“Wherever in This World I Live, Achieving Tamil Eelam is My Conviction”

Long Distance Nationalism Among Second Generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto

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Introduction

Sprawling out from the Canadian coast of frigid Lake Ontario lies Toronto, the bustling and cosmopolitan center of Canada's largest metropolitan area. Home to a host of cultures originating from across the world, Toronto is remarkable in the breadth of languages one can hear spoken throughout the city, among them Tamil, a Dravidian language native to the Indian subcontinent. A traveler visiting Toronto and looking to hear Tamil spoken would probably be sent to Scarborough in East Toronto. Scarborough, a neighborhood of great diversity, is a microcosm of the multiculturalism in Toronto and in Canada as a whole; minorities make up more than 65% of the population, with South Asian and Chinese residents constituting more than 40% of the neighborhood's total population. It is here in Scarborough, amidst this diversity, that a visitor will encounter the largest urban concentration of Sri Lankan Tamils anywhere in the world, including Sri Lanka[1].

[1] Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah. "*Tamil Diaspora Politics*," in *Encyclopedia of Diasporas: Immigrant and Refugee Cultures Around the World,* ed. Melvin Ember, Carol R. Ember and Ian Skoggard. (New York: Springer, 2005), 494.

Fleeing civil war back home, a few thousand Sri Lankan Tamils started to settle in Canada, largely in Toronto, beginning in the mid-1980s. Their numbers increased rapidly throughout the decade and by 1990 the Sri Lankan Tamils had become the largest group of refugee claimants in Canada[2]. As a bloody civil war raged in Sri Lanka throughout the 1990s, Canada received a steadily growing influx of Tamil refugees. By 2006, there were an estimated 200,000 Tamils in Canada, more than a quarter of whom called Scarborough home[3].

Today, one finds a thriving Sri Lankan Tamil community in Scarborough. Indeed, it is hard to miss the Tamil imprint on the Scarborough landscape. A cursory glance at the Scarborough telephone directory reveals hundreds of evidently Tamil-owned businesses. There is even a Tamil chamber of commerce for Scarborough and a Tamil community directory of businesses and services, *Thamilar Mathiyil* (*Amidst Tamil*), several hundreds of pages thick, listing businesses that offer goods and services ranging from legal and accounting services to jewelry and wedding dresses.

Walking along Jane Street, one of Scarborough's major thoroughfares, one encounters Tamil language billboards advertising fruits and vegetables in a manner reminiscent of a large Chinatown. The Tamil convenience store at the corner of Jane and Finch offers ten weekly Tamil language newspapers, most of which have sections on the Sri Lankan civil war. Inside the store blares one of the four Tamil language radio stations broadcast over the air. An intrepid visitor can get into a discussion with the storeowner, a Sri Lankan Tamil from Jaffna, Sri Lanka, who might direct the visitor to the *Kalaivaany Book Depot,* a Tamil language bookstore on East Finch

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[2] Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada, *Report on joint fact-finding mission to Sri Lanka: security and human rights, situation, entry and exit procedure and personal documentation, issue paper,* 2002, Ottawa, 5

[3] City of Toronto Community Council Profile: Scarborough 2006.
The size of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Canada is disputed. Estimates range from 200,000 to 400,000. However, I use the conservative official figures.

Avenue. On his way to *Kalaivaany*, as it is known among Tamils, the visitor would pass by the R.G. Education Center, one of several Tamil language schools in Toronto, as well as the nearby Capital Driving School, a Tamil language driving school. After visiting the bookstore, the visitor can then go to one of the three neighborhood cinemas that show only Tamil language movies. Looking for more Tamil language entertainment, one also has a choice between two twenty-four hour Tamil television channels – *TVI* and *Tamil One*.

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The short narrative above, gleaned from personal experience, shows a strong and established Sri Lankan Tamil community that had successfully recreated its culture in Toronto. The Canadian-Sri Lankan Tamils enjoy a unique situation as compared to fellow Sri Lankan Tamils who fled the island elsewhere in that the former have been minimally subjected to host government assimilation pressures. Canada is widely regarded among immigrant-rights circles as a liberal bastion for immigration, asylum and refugees[4]. This is largely due to the liberal Multiculturalism policy of the Canadian state, which encourages its ethnic communities, particularly immigrant communities, to "retain their individuality" and "racial elements" once in Canada[5]. Indeed as the country with the highest per capita immigration rate in the world, Canada's national identity has decidedly blossomed into an identity of multi-nationalism[6]. Thus, the members of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada have retained their distinct home-identities far more than their diasporic brethren in other Western countries. In 2007, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, including Canadian-Sri Lankan Tamils, is estimated to be over a million strong.[7]

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[4] Vicki Squire, *The Exclusionary Politics of Asylum* (London: Palgrave, 2009) 53-6.
Squire discusses how Europe tightened its immigration and asylum policies through the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999. The Treaty saw the development of a Europe wide asylum policy which was more restrictive with interstate cooperation. In the UK, the conservative governments of Thatcher and Major went even further. The 1988 Immigration Act of United Kingdom reduced the rights of dependents of asylum seekers and exponentially increased the asylum refusal rate. In the 1990s, a series of Acts pertaining to immigration and asylum were passed restricting entry, cutting welfare spending on asylums, restricting rights of appeal and imposing carrier sanctions.
On the other hand, in Canada, Immigration and Refugee Protection Act of 2001 completely overhauled the already liberal immigration policy to an even more welcoming position. As the first major legislation on immigration after 1976, the Act took on a holistic approach to ensure higher immigration and refugee admission while paying particular attention to economic, social and cultural wellbeing of the would be immigrants, asylums and refugees. The stipulations and the spirit of the Canadian legislation are in stark contrast to those of European immigration legislation. (the text of the Act is available on the Department of Justice, Canada Website: www.justice.gc.ca)

[5] Doug Saunders, "Canada's Mistaken Identity," *The Globe and Mail,* June 27, 2009.

[6] Benjamin Dolin and Margaret Young, "Canada's Immigration Program," Policy Paper, Law and Government Division, Library of Parliament, September 10, 2008.

[7] Arun Kumar Acharya, "Ethnic Conflict and Refugees in Sri Lanka," *Revista de Antropología Experimental* 7(9) 2007: 108.

Given their numbers, it is no surprise that the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada wields immense influence over the civil war in Sri Lanka, which will be briefly discussed in Chapter One. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada has also, as compared to other international diasporic Tamil communities, traditionally been the most vocal among the supporters of Eelam, the separate homeland demanded by indigenous Tamils[8] in Sri Lanka, as well as the most prolific financiers of the LTTE (Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam), an organized group of armed militants, fighting the Sri Lankan government on behalf of their proposed Eelam state in the island of Sri Lanka[9]. Moreover, given that over 800,000[10] of the 1,587,100[11] Tamils in Sri Lanka are internally displaced, and that many of the undisplaced are being silenced by the Sri Lankan state, the overseas diaspora is at the forefront in the call for Eelam. Among those making demands, the Canadian Sri Lankan Tamils are the loudest.

The activism of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada was most visible during the first half of 2009, when tens of thousands took to the streets of Toronto to protest the Sri Lankan government's actions as the civil war finally drew to a close. While the Sri Lankan Tamils had previously demonstrated in the streets of Toronto, the wave of protests in 2009 was exceptional in both its numbers and its composition. The numbers of protesters swelled, largely because of

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[8] Indigenous Tamils of Sri Lanka are those who have traditionally inhabited the island, whom I refer to as Sri Lankan Tamils to differentiate from the Tamils of Tamil Nadu in South India. The distinction is also useful to differentiate the Sri Lankan Tamils from Tamils of recent Indian origin, whom I refer to as Indian Tamils, who were first brought into the island by the British in the 19th century to work the tea, coffee and rubber plantations. The Indian Tamils have not demanded a separate state.

[9] "Funding the Final War: LTTE Intimidation and Extortion in the Tamil Diaspora," *Human Rights Watch,* Volume 18, No. 1 (C) 2006, 12.

The article traces LTTE intimidation and extortion of Sri Lankan Tamils in the West. However, it makes clear that most contribute willingly to the LTTE while only a small minority is coerced. The article also points out that a significant proportion of Sri Lankan Tamil business ventures in Canada, particularly Toronto, are partly funded by the LTTE.

[10] Acharya, *Ethnic Conflict and Refugees in Sri Lanka*, 108.

[11] Sri Lanka Census Report, 2001.

the sudden and uncharacteristic presence of tens of thousands of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in the streets.

The level of second generation engagement was welcomed by the Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora and the LTTE[12]. The Tamil Guardian, on January 2009, said: "They [the diaspora] too have stepped up shows of solidarity with the liberation struggle through protests and vigils, with younger Tamils at the forefront of organizing events[13]." Less than three months later, with the war about to come to a close, the Tamil Guardian front page headline read: "Second Generation Diaspora Leads Global Protest Against Genocide[14]."

However, many Sinhalese[15] Sri Lankans greeted this surprising development with scorn and derision. For instance, a South Asia Intelligence Review Assessment prepared with collaboration from government officials declared on May 25th 2009 that: "the events of recent weeks have even further radicalized the younger generation of Tamils abroad … Second generation Tamils who were born overseas have now become separatists in a way that they were probably not before. The risk of Diaspora elements linking up with surviving LTTE cadres to once again threaten security and peace in the North and elsewhere in Sri Lanka cannot entirely be written off[16]." The Sinhalese were also questioning the motives of the second generation protesters.

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[12] *Tamilnet, "*Expanding Role of Diaspora Youth in Political Activism," Sunday, 16 February 2008, 21:12 GMT.
[13] *Tamil Guardian, "*Sri Lanka targets Tamils diaspora, but they too resist," January 21, 2009.
[14] *Tamil Guardian,* April 15, 2009.
[15] The Sinhalese are the majority in Sri Lanka and effectively control the state. Sri Lankan Tamil separatism, even though directed at the state, is in reaction to discriminatory policies of previous Sinhalese dominated governments of independent Sri Lanka.
The total Tamil population in Sri Lanka has decreased proportionately in two decades from 1981 to 2001. Sri Lankan Tamils consisted of 12.7% of the population in 1981 while the Sinhalese comprised 74%. In 2001, Sri Lankan Tamils had been reduced to 4.3% while the Sinhalese had increased to 82%. The total Tamil population in Sri Lanka, including the Indian Tamils had been reduced to 9.3% in 2001 from 18.2% in 1981.
(Sri Lanka Census Reports, 1981, 2001)
[16] Ajai Sahni, "Out of Chaos," *South Asia Intelligence Review,* Weekly Assessments & Briefings, Volume 7, No. 46, May 25, 2009.

Having grown up in Canada, being alien to the realities of Sri Lanka, what was at stake for them? What made the second generation take to the streets?

This thesis will attempt to arrive at an answer to these questions by drawing upon scholarly sources in anthropology and history. The short description above of Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto through the eyes of a fictive visitor announces the substantial role of anthropology in this thesis. The reasons for this role are two-fold. First, the vast majority of historical works on diaspora nationalism and refugee settlement in the West rely heavily on anthropology. Second, diaspora nationalism is a continuous phenomenon informed as much by culture as by history. Therefore, anthropology can be fruitfully employed with history to better understand the thesis topic.

This thesis employs three concepts: remembrance, forgetting and ignorance, from an anthropological point of view, and explores how history is narrated across generations in order to arrive at an answer. Remembrance, or memory, is the presence of knowledge while forgetting is the erasure of that knowledge. Ignorance, however, is the "presence of an absence[17]." In other words, ignorance is the absence of knowledge which arises in a generation as a consequence of the gaps in remembrance and forgetting in the previous generation. Furthermore, ignorance does not manifest itself as a total absence of knowledge, but rather appears as fragmented, disjointed narratives of history, marred by conspicuous gaps. It is important to note that ignorance is not used pejoratively here.

The three concepts above are examined through three dominant issues that arose during my interviews in Canada. These three issues largely underline the way second generation Sri Lankan Tamils relate to the conflict in Sri Lanka. The first issue is their remembrance of their parents'

[17] Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, "Ignorance, Forgetting, and Family Nostalgia: Partition, the Nation State, and Refugees in Delhi," *Social Analysis* 44(2) 2000: 30.

houses in Sri Lanka. The second issue is their interpretation of their “Tamilness” in almost universal terms, disregarding the diversity that characterizes the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. The third issue is the grim view they hold of Sri Lanka, in which Tamils are killed, tortured and raped everywhere with impunity, and in which the government, aided by the Sinhalese majority, actively plots to victimize the Tamils.

These three issues are symbolic of the three anthropological concepts and will serve as subjects to evaluate remembrance, forgetting and ignorance among the second generation. This thesis argues that selective remembrance and forgetting by the first generation have led to ignorance in the second generation, and that this ignorance has allowed the LTTE to mobilize the second generation by imposing the LTTE's own narrative of the civil war.

The first chapter sets the groundwork for this thesis by briefly discussing the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka from 1948, when Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain to May 2009, when government forces defeated the LTTE to bring the civil war to an end. The chapter will close by setting the backdrop to my research and describing a mass Sri Lankan Tamil demonstration in Toronto. The second chapter explores how the selective remembrance of large houses in Eelam and adherence to an ethic of hard work among the first generation emphasized in the second generation's understanding of Eelam the idea of prosperity. The third chapter looks at how the selective forgetting of differences and social hierarchies among the first generation, struggling to assimilate into an egalitarian society, has led to a nebulous sense of fraternity and unity among the second generation.

The fourth chapter examines how the LTTE, taking advantage of the ignorance of the second generation, created a new national narrative of history that is considered “official” among

the Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada, which I call the "Master Narrative[18]." The fifth and final chapter will discuss the catalyst – the final phase of the war and the impending defeat of the LTTE – for the protests in Toronto and the second generation's participation. The chapter will show that the second generation's interpretation of the events during this period provided a compelling motive to demonstrate. In fact, the protests in Toronto galvanized the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils into action.

This thesis is particularly the product of thirty-four interviews conducted among Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto during Thanksgiving and Winter breaks, more than six months after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka. My meetings with Sri Lankan Tamils were initiated through my cousins in Toronto who facilitated my research by introducing me to their friends. The interviews sometimes turned into discussions between generations as on occasion parents joined in the conversations. My initial objective was to research how second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto narrate the history of Sri Lanka. However, the discussions almost always turned to the civil war, genocide against Tamils in Sri Lanka and Black July in 1983[19]. The interviews largely determined the direction the research took as well. For instance, the websites, newspapers, movies, etc, used in the thesis were all first mentioned and explained to me by the interviewees with a unique second generation Sri Lankan Tamil perspective.

Aside from the solicited interviews, many other unplanned interviews were also conducted when some Tamils spontaneously referred me to their friends. These meetings turned out to be

[18] Master narrative is a variation of the meta narrative concept of Jean Francois Lyotard, first put forth in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge ,* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1979). Since then the concept has been analytically applied to many diasporic discourses. See Andrea O'Reilly, ed., *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* (Albany: State University of New York, 2007), 4.

[19] The pogrom in July 1983, now infamously known as Black July, was a watershed in Sri Lanka's ethnic relations, in which Sinhalese mobs attacked and killed Tamils and looted Tamil property for about a week. The events in Black July will be discussed in detail in chapter one.

some of the most exciting and useful. For instance, my cousin referred me to Lemo, a twenty seven year old Sri Lankan Tamil, who had to cut short our meeting because he was late for volleyball practice. However, as we left his house he promised me a meeting with his cousin and teammate Siva, another Sri Lankan Tamil, twenty years old. Almost two hours later, at about 11.30 pm, Lemo asked me to come to the Youth Center in Scarborough to pick up Siva, who was willing to talk with me. I drove to the Youth Center with my cousin and picked up Siva who turned out to be the most enthusiastic and articulate Sri Lankan Tamil I interviewed. Siva and I spoke in the back seat while my cousin drove for about an hour across Toronto. After a short pit-stop of twenty minutes at a Tim Hortons, we finally dropped Siva at his house at 2.30 am.

Retrospectively, I realize that my research was conducted mostly among middle class, relatively well-off Sri Lankan Tamils. However, this positively contributed to my research as most of the Sri Lankan Tamils that took to the streets of Toronto belonged to this group. My thirty-four second generation subjects were overwhelmingly Hindu and had settled in Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s. They were mostly born in Sri Lanka, but had been very young – usually below five years – at the time of migration. Twenty-eight were born in Sri Lanka, four in Canada, and one each in the United Kingdom and Germany. They were also a relatively well educated group. Twenty-six were either in college or had completed college and twelve were in white-collar professions. Out of the nineteen male and fifteen female subjects, none were married, with the youngest twenty and the eldest twenty-eight. Most of the parents, the first generation, spoke English, although not always fluently. Interestingly, a majority of the second generation Tamils did not speak or read Tamil, although most could understand conversations in Tamil between parents. As a result, they relied largely on English language media for information, which also eased my research, as I do not speak Tamil.

My sample of interviewees, although not chosen with this in mind, is representative of the majority of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. For instance, the gender balance in the sample is a plausible representation of the second generation in Toronto because of the large number of Sri Lankan Tamil single males who still continue to immigrate to Canada. However, my sample's representativeness of their socio-economic position in Canada is doubtful because no reliable studies are available on the socio-economic position of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils.

Apart from my interviews, I focused mostly on www.TamilNet.com and the *Tamil Guardian* newspaper. Tamilnet is the mouthpiece of the LTTE and the website most visited by the second generation. In fact, many had the website in their bookmarks and some even as the homepage of their internet browsers. More importantly, upon further research, it was evident that for the Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto, Tamilnet was the source of almost all the media information about Sri Lanka that they consumed. All of the community newspapers, radio stations, TV stations and publications by Tamil organizations cited information from Tamilnet, available also in French and German, on a daily basis. The Tamil Guardian is a biweekly newspaper distributed free of charge across the globe among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. In all respects, it is the print equivalent of Tamilnet and is largely directed toward the technologically unsavvy. I use the 26,692 news reports and 510 feature articles that appeared from Tamilnet from June 1997 to May 2009 and the 110 issues of Tamil Guardian distributed from January 2005 to June 2009.

Despite their visibility in Toronto, very little has been written about the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada and almost nothing has been written about the second generation. For instance, authors and researchers tend to use Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and "Other" as

categories when discussing the South Asian diaspora in Canada. This category of "Other" includes immigrants from all other South Asian countries. Even though a significant portion of the "Other" may be Sri Lankan Tamil, they tend to fade into invisibility in analysis. There may be two reasons for their invisibility. Firstly, Canada has many other immigrant groups in massive numbers compared to Sri Lankan Tamils. Most of the research seems to be on Eastern European immigrants such as Ukrainians and Poles and other "non-traditional" groups such as Blacks and Indians from the Caribbean islands. Secondly, Sri Lankan Tamils' dual identity, as both Tamils and Sri Lankans, results in a partial overlap with the ethnic Tamils of South India on the one hand and with Sri Lankan nationals generally on the other. Therefore, they are usually grouped together with other Sri Lankans such as Sinhalese and the Muslims or with Tamils from India. As a result of this ambiguous space between the Sri Lankans (nationality) and Tamils (ethnicity), the distinct identities and experiences of the Sri Lankan Tamils tend to disappear in the wider analysis.

Finally, for clarity I use Sri Lanka throughout the thesis to refer to the island even though the name was changed from Ceylon, the British name for the island, to Sri Lanka only in 1972 with the advent of the republican constitution. I also use Sri Lankan Tamils, as mentioned before, to differentiate the indigenous Tamils of the island from the Tamils in Sri Lanka who are of recent Indian origin who trace their ancestry to South India. By first generation, I refer to those who migrated to Canada as adults, while I use second generation to refer to those who reached Canada before ten years old. In my sample of thirty-four second generation Sri Lankan Tamils, only five were born in Canada; twenty-eight were born in Sri Lanka, but had migrated to Canada while young. One was born in Germany and had migrated to Canada when she was four years old.

Chapter 1 Background and Setting

Post-independence Sri Lanka and the Ethnic Conflict

Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain on February 4, 1948 on the heels of Indian, Pakistani and Burmese independence. For the first time in more than four hundred years, Sri Lankans were governing the entire island after repeated colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch and British since the sixteenth century. While there were several minor ethnic disturbances – the largest being the Sinhalese-Muslim riots in 1915 – the colonial period was mostly marked by political and ethnic unity among the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims against the colonial powers[20].

At the time of independence, the island was home to diverse groups of peoples. Sinhalese, Tamils of various origins, Sri Lankan Moors[21], European Burghers[22] and other Indian and Malay groups inhabited the island adhering to four major religions – Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant[23]. The first post-independence acts of ethnic disunity came immediately following independence in the form of the Citizenship and Franchise Acts of 1948 and 1949, which disenfranchised the Tamils of Indian origin. The Tamil Congress' support of the acts created a deep rift within the party which resulted in the creation of a new Tamil party, the Federal Party, by break-away groups from the Congress. The new party was led

[20] A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese-Tamil Conflict* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1988), 56-7.
[21] Sri Lankan Moors are the Muslims of Arabian descent who settled in the island over the past millennium. Most arrived in the island as traders from the Middle East, East Africa and via India. The overwhelmingly male Arab settlers later intermarried with local groups resulting in a Sri Lankan Moor population distinct from other Muslim groups such as the Malays who arrived in the island during the long years of colonialism.
[22] Burghers are the descendents of Portuguese and Dutch settlers in the island during the 16th and 17th centuries. After independence most migrated out of Sri Lanka and settled mostly in Australia.
[23] In 1946 census, just before independence ethnicity and religion were distributed as follows: Sinhala 69.5%, Sri Lankan Tamil 11%, Indian Tamil 11.7%, Sri Lankan Moors 5.5% and Buddhists 64.5%, Hindus 20%, Christians 9% and Muslims 6.5%.

by Mr. Chelvanayakam, a leading member of the Tamil Congress[24]. The first major discriminatory legislation against all Tamils, both Sri Lankan and Indian, came in 1956 following the election of a new populist government of Bandaranaike. The Language Act of 1956 made Sinhalese the only official language of the country and required Tamils in the civil service to lean Sinhalese within three years or face retirement[25].

As ethnic tensions were rising in the island, several attempts by the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders to achieve a compromise were vehemently opposed and sabotaged by extremist Sinhalese-Buddhists led by Buddhist monks. 1971 saw the first large scale eruption of violence in the island since independence. Ironically, it was the rural Sinhalese youth who rose against the government in a Marxist insurrection led by the *Janatha Vimukti Peramuna* (JVP) and attempted to overthrow the government. Having brutally crushed the insurrection, the government of Sri Lanka proceeded to enact increasingly authoritarian measures, a process which has been continued by successive Sri Lankan governments to the present day[26]. Since 1971, governments have constantly resorted to brutal violence against the Sri Lankan citizenry and repeatedly compromised both democracy and civil liberties with impunity.

In 1972, the government rushed through the parliament a new republican constitution and renamed the island Sri Lanka (from Ceylon), while doing away with many constitutional protections to minorities and checks on government power. 1972 also saw the passing of the Universities Act which established ethnic quotas and standardization of exam marks for university admissions with significantly higher marks required from Tamil students than from

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[24] E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 113-4.
[25] K. M. de Silva, *Sri Lanka: Problems of Governance* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: International Center for Ethnic Studies, 1993), 280-5.
[26] Patrick Peebles, *The History of Sri Lanka* (London: Greenwood Press, 2006), 120.

Sinhalese students. The ethnic fallout was predictable as university education had been the main path to employment among the Sri Lankan Tamils for decades. Having been shut out from the Civil Service, the drastic reduction in access to higher education finally put thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils youth in a massively disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their Sinhalese counterparts[27].

The mid 1970s also saw the proliferation of numerous Sri Lankan Tamil militant groups carrying out clandestine acts of violence, robbery and arson who called for redress against discrimination. However, their crude methods, a lack of support among the mainstream Sri Lankan Tamil population and the electoral weakness of moderate Sri Lankan Tamil political parties allowed the government to evade addressing Tamil youth grievances. The situation continued to worsen until 1983 with the membership in Tamil militant groups numbering in several dozen each[28].

July 1983 was a watershed in ethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Since the late 1970s a cyclic pattern of violence had emerged in which the Tamil militants would carry out small scale attacks for which the government would retaliate with disproportionate violence which in turn would inspire more violence from Tamil youth. The violence spiraled out of control as negotiations between the government and Tamil political parties failed. On July 22, 1983, the LTTE ambushed and blew up an army patrol in Jaffna and killed thirteen soldiers, all of whom were Sinhalese. The attack shook both the government and the Sinhalese population as the largest single attack to date. Many newspapers, even the moderate English language newspapers, added fuel to the fire by describing the attack as a massacre[29].

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[27] Ibid., 124-6.
[28] Ibid., 152-3.
[29] Ibid., 135-6.

The following day, the government flew the bodies of the soldiers to Colombo to hold a mass funeral. However, before the funeral could be held, the mass gathering erupted in violence and turned into an anti-Tamil rampage that devastated Colombo and parts of the island. Tamil homes and businesses were systematically targeted, burned or looted. As violence intensified, looting and arson turned into outright murder of Tamil civilians. Initially, the government did little to stop the violence and reports surfaced of armed forces and police personnel standing idly by as Sinhalese mobs looted Tamil homes and killed Tamils[30].

In many respects, the events of July 1983, now infamously known as Black July, marked the start of the civil war in earnest. The events convinced the already embittered Tamils that they could not rely on the government of Sri Lanka for safety, and the resulting alienation from the government provided ready recruits for Tamil militant groups, as Tamil youth joined the militias in droves. Black July also crystallized the call for Eelam, which found support even among the Sri Lankan Tamils who were in general conservative. The majority of the Colombo Tamils who were affected was conservative and voted for the two mainstream, largely Sinhalese, political parties. They were living among the Sinhalese and had until then rejected the extreme politics of Tamil youth militias. However, with their property looted and an estimated 400 to 3000 killed in mob violence[31], thousands of Tamils fled the island and found asylum mainly in the West and in India. Later, a million-strong Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora formed the financial and propaganda backbone of Tamil separatism[32].

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[30] Ibid., 135-6.

[31] Frances Harrison, "Twenty Years on – riots that led to war," *BBC News,* July 23, 2003.
The Massacres in Sri Lanka During the Black July Riots in 1983, May 13, 2008, *The Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence*, Sciences Po, 10.
The official estimate is 371 deaths. The disparity is largely due to state censorship of media.

[32] Acharya, *Ethnic Conflict and Refugees in Sri Lanka*, 108.

The events of 1983 also marked the beginning of the darkest decade in the island's post-colonial history, seeing the country experience a full scale civil war, an armed Marxist insurrection of Sinhalese youths in the South, a military intervention by India, and a string of assassinations and suicide bombings in which almost the entire top crust of the country's political and military leadership was assassinated. Beginning in late 1983, India, under Indira Gandhi, began training and arming Sri Lankan Tamil militias in Tamil Nadu, India. Violence continued to increase rapidly as attempts at negotiations, facilitated by India, failed in 1985. By late 1987, India, then under Rajiv Gandhi, was fighting the Sri Lankan Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka. At the same time, the Sri Lankan government was fighting a more brutal armed Marxist insurrection by the Sinhalese youth in the south[33].

By 1994, the government had finally changed after seventeen years of rule by one party and the Indian military had withdrawn. However, tens of thousands of Sinhalese lay dead in mass graves, killed by the government's own forces, while thousands of Tamils were being killed in the civil war, more often than not by rival Tamil militia groups. The economy was in shatters and the Sri Lankan President Premadasa and the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi were killed by LTTE suicide bombers[34]. Thousands of professionals and academics emigrated from the island and tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils sought asylum in the West.

The entire population of the island greeted 1994 with optimism as they elected a new government which campaigned on a peace platform. However, their optimism soon proved misplaced as peace talks with the LTTE failed and the civil war resumed in 1995. War continued until the beginning of peace attempts yet again in 2002. Peace talks soon failed in 2003, but the

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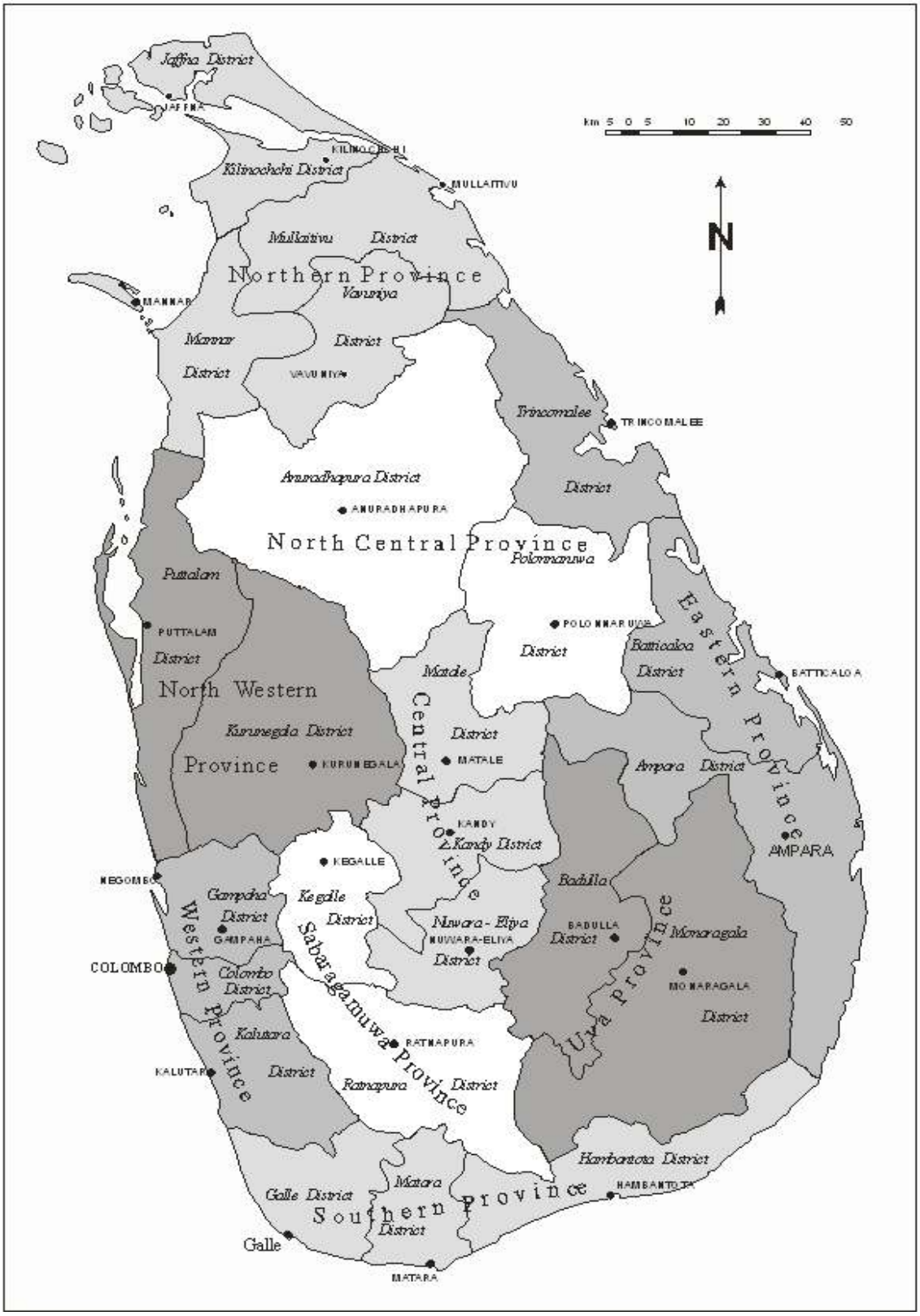
[33] K. T. Rajasingham, "Accord Turns to Discord," in *Sri Lanka: The Untold Story* http://www.atimes.com/ind-pak/DD13Df02.html

[34] *BBC News,* "Tamil Tiger 'regret' over Gandhi," June, 27 2006, 17:42 GMT. 18:42
Jonathan Lyons, "Suicide bombers – weapon of choice for Sri Lanka rebels," *Reuters,* August 20, 2006.

Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) established in 2001 remained in effect until the government unilaterally withdrew their agreement in 2008. The resumption of the civil war saw heavy fighting and heavy casualties on both sides, but by June 2009, Asia's longest running civil war[35] had come to an end as the government declared victory following the death of LTTE leadership. Tens of thousands lay dead and hundreds of thousands were withering in refugee camps.

[35] Graham Bowley, "Civil Wars: the fights that do not want to end," *New York Times,* May 23, 2009.


Jaffna District
JAFFNA
Kilinochchi District
MULLAITIVU
Mullaitivu District
Northern Province
Vavuniya
MANNAR
Mannar District
VAVUNIYA
Trincomalee
TRINCOMALEE
District
Anuradhapura District
ANURADHAPURA
North Central Province
Polonnaruwa
Puttalam
PUTTALAM
District
POLONNARUWA
District
Batticaloa
District
BATTICALOA
North Western
Province
Kurunegala District
KURUNEGALA
Matale
District
MATALE
Central Province
Eastern Province
Ampara District
AMPARA
KANDY
Kandy District
KEGALLE
NEGOMBO
Gampaha District
GAMPAHA
Kegalle District
Nuwara - Eliya
NUWARA-ELIYA
District
Badulla
BADULLA
District
Monaragala
MONARAGALA
District
Western Province
COLOMBO
Colombo District
Sabaragamuwa Province
Uva Province
Kalutara
KALUTARA
District
RATNAPURA
Ratnapura District
Hambantota District
HAMBANTOTA
Galle District
Matara
District
Southern Province
Galle
MATARA
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Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada

Canada has been the most popular destination for the Sri Lankan Tamils asylum seekers because of its liberal asylum policies. The first stream of Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum arrived in Canada almost immediately after Black July in 1983. The stream of asylum seekers continued for several years, consisting mostly of single males in their twenties and thirties. Generally, families would pay for the migration of the eldest son (usually) by mortgaging houses, selling jewelry and land and sometimes even furniture. The son, after having established himself in the West, would sponsor a Sri Lankan Tamil bride from Sri Lanka and later both his and his wife's entire family, including parents, siblings, nephews and nieces[36]. Therefore, it is no surprise that, aided by liberal Canadian immigration and citizenship policies, the initially small numbers of largely single male Sri Lankan Tamil asylum seekers turned into thousands of Sri Lankan Tamil families by the end of the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s[37].

By 2006, Sri Lankan Tamils were one of the most visible[38] minorities in Canada and had established in Canadian cities strong communities, popularly known as "Little Jaffnas" among Canadians. Toronto, however, has been the most popular destination for Sri Lankan Tamils and

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[36] Christopher McDowell, A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1996), 139.
In the first study of its kind about the Sri Lankan diaspora, McDowell discusses the migration patterns of Sri Lankan Tamils since 1983, the home country push factors and the pull factors in the West. Even though his discussion is on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Switzerland, the migration patterns out of Sri Lanka were the same for Canada as it was for Switzerland. Moreover, as McDowell notes, Canada is not a country of first entry, which means Sri Lankan Tamils seeking asylum in Canada must reach a "first destination" and subsequently make the journey to Canada because there are no direct flights to Canada from Sri Lanka. He further notes that Switzerland along with the Middle East and Eastern European countries were the most favored countries of first destination for Sri Lankan Tamils making the long journey to Canada.

[37] Feng Hou, "The Initial Destinations and Redistribution of Canada's Major Immigrant Groups: Changes over the Past Two Decades," Statistics *Canada Research Paper for Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series*, 2005, 10.

[38] According to Statistics Canada, visible minority "applies to persons who are identified according to the Employment Equity Act as being non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color. Under the Act, Aboriginal persons are not considered to be members of visible minority groups."
http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/minority-minorite1-eng.htm

is believed to be the home of more than half of the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Canada. Greater Toronto's Sri Lankan Tamil population was largely concentrated in Scarborough and nearby Mississauga in the 1980s and 1990s. A decade later, having established a thriving community, the Tamils are now moving East to areas such as Pickering, Ajax, Markham and Whitby, leaving distinctly ethnic neighborhoods for more middle class surroundings[39].

However, the community appears to have retained a distinct cohesiveness amidst the scattering of its members. The largest, if not most dramatic, expression of this cohesion came in the early part of 2009 when tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils held mass demonstrations for several days at a time, protesting alleged human rights abuses of the government of Sri Lanka and calling for an end to hostilities in the final phase of the civil war[40].

[39] Sean Durak, "Newcomers Find a Home in Scarborough," *Inside Toronto,* March 30, 2003.

There are no reliable studies to prove this phenomenon. As mentioned in the introduction, the most widely used categories of original nationality and language spoken at home do not portray a comprehensive picture of Sri Lankan Tamils in Canadian Statistics. However, the Sri Lankan Tamil community widely believes in this phenomenon. Moreover, in the history of immigration and immigrant communities, this is not an unprecedented.

[40] The final phase was fought from January to May 2009. In late 2008, the government had established a "no-fire zone" for the Tamil citizens of the regions previously controlled by the LTTE. However, as the government forces advanced the LTTE cadres and its leadership retreated into the no-fire zone with the Tamil citizens. Thus the final phase was characterized by government attempts to break into the no-fire zone, which was now heavily fortified and guarded by the LTTE. The no-fire zone, a patch of coastal land of 17 square kilometers, was believed to have housed more than 200,000 Tamil civilians.

The government was accused of using heavy weapons on the no-fire zone in its attempts to break through LTTE barriers, inevitably killing thousands of Tamil civilians. The LTTE, on the other hand, was accused of forcibly using the Tamil population as a human shield.

Reliable numbers of casualties are not available due to extreme and highly effective government censorship of all media in the island. The estimates of civilian casualties for the final phase range from 6,000 to 20,000.

April 26-30, 2009. Tamil demonstration on University Avenue, Toronto

A young Sri Lankan Tamil leading the demonstration

The above photographs are of the Sri Lankan Tamil demonstration held opposite the United States Consulate on University Avenue, Toronto, a major street in the city. The demonstration was held from April 26th to the 30th, urging the United States to move against the Sri Lankan government, which had disregarded the unilateral permanent ceasefire declared a few days ago by the LTTE, a banned organization in Canada[41]. However, for many Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada, the LTTE was the only organization fighting for their rights "back home" and its leader *Velupillai Prabhakaran,* their savior.

[41] Preety Bhattacharji, "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (aka Tamil Tigers)," Council *on Foreign Relations Backgrounder,* May 20, 2009.
The LTTE has been proscribed in more than 32 countries. The United States proscribed the LTTE in 1997 and the United Kingdom in 2001. The EU and Canada only followed in 2006 despite overwhelming evidence of LTTE fund raising and intimidation within their territories. This may reflect the large number of Sri Lankan Tamils living in Canada and within the EU and their successful lobbying efforts.

On Sunday the 26th, carrying the Tamil Eelam flag, thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils descended upon University Avenue, closing both north- and south-bound lanes. On Wednesday the 29th, at about 4.30 p.m., the demonstrators attempted to push past the police barriers, which resulted in a scuffle between police and the demonstrators, which resulted in the subsequent arrest of fifteen demonstrators. The next morning, at about 8.30 a.m., the police moved the demonstrators off the road and cleared the University Avenue for traffic after more than four days[42].

In many ways, the wave of demonstrations that gripped Toronto was unprecedented for the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto. However, the most striking aspect was the presence of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in large numbers. The second photograph above shows a young second generation Sri Lankan Tamil, leading the demonstration with a bullhorn. In front of him are several older Sri Lankan Tamils seated on the street. The photograph captures an unseen transformation in the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto that only came to the fore during the demonstrations. For many, the demonstrations saw the passing of the nationalist mantle from the first generation who grew up in Sri Lanka to the second generation who grew up in Canada[43]. The photograph is illustrative of this larger phenomenon observed in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, in which the first generation stepped back, fatigued, their methods defeated, and made way for the second generation to carry the torch. After sending millions of dollars to fund the LTTE and carrying out LTTE propaganda in Canada[44] for more than two decades, the first

[42] *CBC News Canada*,"University Avenue reopened to traffic, Tamil protest continues," April 30, 2009. Emily Mathieu and Robyn Doolittle, "15 Arrested at Tamil Protest, Police Say," *The Toronto Star*, April 29, 2009.
[43] Lesley Ciarula Taylor, "Tamil Support Out in the Open: Civil War Carnage in Sri Lanka Sparks New Wave of Militancy among Young People," *The Toronto Star,* April 06, 2009.
[44] Human Rights Watch, *Funding the Final War,* Volume 18, No. 1 (C) 2006.

generation is no longer at the forefront. Instead, a young speaker has taken up the bullhorn, while the elders watch seated.

Research Setting

Before moving on to the second chapter, the circumstances and the immediate context in which my interviews took place should be noted. The bulk of this thesis is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with two generations of Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto during a period in which the past as the second generation understood it was connected to the present. Even though by November 2009 the tensions within the community had somewhat subsided and demonstrations had become a thing of the past, my trip to Toronto during the Thanksgiving break coincided with the *Maavir Day* (Heroes Day), which aroused emotional tensions within the community once more. Several of my interviewees were particularly tense because I am Sinhalese. Several vigils were held in Toronto for the thousands who died in the final phase of the civil war, and the tens of thousands of Tamil civilians who were still held in refugee camps remained a hot topic in the community[45]. The *Maavir Day*, falling on the 27th of November, was held in honor of the dead lauded by the LTTE as martyrs, especially suicide bombers, a number of whom would eventually be inducted into a hall of martyrs during a yearly ceremony. The celebrations also coincided with the much anticipated annual speech delivered by the leader of the LTTE, Prabhakaran.

[45] The government claimed to keep the civilians in the camps in order to identify surviving LTTE cadres and other militants. The refugees' prolonged stay was justified by the need to make sure that all traces of the LTTE were eliminated so as to not risk another uprising. However, the Sri Lankan Tamils claim the camps to be concentration camps for the Tamils. They point to the government quarantine of the camps and restrictions on all media access to the camps as evidence. Moreover, the Sri Lankan Tamils claim that the government is forcibly concentrating the Tamils in camps in order to disenfranchise them, who are expected to vote for the opposition party in the upcoming presidential election.

Until the demise of the LTTE, *Maavir Day* was marked by massive celebrations, cultural activities and the annual speech of Prabhakaran. In November 2008, in London for example, a large celebration was held in East London attended by thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils. While I was politely asked to leave the premises because I was Sinhalese, I saw attendees donating £20 notes in droves and even several €50 notes[46]. For many people the event was an emotional experience as they listened to speeches, news and other important information about the situation in Sri Lanka. Thousands, from the very young to the very old, attended the celebrations, which also served as an occasion to meet friends and family from all corners of London, the United Kingdom and even the European Union. However, in 2009, in Toronto, the situation could not have been more different.

While Toronto was known to hold the world's largest *Maavir* celebrations, in 2009, six months after the end of the war, there was a palpable sense of uncertainty in the community. *Maavir* celebrations have always been clouded in secrecy, with invitations only sent through word of mouth; in 2009 the celebrations had gone almost underground. Even some of the Sri Lankan Tamils I interviewed did not know specific information about the *Maavir* celebrations even though some were expecting a dramatic reappearance of Prabhakaran[47]. Eventually, on November 27, the celebrations turned out to be low-key, and disjointed. Instead of large

[46] The Euros were probably from Sri Lankan Tamils from the European Union. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils sought asylum in Europe and systematically settled in key countries of Western Europe. Many have relatives living in several countries in Europe and it is common to find family connections across the English Channel.

[47] A common belief among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils before Maavir Day was that Prabhakaran had staged his death in order to avoid the government onslaught, escaping to continue the struggle. Many expected him to deliver a dramatic speech on the 27th as usual. However, after the 27th, the common answer was that he was biding his time and secretly gathering his forces for a more favorable time. Most also gave a logical answer with remarkably similar details explaining why Prabhakaran was still alive. The similarity in details and the order in which the different, seemingly logical, explanations were given suggested that the explanations originated from a single source.

gatherings, several small uncoordinated celebrations were held in Toronto, in which attendees took oaths to continue to advocate for Eelam.

The English version of the oath, directed toward particularly toward the second generation, stated:

> On this holy day when heroes
> who sacrificed their lives for the
> motherland of Tamil Eelam are remembered,
> I undertake this oath that as an Eelam Tamil,
> wherever in this world I live,
> achieving Tamil Eelam is my conviction and that
> I will act with commitment and
> will work relentlessly for the retrieval of
> separate, independent and sovereign Tamil Eelam
> which is my historical country.
> Quest of Tamils is the motherland of Tamil Eelam.[48]

More interestingly, two messages claiming to have come from the LTTE (not from Prabhakaran as before) were circulated in Toronto. One claimed to be from the moderate faction of the LTTE and called on all moderate Sri Lankan Tamils to repudiate advocating violence and begin reconciliation. The other message, claiming to have come from the LTTE secret headquarters in Sri Lanka, toed the usual LTTE line of determinate belligerence. It was clear that *Maavir Day* in 2009, unlike in the years before, had failed to galvanize the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto.

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[48] *Tamilnet*, "Heroes Day Address Highlights Political Formation for Liberation," Friday, 27 November 2009, 11:58 GMT.

Chapter 2 Remembering Eelam

"To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely[49]*."*- Edmund Burke

"All diaporic discourses share certain common features… some of us have constructed an idea of a lost ancestral home in the interstitial space between history and dreams, and on the shifting sands of nostalgia and memory.[50]*"*

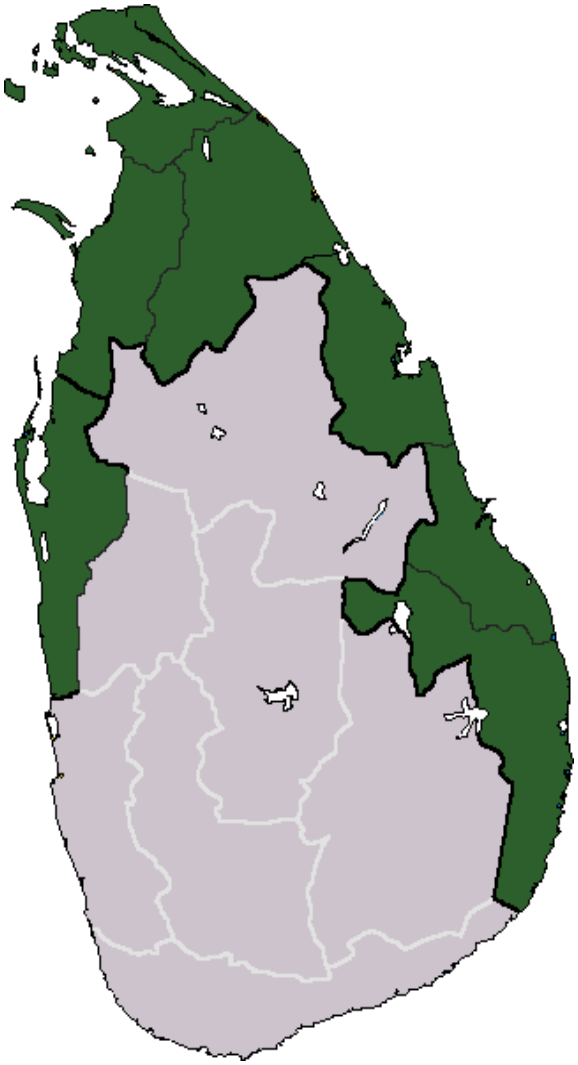
Golden Eelam

Today Eelam stands, almost exclusively, for the separate and independent homeland on the island of Sri Lanka demanded by the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, this fusion of Eelam with separatism is a relatively recent phenomenon which had not yet fully formulated it territorial contours during the 1980s when most Tamils began emigrating from Sri Lanka. The territorial claims had not reached their maximum limits by the end of the 1980s as the Tamil militants, led by the LTTE, were in the process of taking over the Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka from the more moderate Tamil political parties. For instance, the district of Puttalam appears in maps of Eelam only in the 1990s. Eelam reached its maximum area during the 1990s under the exclusive patronage of the LTTE, which by the turn of the decade had established itself as the sole representative of the Sri Lankan Tamils by force of arms[51].

Because a large portion of first generation Sri Lankan Tamils immigrated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, their understanding of Eelam is different from that of the second generation, who were educated on the phenomenon once it had reached maturity. In this chapter, I use two topics that arose during my interviews to illustrate a larger theme among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils. The second generation's memories of Eelam usually included large houses

[49] Mark Carnes and Gary Kates, *Rousseau, Burke, and Revolution in France 1791* (New York: Longman, 2005), 95.
[50] O'Reilly, *The Politics of Mis-ReMembering*, 177.
[51] The territorial aspect of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism will be discussed in detail in the fourth chapter.

(with household servants at times) their parents left behind in Sri Lanka and an ethic of hard work and industriousness that was considered genetic, resulting in an emphasis on prosperity, a phenomenon I call “Golden Eelam." Incidentally, large houses and a hard working ethic were two of the many ways the first generation recalled Eelam.



Remembrance

Recollection, or remembrance, usually known as memory, is widely studied and theorized. While there is no consensus on what constitutes memory[52,] or the relationship between collective memory and individual memory, several aspects of the concept are largely agreed upon today. There is a wide consensus that memory is continuously refigured and reconstructed based on how we perceive the past, present and future. According to Meir Litvak, a senior researcher at the Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv and an Arab Palestinian scholar, "the social function of memory is to reconstruct the past as well as to legitimize the present and a much coveted future[53]." In this sense, memory is not static, but a continuously developing, nebulous concept that directly responds to events and experiences. Another widely agreed upon aspect of memory is that it is largely, but not exclusively socially determined[54]. Social mores and norms are believed to set the framework with which we construct and reconstruct memory. Memory serves as a prism that filters and magnifies, perhaps at the same time.

In this chapter I focus on the dynamism and the social determination of memory of Eelam among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. I will further discuss how memory is translated into the second generation, who grew up in a Western society facing a completely different social framework than their parents. For clarity, I use recollection, remembrance and memory interchangeably. The two topics of large houses and an ethic of hard work are used to illustrate three of the main functions of remembrance.

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[52] Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, Introduction to *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century,* ed. Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), 1.
[53] Meir Litvak, ed., *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 13.
[54] Winter and Sivan *War and Remembrance*, 6.

Large Houses

According to Litvak, the major social functions of remembrance are to reconstruct a suitable past, to legitimize the present and look forward to a "much coveted future.[55]" David Lowenthal concurs: "the past thus conjured up is, to be sure, largely an artifact of the present[56]." Similarly, the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto use large houses and a hard working ethic to project backward and forward respectively from their present condition[57]. Large houses are used by the first generation to legitimize and assume social status while the hard working ethic is used to ensure that the same social status is maintained.

Before addressing the reasons for legitimizing the past and ensuring its continuity, it is important to note the present situation of the first generation. The difficulties in integration into the host country and the subsequent attempts to idealize the home country among first generation immigrants are widely observed phenomena. For instance, Lowenthal claims: "immigrants cut off from their roots remain dislocated; discontinuity impels many… to exaggerate attachments to romanticized homeland or stridently to assert an adoptive belonging"[58]. In the case of the displaced Sri Lankan Tamils, this phenomenon is more acute given their attachment to their land. For instance, Valentine Daniel, who has conducted extensive research on Tamils in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora, says that the Sri Lankan Tamil's attachment to land is inalienable[59]. The Tamil *Ur,* translated as village, is more than just a place, but a place from which the inhabitants draw the metaphysical substance of their very being[60]. According to Daniel, "when a Tamil loses

[55] Litvak *Palestinian Collective Memory*, 13.
[56] Lowenthal, *Past is a Foreign Country,* XVI.
[57] Here I use Dhooleka Raj's observations about Hindu Panjabi refugees in New Delhi
[58] Lowenthal, *Past is a Foreign Country,* 42.
[59] E. Valentine Daniel, *The Lost Ur,* in *Village Matters: Relocating villages in the contemporary Anthropology of India* edited by Diane P. Mines and Nicolas Yazgi (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2010), 325
[60] Ibid., 236.

her ur… she loses her world, which was for her *the* world, and is then forced into a quest for authenticity in a strange space out of place[61]." He further notes that the "Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and immigrants in Toronto, if at all possible, like to reproduce a simulacrum" of their village in Toronto by settling in a "neighborhood with people from their own ur[62]."

Moreover, the Sri Lankan Tamil situation is marked by an extreme rupture of the social fabric and a displacement that is perhaps only surpassed proportionally by the case of Palestinian refugees. For instance, in the 1981 census there were 1,714,000 Sri Lankan Tamils. By 2000, more than a third had emigrated out of Sri Lanka and another third had been internally displaced[63]. The overall proportion of the Sri Lankan Tamil population in the island had also been reduced to 4.3% from 12.7%[64].

It is in light of this rapid transformation, weakened social patterns and social upheaval that the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils' recollections in Toronto should be understood. For instance, Eric Hobsbawm notes that often the remembrance of the past is particularly rooted in the core values of the "old tradition[65]." For Sri Lankan Tamils, the core of their social values and system of social interaction was land. Moreover, the Sri Lankan Tamil society was land-centered in more ways than one, but most importantly, social status was "land-bound[66]", which was most visibly manifested in owning a house. A large house meant a higher social status. In other words,

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[61] Ibid., 331.
[62] Ibid., 329-30.
[63] *International Displacement Monitoring Center, Norwegian Refugee Council*, "Sri Lanka: Continuing Humanitarian Concerns and Obstacles to Durable Solutions for Recent and Longer-term IDPs," November 10, 2009.
[64] Sri Lanka Census Reports 1981, 2001.
[65] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, ed., Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4.
[66] Daniel *Charred Lullabies*, 175.
Land was at the center of Sri Lankan Tamil identity in the island as Daniel explains. I will discuss this phenomenon at length in the Third Chapter.

attachment to land and the social fabric based on land were essential to the first generation Sri Lankan Tamil's sense of identity[67].

It is in attempting to cope with the powerful psychological rupture resulting from displacement that "Golden Eelam" emerges. In other words, Golden Eelam is similar to the concept of "lost paradise," romanticized and "nostalgically reconstructed" by many a diaspora[68]. Nostalgia and reconstruction in this context are noteworthy because nostalgia points to the past while reconstruction points to the present; the two are bridged by the lost paradise or Golden Eelam[69]. The large houses, therefore, serves as a bridge between the social statuses enjoyed in Sri Lanka and their new social position in Canada. As such, the remembrance of large houses, which is a sign of wealth and higher social status in Sri Lanka reflect the first generation's attempt to hold on and continue the core values of the Sri Lankan Tamil society in Sri Lanka. This was forcefully evident in their keeping of the deeds to their houses back in Sri Lanka. Several first generation Sri Lankan Tamils I interviewed admitted to keeping the deeds of the houses they abandoned due to civil war.

However, the anxieties and the social ruptures of the first generation that manifested in their recollection of Eelam are not passed on to the second generation in their entirety. Instead, the second generation possesses a "received memory[70]" of Eelam, a state of seeing-without-seeing. Received memory need be neither logical nor complete although this illogicality and

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[67] The earliest to leave Sri Lanka were almost all from the middle class in Jaffna. And the Jaffna middle class were comparatively materially better off than their southern counterparts for historical and cultural reasons, especially the cultivation of thrift as a virtue by the community. Therefore, it is quite conceivable that many of these middle class asylum seekers did live in large houses and owned land.

[68] O'Reilly *Cuba,* 179 and 181.

[69] Nostalgia, according to the psychoanalytic theory, arises from the refusal to acknowledge the past, to mourn it and to let it go. Nostalgic remembrance does not necessarily mean false remembrance, but rather remembrance anchored in the past and refusal to move on (conversation with professor Valentine Daniel).

[70] O'Reilly *Cuba*, 179.

incompleteness is not always intentional. Instead, its function is to pass on a value or an idea rather than a concrete set of facts. In my interviews with second generation Sri Lankan Tamils, this phenomenon was evident as they remembered the idea of the large house without remembering or knowing the physical details of the houses.

One of the most frequent responses from second generation Sri Lankan Tamils to the question – "Do you know where in Sri Lanka you are originally from?" – was that their parents and grandparents lived in large houses. Most of them knew the region (Jaffna or Batticaloa, for instance) and sometimes the specific village their parents used to live in. However, when asked exactly how large their houses were, most did not remember or know the details. The idea of the large house was more important than the actual physical house. For instance, Gnanan, a twenty-five year old Sri Lankan Tamil who had left Sri Lanka when he was two years old said: "You mean how many bedrooms? I don't know. We have three bedrooms here (meaning the house in Toronto), so more than three bedrooms I guess." Another twenty-two year old, Veeran, said: "My father's house had separate quarters for servants because a family was serving us. They were with us for two generations." While Veeran did not know the whereabouts or the name of the family, his suggestion was straightforward. His family had been wealthy and lived in a house large enough to require the services of an entire family of servants.

Overtime the physical distance experienced by the first generation vis-à-vis Eelam was augmented by a temporal distance confronting the second generation. This is especially true when the second generation has not visited the country of their parents. Lowenthal claims that this temporal distance "…purges the past of personal attachments and makes it an object of

universal veneration, lending the remote a majesty and dignity absent from the homely…[71]." In other words, it is not the actual physical house that is important, but the idea of a large house; the social values of majesty and dignity conveyed by a large house are more important than the personal memories and values attached to a large house.

Ethic of Hard Work and Industry

If the first generation recollection of large houses provides a bridge to the past for the second generation, the ethic of hard work provides a bridge to the future. More importantly, it provides a system of values in which the dignified past, manifested in recollections of large houses, could be recreated and maintained. For the first generation, the hard work ethic was part of the idealized Golden Eelam, and similar to the large houses, related to land further indicating their attachment to land. In Toronto, the first generation repeatedly recounted a general story which embodied the work ethic of the Sri Lankan Tamil. Upon finding out that I was a Sinhalese from Colombo, a typical conversation about the work ethic would follow a similar pattern: "You know in the south, all you have to do is throw the seeds on the ground and nature takes care of the rest. But in Jaffna, it is nearly impossible to perform agriculture. But who do you think sends chili to Colombo[72]?"

The chilies were sometimes substituted with tobacco, but the moral of the story remained the same. The Sinhalese in the South, with all the natural advantages incumbent to the South's geography still could not match the agricultural prowess of Sri Lankan Tamils in the North, who

[71] Lowenthal *Past is a Foreign Country*, 53.

[72] The south-west largely inhabited by the Sinhalese is the most fertile "Wet-Zone" of the island while the Jaffna peninsula is in the "Dry-Zone." The lack of rainfall in the north makes irrigation a necessity while plentiful rainfall in the south makes irrigation redundant.

In the 1970s chili from Jaffna was very popular in Colombo and the reference to chili may also be seen as remembrance of a more prosperous time in Eelam. Since the late 1980s, agriculture in Jaffna has virtually collapsed.

faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles to the successful implementation of agriculture. The story, while not told in Sri Lanka, nevertheless refers to two internalized stereotypes among Sri Lankans, both Tamils and Sinhalese: that the Sri Lankan Tamils are industrious, crafty, smart and hard working, and that the Sinhalese are naïve, laid back and indolent.

It is noteworthy that the popular story in Toronto relates to agriculture and land, while in Sri Lanka the industry and intelligence of the Sri Lankan Tamil is usually mentioned with reference to education and white collar professions. Sri Lankan Tamils in Colombo own houses rather than large plots of land. Therefore, the measure of their success lies in education and in financial enterprises. Even in Toronto, the Sinhalese still mention the Sri Lankan Tamils' ethic of hard work which allows them to find high-paying professional jobs. This belief is also internalized by the second generation Sinhalese in Toronto who continue to view their second generation Tamil counterparts as generally "smart." It is only among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils that the reference to agriculture and land emerges, another indication of their land-bound, romanticized remembrance.

Similar to the received memory of large houses, the second generation has again internalized the value rather than the subject. The ethic of hard work is internalized and applied to education and employment rather than to the subject of the story – agriculture[73]. While I could not verify the second generation's educational or professional achievements, their success in both school and the workplace was widely stereotyped in Toronto by all ethnic groups. Perhaps a more concrete indication of their success may be the steady movement of Sri Lankan Tamils,

[73] While this may seem obvious in the post-industrial society in Canada, agriculture is still practiced widely among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada, albeit in a token scale. Many Sri Lankan Tamils had small vegetable gardens. Those who did not have large enough yards grew Tomatoes in large clay pots. Tomatoes were by and large the most popular to grow. Most complained of the severe weather conditions in Canada and explained how they had to work around the unforgiving weather conditions in Canada.

largely led by the second generation, from predominantly ethnic neighborhoods in Scarborough to mostly middle class neighborhoods such as Markham. The Sri Lankan Tamil movement to middle class neighborhoods that began in the last decade is for most part led by the second generation[74].

The first generation's remembering has influenced the way the second generation perceives Eelam as well as the way they relate to their conditions in Toronto. In large part, the recollection of large houses has given them a sense of social worth and status that legitimizes their middle class claims in Canada. On the other hand, the ethic of hard work, in which they take much pride, has allowed them the means to reclaim the past. More importantly, it has also allowed the second generation to relate to Eelam in a way that emphasizes its prosperity, remembering the beauty and forgetting the ugly. In this way, the first generation's attempt to hold on to their core values in the "shifting sands of nostalgia and memory" has translated into the second generation's memory, albeit received memory, of larger-than-life prosperity. Furthermore, their memory of Golden Eelam is continuously reinforced the LTTE. For instance, a personal narrative from a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee appearing in the Tamil Guardian read:

> It all began in 1983 for me following the horrifying experience of the riots…I soon forgot and overcame the bad memories thanks to my people and Jaffna. I was just a little girl and I was swept away by the simple beauty of my hometown Chavakachchery – the lush paddy fields, the tall palmyrahs, the mango groves and the hot white sand that made me hop and jump when I tried walking to the kovil close by. Jaffna healed me and my horrific memories of riots…Jaffna saved me in many ways. Jaffna taught me culture, the beauty in living close to nature, the

[74] Sean Durak, "Newcomers Find a Home in Scarborough," *Inside Toronto,* March 30, 2003.

> importance of an ecologically sustainable living and embedded in me deep spiritual beliefs[75].

Another article appearing a fortnight later said:

> Imagine a country whose greatest asset is its people. A country in which over a third of its citizens speak fluently one or more of English, French, German, Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, Swedish, Dutch, Creole, Zulu and many more, in addition to speaking the world's oldest living classical language, Tamil. A country with one of the highest literacy rates in the world, which has for decades exported professionals – doctors, teachers, scientists, engineers, accountants, computer programmers – as far afield as Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, much of Africa…Imagine a country whose unpolluted seas are a clear turquoise blue, lined with white sandy beaches, still unspoilt, whose skies take on the azure hues of the Indian sub continent, whose shore is lined with coconut palms, and tens of varieties of mango, guava and jack fruit. Imagine a country of rice fields and banana groves, chili plants and hibiscus flowers, brimming with the lushness of the tropics, which even in places which are not naturally green has been made so by the industriousness of its people, its network of traditional water wells and irrigation channels. You remember this county. It is Eelam[76].

The references to land, hard work, education and industry are obvious. The overall memory of Eelam is that of a lush, prosperous and wealthy "country" inhabited by a spiritually elevated, highly literate, multilingual, industrious and professionally thriving Sri Lankan Tamil people.

[75] Janani Barath, "What can we do? Thoughts for the Tamil Diaspora," *Tamil Guardian*, no: 366, February 06, 2008.
[76] T. J. Janani, "Because we Can," *Tamil Guardian*, No. 367, February 20, 2008.

Chapter 3 Forgetting Differences

"Remembering is a malady for which forgetting is the cure[77]*"* – George Perec

Forgetting

Forgetting as a human phenomenon has been studied for centuries. However, a specific social focus on diasporic forgetting only gained academic attention after the Second World War. Until recently, the Euro-centric Aristotelian and Freudian traditions of loss of memory imprints dominated the study of forgetting[78]. However, I use the recent, non Euro-centric, tradition of studying forgetting as a cultural phenomenon in which the dichotomy between the private and public spheres is stressed[79]. Forgetting connotes agency on the part of the individual as opposed to amnesia, which is inadvertent. Furthermore, forgetting is often manifested in disregarding certain information rather than entirely erasing information from memory. It is in forgetting as an act of disregarding that the dichotomy between the private and the public becomes significant. One is able to forget in public by disregarding information, while still remembering that same information in private.

I argue in this chapter that selective forgetting among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto has led to a sense of universal brotherhood among the second generation. In the public sphere, the forgetting has largely occurred in the context of the development of a master narrative for Sri Lankan Tamils by the LTTE, which I discuss in Chapter Four. Over time, the historical discourse in the public sphere in Toronto largely coalesced around the master narrative as the first generation selectively forgot information that contradicted the master narrative.

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[77] George Perec quoted in Adrian Forty and Susane Kuchler, ed., *The Art of Forgetting* (New York: Berg, 1999), 1.
[78] Ibid., 6.
[79] Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance*, 183.

I focus on the public sphere because I could not conduct research on the private sphere which would entail interviewing large numbers of Sri Lankan Tamils, both first generation and second generation. Instead, I explore forgetting through the first generation's selective disregarding of differences among Tamils in Sri Lanka so as to largely conform to the master narrative imposed by the LTTE in which all differences among Tamils in Sri Lanka are subdued in favor of a monolithic identity. I explore the differences that existed among the Tamils in Sri Lanka by focusing on one difference based on regional identity and another based on caste.

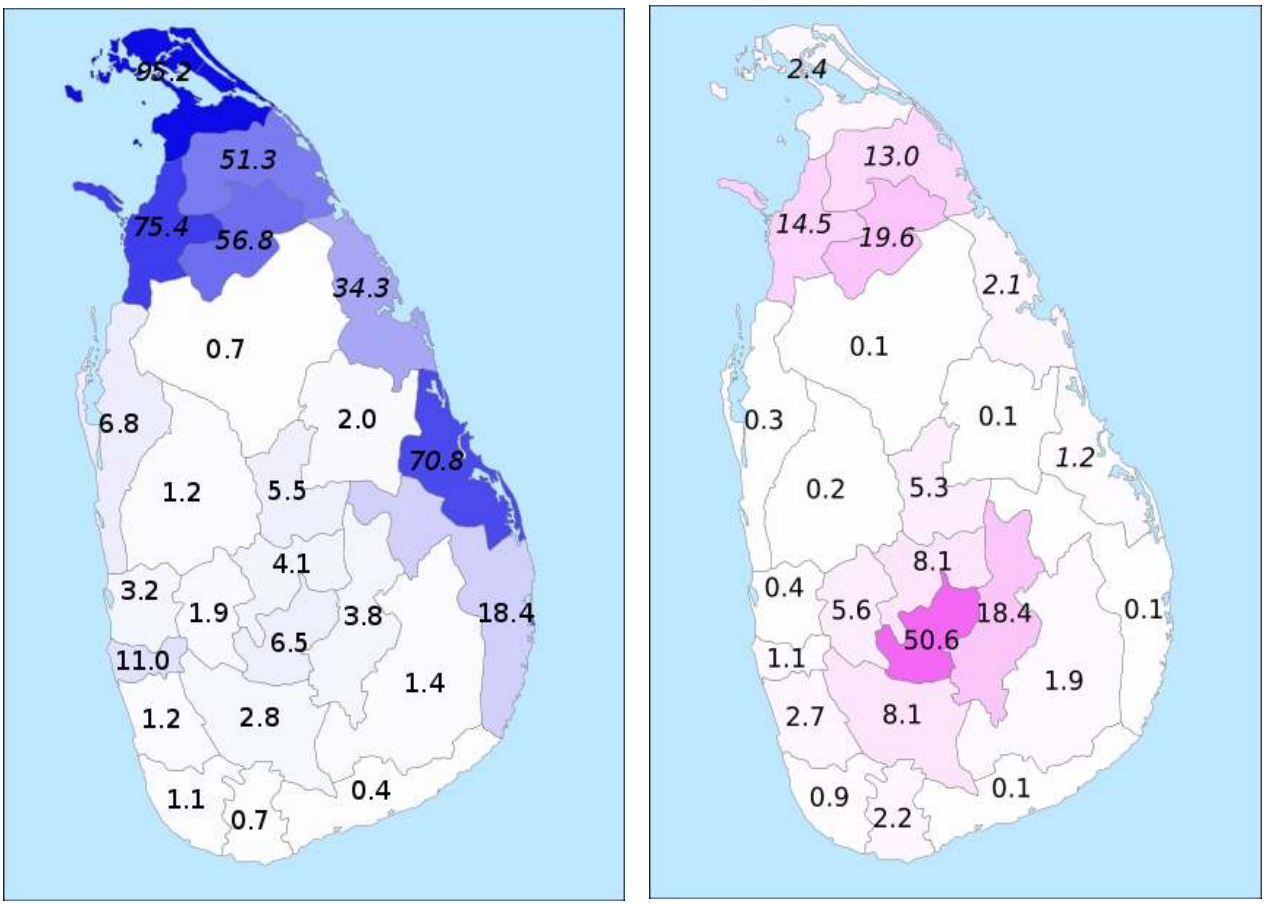
Regional Differences

Different identities based on regional differences have traditionally been the most salient of differences among the Tamils in Sri Lanka. Tamils were largely differentiated based on three regions – Jaffna, Batticaloa and the Hill Country. Although Colombo is home to a significant Tamil population, it is generally not considered a basis for a differentiated identity as most Tamils living in Colombo trace their ancestry to the three regions of Jaffna, Batticaloa and the Hill Country. Jaffna to the North and Batticaloa to the East were mainly home to Sri Lankan Tamils or Tamils who had lived in the island before the arrival of South Indian Tamil laborers in the mid nineteenth century. The South Indian Tamil laborers, brought to the island to work on the coffee, rubber and tea plantations, are concentrated in the central hill regions of the island and are popularly called Estate Tamils or Indian Tamils.

Valentine Daniel says that "Sri Lankans have forgotten that there was a time when where you lived mattered more than your language or religion[80]." Indeed, regional identity subsumed social, religious and linguistic differences among the Tamils of Sri Lanka. It is important to note

[80] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies*, 16.

that the Tamils of Sri Lanka were still very much aware of the differences among them until the 1980s when the civil war erupted in full force. The Sinhalese, on the other hand, had largely overcome their once-considerable differences much earlier[81].



Sri Lankan Tamil (Blue) and Indian Tamil (Pink) percentages in each of the districts. The italics refer to the census data from 1981. No census has been held in the six districts of Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Killinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa since. (Sri Lanka Census Report, 2001)

The differences in language were one of the most salient of all differences among Tamils and were based on the dialects spoken in the three main regions mentioned above and the values attached to them. The Jaffna Tamil dialect is considered *centamir* (elegant or pure) and thus more prestigious than the Indian Tamil dialect, which is considered *kotuntamir* (coarse or corrupt

[81] Ibid., 17.

Tamil) by the Jaffna Tamils[82]. In fact there are a several openly derogatory names for Indian Tamils in popular Tamil culture in Jaffna. The most widely used is *Kallattoni* (illicit boat person) while *tottakkattan* (plantation jungle man) is used less widely[83]. The Indian Tamils, for their part, call Sri Lankan Tamils, whether from Jaffna or elsewhere, *panankottai cuppis* (suckers of Palmyra seeds), a derogatory epithet[84].

Furthermore, the differences went far beyond mere making fun of each other's spoken dialect. The values attached to language, as indicated by preoccupation with prestige and purity reveal underlying social differences. For instance, Daniel, writing about the period before the 1990s says that "the contempt shown toward these hill-country Tamils by the Jaffna Tamils and the incorrigible distrust that the former have towards the latter was too well known among both groups to even require mention[85]." Even fairly mundane activities such as cooking and eating have had powerful impacts on the differences. For instance, Indian Tamils use very different spices in cooking than Sri Lankan Tamils, who use spices similar to the ones used by the Sinhalese. Both groups deride each other's use of spices as less sophisticated than their own. The Indian Tamils use more milk in cooking but less chili and coconut while the Sri Lankan Tamils use less milk but more chili and coconut in cooking[86].

A more marked difference between Sri Lankan and Indian Tamils is the method of eating. Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamil, similar to their neighbors in India, use their hands (right or left hand) to eat. The hand movements and placements are considered of utmost importance and eating rice, the staple for both Sinhalese and Tamils, in social situations is usually an

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[82] Ibid., 29.
[83] Ibid., 21.
[84] Ibid., 18.
[85] Ibid., 18.
[86] Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Sri Lankan Tamil Society and Politics,* 8th World Tamil Conference Special Publication (Madras: New Century Book House, 1995), 4.

elaborate affair concerned with grace of movement. In fact, Sri Lankans can generally gauge another Sri Lankan's social background by merely observing the manner in which they use their hands to eat rice. Children, both Sinhalese and Sri Lankan Tamil, are trained from early age to keep the rice-line well above the base of the fingers and to keep the other hand on the table across the body between the body and the plate. Indian Tamils, on the other hand, use the entire hand including the palms to mix and eat rice and place equal importance to form and hand movements, albeit drastically different from those of Sri Lankan Tamils[87]. Therefore, it is not surprising that both groups abhor each other's manner of eating and deride other's manners as unsophisticated and even disgusting[88].

Another major difference among the Sri Lankan Tamils concerns genealogy. The patrilineal Jaffna Tamils of the North had a starkly different social structure than the matrilineal Batticaloa Tamils of the East[89]. In fact, the Sri Lankan Tamils from Jaffna and Batticaloa were loath to marry each other because of the differences in family structures between the people of the two regions. The social organization of Batticaloa Tamils, excepting the Vellalah caste, is based on the *Kuti*[90] system, the exogamous matri-clans, in which no male carries with him the kuti of his birth and always joins his wife's kuti on marriage[91]. Moreover, the husband always moves to the

[87] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 165.
[88] Originally, the flat plates used by Indian Tamils (same as in South India) required them to use their whole palm in sweeping motions around the plate to keep the gravy on the plate. However, now flat plates are almost never used in Sri Lanka among the Indian Tamils. But the customs, mannerisms and movements remain the same. They serve a purely social purpose and illustrate how important this seemingly trivial activity is among Tamils in Sri Lanka.
[89] Dennis McGilvray in *Ethnigraphy of Fertility and Birth,* edited by Carol P. MacCormack (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland, 1994), 16-7.
[90] In Tamil, means settlement or house. Alternatively spelled Kudi.
[91] Sivathamby, *Sri Lankan Tamil Society and Politics,* 9.

wife's house and their children become part of the larger family of the wife, but not the husband's, a practice anathema to the highly patrilineal Jaffna Tamils[92].

Caste Differences

The differences in family and social structures among the Tamils point to another significant difference – caste – among the Tamils of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils of the North and the East are as caste conscious as the Tamils of South India, but have for centuries had a set of castes with somewhat different names, functions and positions in the hierarchy than those that may be found in South India. The number of castes among the Indian Tamils who work in the plantations of Sri Lanka, however, are far fewer than those that are to be found either in their ancestral South India or among the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Indian Tamils also have somewhat different nomenclature than the Sri Lankan Tamils and are much less fastidious about caste than the Sri Lankan Tamils[93]. This is partly due to the fact that there are numerically very few individuals among these plantation workers who belong to the upper castes, who are the ones who are generally given to orthodoxy in the caste system. In Sri Lanka, the caste system is most rigid among the Jaffna Tamils and less so among the Batticaloa Tamils[94]. For instance, until recently, a Tamil Vellalah (the "highest" Tamil caste in Sri Lanka) would rather have his daughter marry a Sinhala Goyigama (the corresponding "highest" caste among Sinhalese) than have her marry a Tamil of a "lower" caste[95].

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[92] Nur Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree: Studies in Caste, Kinship, and Marriage in the Interior of Ceylon* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1967), 286-7.
[93] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 175.
The most distinct characteristic is that among the Sri Lankan Tamils, the highest caste is the non-Brahmin Vellala caste, which dominates the priestly Brahmin caste, while the Brahmin caste is at the pinnacle in India.
[94] Yalman, *Under the Bo Tree,* 329.
[95] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 16.

Similarly in 1912, the Sri Lankans elected *Ponnambalam Ramanathan*, a Tamil, to the only local seat in the colonial assembly over Dr. Hilarion *Marcus Fernando*, a Sinhalese. At the time, out of a population of about 4.5 million, fewer than three thousand could vote in the election. Ramanathan won 1645 to 981. Therefore, even if all the Tamils had voted for Ramanathan, at least a quarter of the Sinhalese must have voted for Ramanathan over Dr. Fernando as well. The election is widely held as an example of caste collaboration across ethnic boundaries in Sri Lanka. Dr. Fernando was from the Sinhalese Karava caste, which was considered lesser than the dominant Goyigama caste among the Sinhalese or the Vellalah among the Tamils, to which Ramanathan belonged. Since most of the elite with voting rights at the time were either Goyigama or Vellalah, it was believed that the voters would have preferred a Tamil from a higher caste than a Sinhalese from a lower caste[96].

The importance of caste among the Sri Lankan Tamils was such that even in the immediate aftermath of Black July in 1983, the caste differences were not forgotten. According to Daniel, immediately after the events during Black July, packets of food were donated to the refugee camps by foreign embassies in Sri Lanka. Soon after the food arrived in the camps, the higher caste Tamils ordered that the food be taken "upstairs" to where they were housed and sent "down" the leftovers once they were done[97].

Daniel notes cases of caste consciousness in other parts of Sri Lanka and South India as well. He notes that some of the Sri Lankan Tamils from the East, fleeing Sinhalese mobs in 1983, were given water in coconut shells by the Northern higher caste Tamils for fear that their

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[96] Peebles, *History of Sri Lanka,* 79.
There were many instances in which, the two higher castes among the Sinhalese and the Tamils collaborated to protect their interests. Accordingly, all the political leaders of colonial and independent Sri Lanka, both Sinhalese and Tamil were from the two "highest" castes until the outbreak of the civil war in 1980s.
[97] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 162.

lips would pollute the cups of the higher caste Tamils[98]. In another instance, when asked by her teacher whether she was a "repatriate Tamil[99]," a refugee Jaffna Tamil girl living in South India replied "chee" (meaning eww or gross in Sri Lanka).

The episodes mentioned above are particularly illuminating in the context in which they occurred. The Tamils of Sri Lanka had just witnessed a mass killing of Tamils and the destruction of Tamil property by Sinhalese mobs. Those in refugee camps had only narrowly escaped certain death and most had seen or heard of a murder of another Tamil family member, friend or neighbor. Nevertheless, even in those dire situations, the caste distinctions were strictly maintained and adhered to by many Vellalahs among the Sri Lankan Tamils[100].

The Muslims

The Muslims of Sri Lanka are broadly categorized as Sri Lankan Moors, Malays, and Indian Muslims. Sri Lankan Moors comprise more than 93% of Muslim population and are the descendents of Arab settlers in the island since the fourteenth century. Indian Muslims refer to a myriad number of small Muslim groups such as Memons[101]. However, for the Muslims, their religious identity is stronger than any ethnic identity. As such "Muslim" today is used alongside Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese as a distinct group. Out of the Muslims, who are spread across four corners of Sri Lanka, of particular interest to the thesis are the largely Sri Lankan Moor Muslims who live in the regions demanded by the LTTE.

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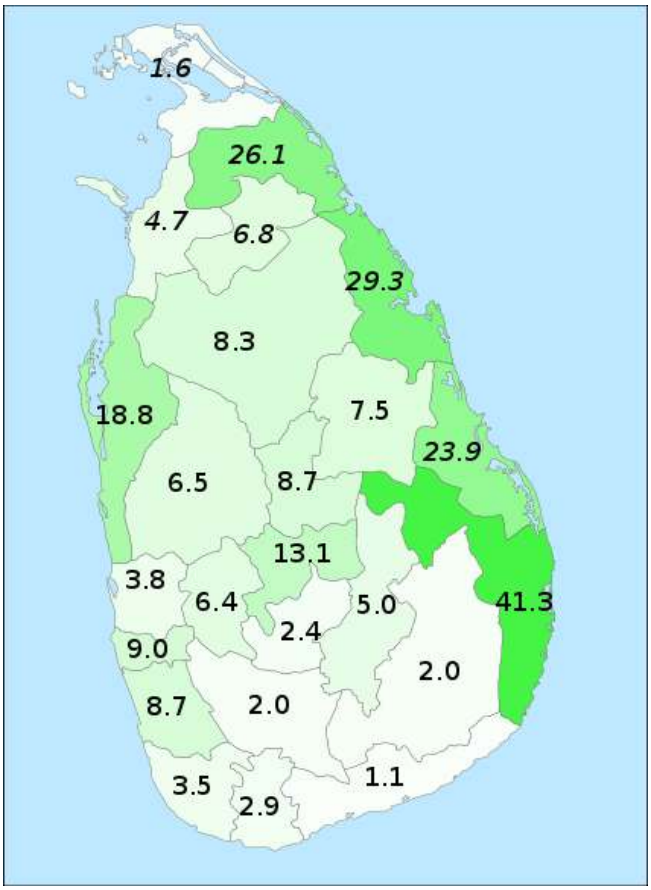
[98] Ibid., 162.
[99] Repatriate Tamil, in South India meant an Indian Tamil who was repatriated to India after Sri Lankan independence.
[100] Since the civil war, no reliable studies have been carried out to research social differences among Tamils of Sri Lanka.
[101] Sri Lanka: A Country Study, *Nations Encyclopedia* http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-13175.html

In the North, the Tamils and Muslims had lived for centuries as neighbors and in peace. However, since 1990, the Muslims in the LTTE regions, as a minority-within-a-minority, were increasingly oppressed by the LTTE[102]. In the East, where they hold the balance in ethnic power struggles between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils, the Muslims are "caught in the crossfire[103]" between the two warring communities. The Muslims became the targets of LTTE attacks as the Indian Peace Keeping Force was planning its withdrawal from Sri Lanka in late 1990. Of the string of massacres of Muslims in the East, in which more than a thousand Muslims were killed in a few months[104], *Kattankudi* mosque massacre is the best known, in which LTTE gunmen killed 147 Muslim men in four mosques in Kattankudi region in August 1990[105]. Soon thereafter, the LTTE moved to expel the Muslims from the North. "Without any warning, in the third week of October 1990, LTTE cadres went from village to village in the Northern Province, announcing over loudspeakers that Muslims had forty-eight hours to leave LTTE-held territory or face reprisals. In Jaffna Muslims



[102] V. Suryanarayan, "Singing the Same Tune," *Frontline* Volume 19 - Issue 09, Apr. 27 - May 10, 2002.
[103] *Asia Report,* Sri Lanka Muslims: Caught in the Crossfire, N'134 – 29th May 2007.
The ethnic balance in the east is about equal with Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims comprising about a third of the population each.
[104] Ibid.
[105] *Amnesty International* , "Sri Lanka – the North East: Human Rights Violations in a context of Armed Conflict." http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=5E7F89A231872062802569A600601598

were given only two hours to leave and permitted to take just 150 Rupees ($1.40) with them. In other areas, they fled with just their clothes and little money[106]."

In the aftermath of the massacres and the expulsions, thousands of Muslims were killed and an estimated 75,000 Muslims were forced out of LTTE-held regions[107]. In Jaffna Peninsula alone, the Muslims were said to have left behind as much as 5,000 million Rupees ($46 million) in valuables and property[108] while in the east, the Muslims were said to have abandoned, under force of arms, more than 63,000 acres of land[109]. In 1990, the LTTE categorically expelled the Muslims not only from the regions under its control, but also from the Eelam project, a cause in which many young Muslim men had enlisted. The expulsions, however, convinced the Muslims that their destiny lay elsewhere. As such, the relations between the two communities in the east are characterized by deep and mutual distrust[110].

Second Generation Brotherhood

However, these differences are remarkably absent among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. Not a single second generation Sri Lankan Tamil knew about the regional basis for differences even though they knew the regional affixes to Sri Lankan Tamils. While most knew the caste of their parents and therefore their own caste, they did not know the hierarchy nor how to gauge the caste of other Sri Lankan Tamils, which is usually indicated by

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106 *Asia Report,* Sri Lanka Muslims: Caught in the Crossfire, N'134 – 29th May 2007
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 *Amnesty International* , "Sri Lanka – the North East: Human Rights Violations in a context of Armed Conflict." http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=5E7F89A231872062802569A600601598
110 To be sure, the Sinhalese have treated the Muslims no better albeit with no planned expulsions. The precarious ethnic balance in the east made the province the most unstable region in Sri Lanka. Since the beginning of the civil war, all three major peace attempts have failed due to incidents in the east. The Sri Lankan government is also suspected of arming and training Muslims groups in the East, ostensibly for their self-defense, but with the larger goal of destabilizing ethnic relations between the Muslim and Sri Lankan Tamil communities in the Province.

the names. Three mentioned that they faced pressure from their parents to marry within their own caste, Vellalah, and noted that they were largely oblivious to caste distinctions until the issue of marriage arose.

Only six out of the thirty-four I interviewed even knew about the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. Twenty-one out of the thirty-four knew that South Indian Tamils were brought to the island during the nineteenth century by the British to work the plantations. However, they did not know that the Indian Tamils consisted of a distinct group of Tamils. In fact, the Indian Tamils are known among the second generation as "Up Country Tamils" or "Central Highlands Tamils" similar to the usual Eastern or Batticaloa Tamils and Northern or Jaffna Tamils that explicitly refer to geography. However, the values attached to the regions among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamil are entirely absent in the second generation, who relate to regional distinctions as purely an accident of birth defined by administrative convenience rather than as a basis for separate identities.

On a lighter note, Ramanan, a twenty-six year old who had immigrated to Canada at four, was the only person to mention *Kallattoni,* although he used it to mean "fresh off the boat" to Canada rather than as a derogatory epithet toward Indian Tamils. Ramanan further joked about the Upcountry Tamils and compared them to the Guyanese in Canada. The popular joke about the Indo-Guyanese in Toronto, he said, was that their ancestors were slow on their feet which allowed the British to catch them in India and send them to British Guyana. Maybe the Upcountry Tamils in Sri Lanka, he said, too must have been slow runners.

It was evident that the second generation had no sense of the differences that existed among their parents in Sri Lanka and that the first generation had largely forgotten about the differences at least in the public sphere. Nevertheless, my interviews with second generation Sri Lankan

Tamils suggested that the first generation was still conscious of differences in private, particularly caste and regional differences, without explicitly passing it on to the second generation. For instance, Kathy, a twenty-four year old, mentioned an "incident" that occurred on the beaches of Lake Ontario in Toronto. She and her sister were verbally harassed by a group of Sri Lankan Tamil boys who were also at the beach with their parents. When she expressed her amazement at the boys' lewd behavior in front of their own parents and the parents' inaction, her mother quipped that they were "coastal dwellers" in Sri Lanka and did not know any better. While Kathy still did not fully comprehend the meaning of her mother's remark at the time of the interview, she knew that there was a difference between those who lived inland and those who lived on the coasts, the latter belonging to the Karayar or fisher caste.

In Sri Lanka, the Tamil Karayar caste, which is considered second only to Vellalah, was largely concentrated in the coasts as they were fishermen by occupation as opposed to the Vellalah who were farmers or landowners. The two castes have maintained a distance between themselves throughout history with each considering the other "arrogant." The early Sri Lankan Tamil leaders and politicians were all from the Vellalah caste while the LTTE leadership is from the Karayar caste[111]. Therefore, in Sri Lanka the leadership of the Sri Lankan Tamils has passed from the Vellalah to the Karayar. Kathy probably belonged to Vellalah caste even though she was not aware of her caste. For instance, Daniel mentions that an entire generation of Vellalah Sri Lankan Tamils in Jaffna loathed being ruled by lower caste Karayar than by the Sinhalese[112]. Tyranny of the Sinhalese was more dignified than rule by lower caste Tamils.

Another twenty year old Sri Lankan Tamil, Amaran, mentioned that during the New Year celebrations, his parents would immediately discard the food received from some Sri Lankan

[111] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 163.
[112] Ibid., 164.

Tamil neighbors in Scarborough. The Tamil New Year falls in mid April and it is custom to exchange platters of food among the neighbors and extended family as tokens of goodwill. The caste hierarchy in Sri Lanka prevented lower caste neighbors from exchanging food with their higher caste neighbors, who were afraid of the "pollution" transmitted by the lower castes. Now in Toronto, the higher castes seem to accept the food at the door in public while quickly discarding the food in private soon afterwards. The two examples mentioned above illustrate the dichotomy that exists between the private and the public sphere among the first generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. In the public sphere they have forgotten the differences that existed back home, but still remember them in private.

Surprisingly, the Muslims seemed to be almost an afterthought to the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils. While thirty-one out of the thirty-four I interviewed knew about the Muslims in the East, only six knew about the expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province in 1990; none knew about the extent and the brutality of the expulsion. In fact, many were surprised at my questions about the Tamil speaking Muslims because they did not know that the Muslims "were an issue." For the second generation, the Muslims in the east were equally discriminated against by the Sinhalese as the Sri Lankan Tamils and as such were thought to be firmly within the fold of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism.

Turmoil and Egalitarian Pressures

One of the major reasons for the first generation's forgetting is that during the time of their immigration to Toronto, Tamil society in Sri Lanka was in turmoil and thus Tamil social identities in a state of flux. An overwhelming majority of Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada immigrated in the decade of 1986 to 1995. Through research conducted precisely during this

period, Daniel notes that some social boundaries within Tamil society in Sri Lanka were being redrawn and that some were erased all together[113]. Linguistic, regional, caste and religious boundaries were being redrawn under the new circumstances brought about by the civil war.

The foremost reason for the state of flux in social identities was the large scale displacement caused by the civil war during this period and the subsequent broken residential patterns. This is particularly acute for a society that based its identity on land. Similarly, the same phenomenon is observed among other land-bound groups experiencing massive displacement. The most widely studied is the case of the Palestinians. The Palestinian society soon after the Nakba was in a state of flux as its land-bound social structure was ruptured by massive displacement and proved inadequate to maintain social relations in displacement[114]. The same phenomenon is also observed among the Cuban exiles, who did not have a rigid land-bound social structure, to a lesser degree[115].

Another powerful impetus for forgetting among the first generation may be the egalitarian pressures they faced in Canada. Moving from a highly hierarchical society in Sri Lanka to an egalitarian society in Toronto, the first generation was pressured, albeit indirectly, by both their Canadian neighbors and their own children inculcated in Canadian values of equality. For instance, criticizing the official Canadian policy of multiculturalism, Neil Bissoondath, says that the emphasis on "home cultures" has led to ethnic stereotyping in which the complex home identities of the immigrants are disregarded in favor of a "usable" ethnic identity in the new host context of Canada[116]. Terence Turner agrees that multiculturalism in Canada "risks reifying cultures as separate entities by overemphasizing their boundedness and mutual distinctness; it

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[113] Ibid., 17, 75, 172, 175.
[114] Litvak, *Palestinian Collective Memory,* 51, 104.
[115] O'Reilly, *Cuba*, 3.
[116] Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994), 85-6.

risks overemphasizing the internal homogeneity of cultures…[117]" Another impetus for forgetting comes directly from the first generation's younger kin, thoroughly inculcated in Western values of equality. For instance, Daniel mentions an episode in which an aunt visiting the United States complained to her nephew in the diaspora about the corpse of a young man belonging to a lower caste who was killed by the army. The nephew remarked to Daniel: "These people (the likes of his aunt) should be lined up and shot[118]."

Regardless of the reasons for first generation's selective forgetting, the second generation has a universal and highly inclusive sense of Sri Lankan Tamil identity that was not observed among their parents' generation even during their hour of greatest danger in July 1983.

[117] Terence Turner, "Anthropology and Multiculturalism: What is Anthropology that Multiculturalists should be Mindful of it?" *Cultural Anthropology* Vol. 8, No. 4 (Nov., 1993): 412.
[118] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 164.

Chapter 4 The Master Narrative: Ignorance and the LTTE

"To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'... It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger[119]*"*- Walter Benjamin

Ignorance

Unlike memory and forgetting, ignorance, as a social phenomenon has not been widely theorized and scholars have not largely distinguished between forgetting and ignorance[120]. However, as noted by Gershon and Raj, forgetting is a voluntary act done principally by first generation migrants, while ignorance is the involuntary consequence manifested primarily in second generation migrants[121]. Furthermore, ignorance does not necessarily arise from the negative, forgetting, but also from the positive[122] larger-than-life remembrance. In this chapter, ignorance, manifested in the second generation, is discussed as a consequence of the sum of remembrance and forgetting discussed in the previous two chapters.

As with remembrance, ignorance is not individual in character, but is "socially-bounded[123]" because it exists in a social framework which is determined outside the individual. However, in contrast to remembrance and forgetting, ignorance occupies the space, the gap, left by larger-than-life remembrance and selective forgetting. I do not employ the word ignorance pejoratively, rather as a purely structural phenomenon and an analytical tool without a value judgment. I also use ignorance and unawareness interchangeably for clarity.

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[119] Walter Benjamin quoted in Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Exiled Memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 1.
[120] Ilana Gershon and Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, "Introduction: The Symbolic Capital of Ignorance," *Social Analysis*, 44(2) November 2000, 4.
[121] Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj, "Ignorance, Forgetting, and Family Nostalgia: Partition, the Nation State and Refugees in Delhi," *Social Analysis*, 44(2) November 2000, 31.
[122] Ilana Gershon, "How to Know When Not to Know: Strategic Ignorance When Eliciting for Samoan Migrant Exchanges," *Social Analysis*, 44(2) November 2000, 85.
[123] Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance,* 6.

In a second generation diaspora, lacking the experience of the home country, the social framework becomes even more significant. It is here that the LTTE's role in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora becomes paramount. By indoctrination, intimidation, extortion and sometimes even murder[124], the LTTE managed to set the boundaries of discussion within the diaspora, particularly in Toronto. As a result, the LTTE came to monopolize the public discourse in Toronto and by the turn of the century, managed to establish its own version of historical narrative as representative of all Sri Lankan Tamils, violently impeding sustained discussions to the contrary. The master narrative of the LTTE provided the social framework, the imposition of which was facilitated by the ignorance among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora. Before the master narrative is discussed, the organizational strength of the LTTE and its reach among the diaspora in Toronto should be discussed in order to better understand the imposition of the master narrative.

Profiling Tigers

As a terrorist organization, the LTTE, popularly known in Toronto as the Tigers, has an impressive resume. Indeed, the LTTE was the only terrorist organization in the world capable of conventional warfare with heavy weapons, artillery and tanks. However, its most devastating invention was the modern suicide belt and jacket. Having pioneered the human bomb in its modern form[125], the LTTE was responsible for 40% of the 186 suicide attacks in the world from 1980 to 2001[126]. Moreover, it was deadlier than any other terrorist organization including Hamas

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[124] Human Rights Watch, *Funding the Final War,* Volume 18, No. 1 (C) 2006, 28.
[125] Federal Bureau of Investigation Profile of the LTTE, January 2008. http://www.fbi.gov/page2/jan08/tamil_tigers011008.html
[126] Robert Art and Robert Jervis, *International Politics: Enduring Concepts and Contemporary Issues* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007), 222.

and Hizballah during the same period, responsible for 48.6% of all deaths from suicide bombings in the world[127]. The LTTE's most notorious achievement was to assassinate two world leaders – Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi of India and President Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka – in suicide attacks, the only organization in the world to assassinate two leaders of state[128].

Furthermore, its military capabilities were unique and legendary among the terrorist organizations with a fully operational Navy and even a rudimentary Air Force, both with suicide wings[129] and large female contingents within the ranks. The LTTE was also the only terrorist organization to own a commercial carrier sea fleet, which was used to smuggle weapons and other goods across the Indian Ocean[130]. In addition, the LTTE was known to be an active player in international arms smuggling and credit card fraud used order to finance its war machine.

The LTTE is also infamous for its use of child soldiers in battle, and even in suicide missions. During the four year period from February 2002 to January 2006, UNICEF's conservative estimates put the LTTE child recruitment at 4,347 documented cases, with the majority of the cases said to be undocumented, and over 36% of the documented cases involving children below fifteen years of age at the time of recruitment[131]. However, in the eyes of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, the most significant triumph of the LTTE was the establishment of a de facto state in the Northern and Eastern regions of Sri Lanka with its own legal code, court system, police, prison system, school system and a full civil service. It even managed time

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[127] Ibid., 228.
[128] Federal Bureau of Investigation Profile of the LTTE, January 2008. http://www.fbi.gov/page2/jan08/tamil_tigers011008.html
[129] Victor Asal, Brian Nussbaum and D. William Harringtin, "Terrorism as Transnational Advocacy: An Organizational and Tactical Examination," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 30: 15-39, 2007: 30.
[130] C. Christine Fair, "Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements," *United States Institute of Peace*, Washington D.C. USA, 79. http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/Diasporas.pdf
[131] Human Rights Watch, *Funding the Final War,* Volume 18, No. 1 (C) 2006, 9.

differently, with the regions under its control being half an hour earlier at +5.30 GMT than the rest of Sri Lanka[132].

Moreover, the LTTE's international reach was unrivaled among any terrorist organization[133]. Its international links were mainly established and facilitated through numerous cultural, religious, economic and relief organizations in the West, established ostensibly to cater to the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora[134]. The LTTE had absolute control over many of these organizations such as the Tamil Relief Organization (TRO) and the World Tamil Movement, both of which were later found to funnel funds to the LTTE war machine and thus banned in many countries[135]. Furthermore, by the end of 2006, the LTTE had established a "global network of offices and cells that spanned at least 40 countries and was unrivalled by any other insurgent organization worldwide[136]."

In Canada, especially Toronto, the LTTE penetration of Sri Lankan Tamil life was even more profound. For instance, the LTTE acted as a proxy lender to hundreds of small Sri Lankan Tamil businesses in areas such as Scarborough and the profits were split between the LTTE and the ostensible owner after the LTTE's initial investment was recouped. Revenue accrued to the LTTE coffers from this practice was estimated at over one million Canadian dollars per month in

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[132] Federal Bureau of Investigation Profile of the LTTE, January 2008. http://www.fbi.gov/page2/jan08/tamil_tigers011008.html

[133] C. Christine Fair, Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements, United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C. USA, 60. http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/Diasporas.pdf

[134] Ibid., 60.

[135] *Reuters*, "Sri Lanka Bans Charity for Funding Rebels," Colombo, November 22, 2007. Sri Lanka banned the TRO a week after the United Stated designated the organization a terrorist support group. Paola Loriggio, "Canada Bans Tamil Group as Terrorist Front for Tigers: Canadian Assets Frozen after probe finds links to Sri Lankan Militants," *Toronto Star*, June 17, 2008.

[136] C. Christine Fair, Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements, United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C. USA, 60.

2001[137]. In addition to illegal fundraising, the LTTE leveraged numerous legitimate economic activities among its substantial diaspora. For instance, the "LTTE invest[ed] in stocks, money markets, and real estate. The LTTE also own[ed] numerous restaurants and shops throughout the world and ha[d] invested in farms, finance companies, and other ventures that have had high profit margins[138]." The extensive network of Sri Lankan Tamil relief organizations in the West, while undoubtedly engaged in relief activities in Sri Lanka, were used to siphon off funds through pseudo-legitimate means, bypassing Western anti-terrorism laws[139]. In fact, the relief activities of organizations such as the TRO were held as evidence for legitimate use of funds and constantly used to challenge Western anti-terrorism laws on human rights and international aid grounds[140].

The vast international network was managed through a number of umbrella organizations that took orders directly from the LTTE, whether from Sri Lanka or its international offices in Toronto or London. The largest and the most powerful were: The Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils, The International Federation of Tamils (based in the UK), The French Federation of Tamil Associations, The Swiss Federation of Tamil Associations, the Tamil Coordinating Committee in Norway and the Illankai Tamil Sangam (based in the US)[141]. These organizations are mainstays in Sri Lankan Tamil life in the West, providing social, medical, cultural, language, legal and numerous other services to the community while directing LTTE activities. This vast and sophisticated international network of LTTE, according to the United

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137 Ibid., 68.
138 Ibid., 72.
139 Ibid., 71.
140 *Tamilnet, "*U.S. Freezes TRO Funds,"November 15, 2007, 15:10 GMT.
141 C. Christine Fair, Diaspora Involvement in Insurgencies: Insights from the Khalistan and Tamil Eelam Movements, United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C. USA, 75. http://home.comcast.net/~christine_fair/pubs/Diasporas.pdf

States Institute of Peace, allowed the LTTE to "raise funds in one location, operate from another and fight in an altogether different place. This enable[d] groups like the LTTE to exploit fissures among law enforcement authorities and the failure of government agencies to cooperate[142]."

Therefore it is not surprising that the LTTE had a stranglehold on all Sri Lankan news information reaching the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The monopoly on information was used very effectively to impose the master narrative, taking advantage of the ignorance among the second generation. Over time, this master narrative discourse was normalized and accepted into the Sri Lankan Tamil public discourse through enforced repetition[143]. The foremost medium through which the master narrative was exported from the LTTE bases in Sri Lanka and imposed in the West was Tamilnet.com, the mouthpiece of the LTTE.

Tamilnet

Tamilnet's most obvious strength in acting as the medium for LTTE's master narrative is its wide readership among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, especially the technologically savvy second generation, who even today continue to rely on the website for news about Sri Lanka[144]. However, below the surface, its popularity is also due to the aura of legitimacy and impartiality pervading the website, conveyed through the frequent use of the conventional "who-what-when-where[145]" structure in the articles, the absence of obvious political rhetoric and the use of

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[142] Ibid, 79

[143] This phenomenon was first observed widely among the Cuban diaspora after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. The Cuban diaspora centered in Miami, Florida, was particularly successful in imposing its narrative based on anticommunism and political radicalism on the entire Cuban diaspora. See O'Reilly, *Cuba,* 29-30.

[144] Mark P. Whitaker, "Tamilnet.com: Some Reflections on Popular Anthropology, Nationalism and the Internet," *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (Summer, 2004): 480.

[145] Whitaker, *Tamilnet.com,* 478.

conditional factuality. For instance, the article, "Judge Rejects Skewed Reports on Torture Victims[146]" reads:

> The *Trincomalee Magistrate Tuesday* ordered that two Tamil youths, *allegedly tortured* in detention by the Sri Lankan security forces, should be examined by the Colombo Judicial Medical Officer, *when it transpired* during the proceedings that the District Medical Officers who had examined the young men had stated in their reports that there were no fresh wounds on the two suspects who have been arrested and detained under the Prevention of Terrorism Act [emphasis added].

In this manner Tamilnet has been able to distinguish itself from other nationalistic media organizations that were easily dismissed as biased[147]. It's neutral, yet authoritative tone is especially appealing to the second generation who are versed in the journalistic values of freedom of press, impartiality of reporting and factual reporting. However, my research on the 26,692 news reports and the 510 feature articles that appeared on Tamilnet from June 1997 to May 2009 revealed that Tamilnet's air of neutrality is a false façade concealing frequent misrepresentations, outright omissions, and even fabrications. For instance, in March 2009, with the government offensive at its peak, Tamilnet published an article with photographs titled, "Shelling doesn't spare even babies in wombs[148]." The excerpt read that "while four pregnant mothers were killed in SLA shelling on Friday inside the safe zone, another mother who was admitted to the make-shift hospital after injuries in her abdomen gave birth Saturday to a baby girl, but the hospital staff noticed the child having shrapnel on her left thigh. The newborn child went through a small surgery even before her first feeding, according to the medical staff at the

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146 *Tamilnet*, "Judge Rejects Skewed Reports on Torture Victims,"January 15, 2002, 20:03 GMT.
147 Whitaker, *Tamilnet.com,* 478.
148 *Tamilnet*, "Shelling doesn't spare even babies in wombs," March 15, 2009, 02.18 GMT.

hospital in Maaththa'lan." However, the next day, the Asia Tribune published an article claiming the Tamilnet article to be a fabrication after investigations proved that the photographs were taken 23rd September 2007[149].

Nevertheless, its widespread popularity among the second generation and its authoritative position as the source for other Tamil community news outlets has allowed Tamilnet to act as the vehicle of export to LTTE's master narrative. In fact, Tamilnet has been so successful in conveying the LTTE's master narrative that the website is banned in Sri Lanka[150].

The Master Narrative

Based on the articles from Tamilnet and the Tamil Guardian as well as my interviews in Toronto, I argue that the master narrative of the LTTE stands on four distinct sub-narratives. They are a culture of victimhood, territory, history and human rights. All Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist discourses and community news information in Toronto can be grouped into one or more of these four narratives, with each reinforcing others. Through this reinforcement, each of the sub-narratives contributes to a synergistic strengthening of the master narrative, resulting in a greater urgency to mobilize on behalf of Eelam. Moreover, this master narrative is specifically directed toward the Sri Lankan diaspora and the international community, not the Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka. The first sub-narrative and the starting point to the master narrative is Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood.

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[149] *Asia Tribune, "*Freedom of Speech in Danger: Pro-Tiger Media Is At it Again – Old Photographs doctored to Cook Up Stories!" March 16, 2009.
http://www.asiantribune.com/?q=node/16125

[150] *Tamil Guardian, "* Sri Lanka Blocks Access to Tamilnet," No. 351 June 21, 2007.
The Sri Lankan government effectively controls the media and exercises strict censorship within the island and actively imposes its own master narrative on the people, particularly targeting the Sinhalese. Because education in Sri Lanka is nationalized, the government also manages the school curriculum in Sri Lanka to impose its own master narrative. For instance, the events of Black July in 1983 are conspicuously absent from school history books.

Culture of Victimhood

The culture of victimhood is based on universalizing the idea of the Sri Lankan Tamil victim; so as to include the entire Sri Lankan population, even those who did not experience victimhood first hand. The narrative portrayed the Sri Lankan Tamils as hapless victims at the hands of barbaric Sinhalese-Buddhist nationalists and Sinhala dominated government and upheld the LTTE as the sole savior of the Sri Lankan Tamils. Even though accounts of victimization of Sri Lankan Tamils were constantly circulated with gory details, the core of the narrative and the spirit of victimization were firmly anchored in the riots of Black July in 1983.

The events of Black July were regularly circulated among the Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto and often parallels were drawn between events in 1983 and a contemporary episode of violence in the civil war. Black July was the central event on which Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood drew its persistence and had become emblematic of the victimized Sri Lankan Tamil nation as described by the LTTE.

The powerful emotional grip the events of Black July still has on the Sri

Lankan Tamil diaspora is best illustrated in the most widely known photograph from that period. Indeed, the photograph is emblematic of the spirit of victimhood conveyed by the narrative and is circulated widely among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora that many knew the details of the photograph by heart and referred to the photograph as that of the "naked man," "naked boy" and "stripped man." The photograph depicts a presumably Tamil man, naked, bloodied and exhausted, seated on a cement step by the roadside, his head buried in his hands and awaiting the final blows. His casually dressed, presumably Sinhalese tormentors appear no older than their unfortunate victim. One young man nonchalantly smiles as he raises his right knee in preparation of another blow. The photograph is so popular that poems have been written and paintings have been painted about the Tamil man, whose identity and fate is uncertain.

The photograph forcefully conveys several aspects of victimization. The Tamil man has given-up the fight after being beaten, defeated and subjugated by his Sinhalese oppressors. He is stripped naked and humiliated while his tormentors seem to enjoy themselves. Moreover, frighteningly the Sinhalese men seem to be no older than their Tamil victim and may well have been a neighbor, a classmate or a workmate, who may have taken the same bus as the Tamil man. Furthermore, the anonymity of the actors conveys the fact that the victim and the perpetrators could have been anyone; that no Tamil is safe in Sri Lanka from their Sinhalese neighbors. The surroundings of the photograph too convey the universality of Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood. The small "tea-shop" by the street side elevated by a cement step is ubiquitous in Sri Lanka and exists in both villages and cities, serving people everything from cigarettes, tea, and coffee to soap. The familiarity with and the ubiquity of the tea-shop, no doubt convey the universality of Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood.

This emphasis on victimhood, centered on Black July, has also led to the development of a "culture of victimhood" among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, a phenomenon widely observed among the Jews after the Holocaust and the Palestinians after the Nakba[151]. The development of a culture based on victimhood means that those who did not directly experience the core event of victimization also begin to internalize the thought of victimhood and thus can be included in the experience of victimization. In other words, the development of cultures of victimhood transforms the suffering of a part of the society into a collective possession. According to Emmanuel Sivan, this means that "young people, uninitiated into the actual experience, carry emotion-laden stories very effectively[152]."

Therefore, the second generation is initiated into the sense of collective victimization, by the narrative, even though they have never experienced direct victimization. Sivan also notes that having been thoroughly inculcated into victimhood, for the second generation, the narratives of "suffering can approximate personal suffering[153]," which allows the LTTE to harness the force of the diaspora, including the second generation toward the realization of Eelam. Consequently, the narrative's focus on Black July has become a powerful tool in mobilizing the diaspora, particularly the second generation diaspora. It does not merely encourage passivity, but incites the diaspora into activism toward realizing Eelam, the only rectification for the wrongs of Black July.

To this end, the Sri Lankan Tamils in the diaspora are constantly exposed to highly emotional and evocative photographs and stories depicted in the most gruesome manner and parallels drawn with Black July in 1983. These photographs and stories, first appearing on

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151 Litvak, *Palestinian Collective Memory*, 35.
152 Winter and Sivan, *War and Remembrance*, 18.
153 Ibid., 18.

Tamilnet, are later circulated widely in other media such as the Tamil Guardian newspaper. A news article in June 2006 titled, "SLA Soldiers Massacre Family of Four in Vankalai, Mannar[154]" said:

> SLA soldiers armed with bayonets and knives entered the house of a family of four and slaughtered 35-year-old father, 27-year-old mother, 9-year-old daughter and 7-year-old son Thursday midnight in Vankalai, 12 km southeast of Mannar. Eyewitnesses in the area, Thomaspuri Ward No 10 in Vankalai, have told Mannar Additional Magistrate that they could identify the soldiers involved in the massacre. Villagers alleged the mother was raped before the massacre. Tension prevails in Vankalai. Religious leaders including the Bishop of Mannar, parliamentarians and civil society members in Mannar have rushed to site. Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission officials have visited the massacre site.

The photographs depicted the scene of the massacre with horrifying details and showed the father and the two children still hung with their clothes soaked in blood from repeated stabbing, the boy disemboweled, his insides falling to the ground and used condoms on the floor. While Tamilnet reported the massacre in its usual authoritative tone, the incident in fact was marred in such ambiguities and the witnesses not forthcoming, that the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, the independent mission established to monitor the ceasefire agreement between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, refused to assign responsibility to any party and omitted any mention of the massacre in any of its weekly monitoring reports and statements[155].

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[154] Tamilnet, June 09, 2006, 04:47 GMT.
[155] http://www.slmm.info/STATEMENTS/2006/

Another instance of propagating victimhood, is the widely publicized pictures of Sri Lankan Army soldiers, first appearing in Tamilnet, then in Tamil Guardian that are depicted in a manner specifically intended to arouse highly emotional responses. The front page photograph in Tamil Guardian, published on September 20, 2006[156], depicted a Sri Lanka army soldier holding a gun, dressed in a military raincoat, wearing a black mask, a helmet and goggles. The caption read: "Sri Lanka's military is being blamed for the abductions." The cover story title read: "Death squads unleash wave of terror." For any Sri Lankan, Sinhalese or Tamil, past and present, the soldier dressed in military garb, holding his AK-47 is iconic of an era in which the Sri Lankan government was responsible for the deaths of tens of thousands of Sinhalese and Tamil citizens during the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

The photograph, along with the captions, specifically appeal to the images and emotions ingrained in the Sri Lankan Tamils who migrated during the period when black

[156] *Tamil Guardian,* No. 332, September 20, 2006.

masked soldiers roamed the streets of Sri Lanka. Constantly exposed to images such as these, the second generation has been thoroughly immersed in the culture of victimhood.

Moreover, article titles such as, "Loud echoes of a bloody past[157]," "Genocide charges ready: many consider the organized pogrom of 1983, where over 3,000 Tamils were killed in Colombo alone, as one of the long list of indicators of the ongoing, slow genocide of Tamil in Sri Lanka[158]," and "State orchestrated violence raises spectre of 1983 pogrom[159]" were commonplace on Tamilnet and in the Tamil Guardian, explicitly drawing parallels between present events and those in 1983.

Another, more potent medium, in which the culture of victimization is conveyed, is cinema, especially movies and documentaries, a number of which have appeared in the West since 2000. The most recent and by far the most popular among the second generation was *Aanivaer,* meaning "original root" or one's origins. The movie which premiered in Toronto in September 2006 was related to me by many second generation Sri Lankan Tamils as a must-see. The story narrates the journey of a female South Indian reporter, Sandhya, and her companion, Dr. Nanda, a Sri Lankan Tamil living in LTTE-controlled regions. The movie is especially powerful as it forcefully brings to life well known incidents in the Sri Lankan civil war. One such episode is when Tamil civilians are shredded under an army tank, which left flesh scattered across the road. Another episode is when a Tamil school girl is ambushed, while riding her bicycle, by a group of Sri Lankan soldiers who assault and rape her. Later the personal pain of such incidents are powerfully conveyed by Dr. Nanda who refuses to identify the body of the girl, now dug out of the muddy ground, because he was fond of her. Even though, most Sri Lankan Tamils have

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157 *Tamil Guardian*, No. 379, July 02, 2008.
158 *Tamil Guardian*, No. 388, December 24, 2008.
159 *Tamilnet*, April 15, 2006.

heard or read about the events depicted in the movie, Aanivaer's depiction of these events brings an added immediacy to Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood and evokes the most powerful emotions in its viewers. Interestingly, the movie never mentions the LTTE which afforded the movie legitimacy to avoid being dismissed as LTTE propaganda.

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Territory

The culture of victimhood is directly used to justify Eelam, the separate Tamil homeland. Having harnessed the emotions of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, especially the second generation, into a powerful force of mobilization through the inculcation of a culture of victimhood, the LTTE embarked on giving that mobilized force a direction and a more specific target - territory. This was achieved by the narrative of territory, in which Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism was decisively territorialized[160] and the borders of Tamil Eelam carved in stone, the need for which was legitimized by Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood.

Given the Sri Lankan Tamils' attachment to land, as discussed in Chapter Two, territorialization of nationalism may have been achieved relatively easily. To be sure, territorialization was a process that had begun long before the LTTE came to monopolize the nationalist discourse. For instance, in the *Vaddukoddai* Resolution – the first official call for Eelam – announced on May 14th 1976, "that the State of Tamil Eelam shall consist of the people

[160] Daniel, *Charred Lullabies,* 155.
Daniel notes the failure of linguistic nationalism among the Sri Lankan Tamils and subsequent territorialization of nationalism

of Northern and Eastern Provinces[161] and shall also ensure full and equal rights of citizenship of the State of Tamil Eelam to all Tamil speaking people living in any part of Ceylon…[162]" However, the defining characteristic of the LTTE's narrative of territory is its exclusiveness. The case of Muslims in the Northern Province best illustrates the exclusivity. Despite the official LTTE rhetoric of mutual understanding between the Sri Lankan Tamils and Muslims, by the mid 1990s, as mentioned in Chapter Three, the LTTE had managed to expel both Muslims and the small Sinhalese populations in the Northern Province to make the province almost exclusively Sri Lankan Tamil. Also, as mentioned before, the expulsion of Muslims has been thoroughly censored in LTTE propaganda and from the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils.

On the other hand, territorialization is most evident in the language used in LTTE propaganda, particularly the articles from Tamilnet and the Tamil Guardian. For instance, six months after the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the Tamil Guardian carried an article titled, "Has the long wait for Eelam ended?" The article suggested that "the Tsunami did what a violent ethnic conflict couldn't. It made Eelam, the Tamil homeland, a de facto reality[163]." Another article titled "Strengthening Homeland Security[164]" spoke about the security measures taken by the LTTE to prevent an "invasion of homeland." By 2009, the use of language suggesting Tamil national boundaries was so widespread that catchphrases such as "Sinhala colonizing," "conquering Sinhalese army," "invasion of Tamil homeland," and "national defense" appeared several times each week on Tamilnet and in every issue of the Tamil Guardian. Furthermore, the demand for exclusive territory is both justified and reinforced by Sri Lankan Tamil historiography.

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[161] The North and the East provinces were merged by the 13th Amendment passed under heavy Indian pressure in 1987 and de-merged in 2008 with a Supreme Court decision ruling the merger unconstitutional. However, the LTTE only used the term Northeastern province as opposed to North and Eastern provinces.

[162] http://www.tamilunitedfront.org/articles/Vattukottai.html

[163] *Tamil Guardian ,* No. 300, June 01, 2005.

[164] *Tamil Guardian,* No. 308, September 21, 2005.

History

Just as territory is justified based on victimhood, the narrative of history seeks to justify territory and victimhood. The territorialization of nationalism is reinforced and justified through "inventing[165]" a historical territorial tradition for Eelam. In this respect, the narrative of history included a vast array of historical lessons and facts, carefully argued to convey the idea that the Sri Lankan Tamils have always constituted a unified nation, inhabiting the Eelam lands exclusively[166]. The inclusion of the district of Puttlam in Eelam best illustrates the use of history to justify territory. For instance, the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Tamils diaspora in Canada now hold that the entire North and the East Provinces and the district of Puttlam from the Northwestern Province constitute the traditional Sri Lankan Tamil homeland. While Tamils have traditionally lived in the Northern and Eastern regions of the island, the areas they inhabited were far smaller than the regions that constitute the present day North and East Provinces[167], the boundaries of which were first drawn by the British in the 1800s for strictly administrative purposes and only marginally changed since. Therefore, they are purely administrative boundaries indicating no historically ethnic demarcations[168].

The Puttlam district was not inhabited by Sri Lankan Tamils in a large scale until the civil war. By 2001, hundreds of thousands of displaced from the North and the East have been settled in Puttlam, both Sri Lankan Tamils and Tamil speaking Muslims, largely in refugee camps. In fact, a large majority of the displaced, accounting for the majority of the population increase in

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[165] Hobsbawm and Ranger, *Invention of Tradition,* 1.
[166] A similar process can be observed among the Sinhalese, in which history is manipulated to justify the claim of Sinhalese ownership of the island and portray the Sri Lankan Tamils as foreign invaders.
[167] Peebles, *History of Sri Lanka,* 32, 37.
[168] Ibid., 54.

the district, are the Muslims who fled the North due to LTTE expulsions in 1990[169]. Even with the displaced Sri Lankan Tamils included, the Sri Lankan Tamils only accounted for 6.8% of the population of the Puttlam district in 2001[170]. Thus, Puttlam never had a large Sri Lankan Tamil population, but is now considered part of the historical Tamil homeland. The change in history is best illustrated by maps used by the LTTE to denote Eelam. This inclusion of Puttlam in Eelam is accepted without question among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto.

The map to the left, on a stamp issued in 1983 by the LTTE, depicts Eelam without the district of Puttlam. The map to the right, published on Tamil Canadian website in 2007, depicts Eelam with the district of Puttlam.

169 Sri Lanka Census Report, 2001.
170 Ibid.

The second function of the narrative of history is to reinforce the culture of victimhood. This is achieved through the reinterpretation of past instances of Sri Lankan Tamil subjugation in light of present conditions. Because there are many instances in which this occurs on Tamilnet and in the Tamil Guardian, I will only focus on the word "Genocide" which is particularly illuminating of this phenomenon as it became the buzz word during the final phase of the war. For instance, on Tamilnet, the word genocide appeared only eleven times during the five year period from July 1997 to July 2002. From 2002 to the beginning of 2008, the word becomes more widely used. From 2008 onward, the word genocide is used almost on a daily basis. Nevertheless, despite its recent ubiquity and the claims of genocide since independence, the word was not applied even to Black July in the 1990s.

The second February issue of the Tamil Guardian in 2009 was dedicated to genocide and ethnic cleansing of Sri Lankan Tamils in Sri Lanka. The issue[171] which carried article titles such as "Long term concentration camps for Tamils says Sri Lanka," "SLA turns first safety zone into a killing field, proposes new zone," "Sri Lanka in systematic genocide" and "Genocide in Sri Lanka" reminded the readers of the "slow and systematic genocide of Tamils that began in 1983." Similarly, the Tamil Guardian's first issue for March 2009 carried an article titled "The diaspora as genocide resisters" which suggested "structural similarities between the genocide of the Tamils and other historic genocides including the Nazi and Rwandan examples[172]." By May, five days before the war was officially declared over by the government, the Tamil Guardian's front page headline read in massive red letters: "Our Holocaust: the struggle for Tamil Eelam is entering a new phase[173]." The article spoke of the "slow genocide underway in Sri Lanka since

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171 *Tamil Guardian,* No. 392, February 18, 2009.
172 T. J. Janani, "The Diaspora as genocide resisters," *Tamil Guardian*, No. 393, March 04, 2009.
173 *Tamil Guardian,* No. 398, May 13, 2009.

independence" and asserted that the "Tamil nation's experience of holocaust" is only the latest in the "sixty-year old genocide of Tamils."

However, as mentioned before, genocide was not used widely until 2002 and was not used to refer to Black July until same year. For instance, in July 1998, a Tamilnet's article titled, "Toronto Tamils mark Black July[174]" spoke of the "anti Tamil pogrom of 1983 in Sri Lanka." In 1999, an article titled, "Students mark Black July 83[175]" mentioned that "picketing was arranged to mark the July 83 communal riots…" On the other hand, in 2001, in one of the first uses of genocide, an article on Tamnilnet titled, "Controversial weapon meant for genocide alleges MP[176]" said "The Sri Lankan government is going to deploy chemical weapons against the Tamils in the island's north and east. The aim is to annihilate them totally." By 2006, genocide was liberally applied to past atrocities, particularly Black July. For instance, in April 2006, a Tamilnet article said that "like the July 1983 genocidal pogrom against the Tamils, the current violence against the Tamil speaking people has been unleashed in Trincomalee with the connivance of the SL Navy[177]." Apart from drawing obvious parallels with Black July, the article also reinterpreted history to mark Black July as genocide.

In the narrative of history, the LTTE is assisted by Sri Lankan Tamil historiography. For instance, conforming to a widely observed phenomenon among other groups engaged in national struggles, Sri Lankan Tamil historiography shares similarities with Palestinian historiography which according to Litvak is still in the "uncritical and unreflecting phase in which only those themes and elements that serve the national cause are accepted, established maxims and truths remain unchallenged, and evidence that runs counter to the national cause is ignored or

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174 *Tamilnet*, July 27, 1998, 23:59 GMT.
175 *Tamilnet*, July 23, 1999, 13:12 GMT.
176 *Tamilnet*, August 17, 2001, 14:26 GMT.
177 *Tamilnet, "*State Orchestrated violence raises spectre of 1983 pogrom," April 15, 2006, 01:26 GMT.

dismissed as false or hostile[178]." An overwhelming majority of the works on the Sri Lankan civil war and ethnic conflict passed on as historical studies are written by Sri Lankan Tamil professionals in the diaspora, rarely practicing academic standards on the use of historical evidence. Instead, the same information, perpetuated by the LTTE, is recycled in majority of the works[179].

Human Rights

Finally, the emphasis on genocide in the narrative of history points toward the more recent sub-narrative of human rights within the master narrative of Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism. For instance, Margo Kleinfeld, writing in 2005 about the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE says that recently "the rights-based territorial discourses have emerged to enhance the old historical justifications for territorial authority. New narratives based upon fulfilling or denying human rights have been put to work linking authority to territory based upon moral fitness and unfitness…[180]" In this way, the sub-narrative of human rights reinforces the other narratives of victimhood, territory and history. For Kleinfeld, the emergence of the human rights discourse is directly linked to the inability of both the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to stabilize their territory[181] as evidenced by the shifting borders between the two sides with the shifting tides in military operations during the 1990s and the early 2000s before the peace process began in 2002.

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[178] Litvak, *Palestinian Collective Memory,* 98.
[179] This phenomenon is also observed among Sinhalese historiography in which critical analysis of history has given way to blatant distortions and mythological narratives that remain largely unchallenged.
[180] Margo Kleinfeld, "Destabilizing the identity-territory nexus: Rights-based discourse in Sri Lanka's new political geography*," GeoJournal*, 2005 64: 287.
[181] Ibid., 287.

She further notes that "each belligerent capitalizes on human rights abuses" and uses international vocabulary of human rights by "magnifying the violence perpetuated by the other and making it attractive to international media" consumption[182]. The two foremost issues used by the two sides to demonize the other, according to Kleinfeld, are terrorism and children with each attempting to prove the "moral unfitness of the other[183]." The Tamil Guardian and Tamilnet again actively engaged in propagating the human rights narrative.

Corroborating Kleinfeld's thesis, human rights figures prominently on Tamilnet only after the peace process began in 2002. The phenomenon is best evident in Tamilnet and the Tamil Guardian articles in response to the banning of LTTE as a terrorist organization by the United Kingdom and the European Union. The United Kingdom banned the LTTE in 2001 and the European Union in 2006. The responses from LTTE propaganda were conspicuously different in their framing. In 2001 an article read, quoting the LTTE, "the British decision to include the LTTE on the list of proscribed terrorist organisations will impose severe restraints on the current peace initiatives undertaken by the Norwegian Government to resolve the civil war in Sri Lanka[184]." The article further stressed that "the British decision will encourage the repressive Sri Lankan regime to be more uncompromising" and that "the peace initiatives depend precariously on the leniency or the harshness in which this draconian legislation will be implemented by the law enforcing agencies in Britain."

On the other hand, in 2006, a long article blames the European Union on being complicit on its human rights record, "despite evidence of government human rights abuses in Sri Lanka[185]." The article further blames the European Union for "tacitly accepting the recent military

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[182] Ibid., 292.
[183] Ibid., 292.
[184] *Tamilnet, "*UK ban imposes restrains on peace process – LTTE," February 28, 2001, 16:23 GMT.
[185] *Tamil Guardian, "*How the EU helped make a war," No. 327, December 07, 2006.

atrocities" and "failing to use its substantial leverage to curb these abuses." Furthermore, according to the article, "the EU has revealed the hollowness of its principled defenses of human rights." "Despite the rhetoric, rights are not that big a deal" for the European Union. The change in language from 2001 to 2006 in denouncing the proscription of the LTTE is revealing of the newly adopted narrative of human rights.

Moreover, the LTTE also sought to deflect the perennial charges of child recruitment directed against the organization. The manner in which the LTTE deflected the charges, particularly the language used, is again revealing of the narrative of human rights. For instance, in 2005, following UNICEF accusations of child recruitment, the LTTE political wing leader, *Thamilselvan,* gave an interview to Tamilnet which was published by the Tamil Guardian under the title: "Most complains about child recruitment come from areas controlled by the military[186]." Thamilselvan firmly places the blame on the government's human rights record and emphasizes the LTTE's welfare efforts toward children. According to him "no one denies the fact that the deplorable conditions in which our children find themselves today were brought about by the genocidal policies perpetuated on the Tamils by successive Sinhala governments for more than fifty years and by the war it waged on our people for the last thirty years."

Finally, in examining the narrative of human rights, the synergistic nature of the master narrative becomes clear. Sri Lankan Tamil victimhood justifies the claims on territory which is justified based on reinterpretation of history which emphasizes violations of Sri Lankan Tamil human rights which in turn reinforces the culture of victimhood. This master narrative is widely imposed and accepted in Toronto, particularly among the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils that a cursory glance at the catch phrases and the boards held in the demonstrations in Toronto

[186] *Tamil Guardian*, No. 294, March 09, 2005.

revealed the extent of the prevalence of the master narrative. Most sighted catchphrases included "Stop Genocide," "Massacre of Children and Mothers," "Sri Lanka kills (insert number here) Tamils," "Tamils have a right to live," "Tamil Eelam is our homeland" and "We want Tamil Eelam."

Chapter 5

The Catalyst: The Final Phase of the Civil War and Cyber Nation

The Final Phase

The final phase of the civil war in Sri Lanka began with the fall of Kilinochchi, the LTTE administrative capital, to the government forces on January 2, 2009 and lasted until May 18th when Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE was announced dead[187]. The fall of Kilinochchi came as a shock to many Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamil, who for decades had firmly believed that the LTTE was militarily undefeatable. Moreover, as the administrative capital of LTTE's de facto state for over a decade, Kilinochchi had been thoroughly fortified and the LTTE had vowed to defend it at all costs[188]. As late as December, 2008, the LTTE was describing Kilinochchi as the graveyard of the overconfident government forces[189].

However, what followed soon after the fall of Kilinochchi, shocked the world even more. The LTTE military machine, much touted as invincible before, collapsed in the face of government advances. In less than two weeks, the entire Jaffna peninsula fell to government forces and the peninsula was declared "cleared" on January 14, 2009[190]. Soon after, on January 25, 2009, Mullaitivu, the LTTE military base and the final stronghold, fell to government forces[191]. By the end of March, the LTTE was reduced to controlling less than one square-kilometer of land in Sri Lanka. For the first time in more than two decades, the LTTE ceased to

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[187] Dean Nelson, "Sri Lanka: Tamil Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and his lieutenants eliminated," *The Telegraph,* May 18, 2009.
[188] Muralidhar Reddy, "Kilinochchi Captured in devastating blow to LTTE," *The Hindu,* January 03, 2009.
[189] *Tamil Guardian, "*Killinochchi: The Kiss of Death for Sri Lanka?" No. 388, December 24, 2008.
[190] Ed Johnson, "Sri Lankan Military Seizes last Rebel Base on Jaffna Peninsula," *Bloomberg,* January15, 2009.
[191] Somini Sengupta, "Sri Lanka Captures Rebel Stronghold," *The New York Times,* January 25, 2009.

be a military player in Sri Lanka. However, the LTTE would hold a last stand, which proved to be a disaster for the Sri Lankan Tamils.

After the fall of Kilinochchi and the rapid military advances, the government established a "No-Fire Zone," for the civilians to escape the military operations. However, in an ironic twist, by early April, the entire LTTE leadership had retreated to the no-fore zone with more than two hundred thousand Sri Lankan Tamil civilians. Soon the seventeen square-kilometer coastal patch of land was fortified by the LTTE and its Tamil civilians held by force as a human shield. For about a month until the defeat of the LTTE, the no-fire zone saw the bloodiest episode in the three decade long Sri Lankan civil war. The government was accused of using heavy weapons against the civilians, including artillery fire and indiscriminate shelling of the no-fire zone. The LTTE was accused of holding the civilians as a human shield by force and killing those who attempted escape from the LTTE[192]. By the end of the war, the estimates of civilian casualties in the no-fire zone ranged from six thousand to twenty thousand[193].

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During this period, the master narrative was imposed in full force on the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto. As mentioned in the Fourth Chapter, daily accounts of Sri Lankan Tamil victimization, from mass murders, shelling of hospitals, dead and dismembered children

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[192] *Human Rights Watch*, "War on the Displaced: Sri Lankan Army and LTTE abuses against civilians in the Vanni," February 19, 2009.
http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/02/19/sri-lanka-end-war-civilians
UN News Center, "UN relief chief concerned over physical condition of Sri Lankans trapped by clashes*,"*February 27, 2009.
Sri Lanka Ministry of Defense News Release, "World's largest hostage rescue mission becomes success; over 30,000 rescued,"*,* April 21, 2009.
BBC News Update, "Thousands Flee Sri Lanka Combat," April 20, 2009.
BBC News Update, "Sri Lanka Army Killed Civilians," April 21, 2009.
Times of India, South Asia Bulletin, "Final assault begins as LTTE vows to fight on," April 22, 2009.
BBC News Update, "UN Mourns Sri Lanka 'Bloodbath,'" May 11, 2009.

[193] *Al Jazeera, Central/South Asia News Bulletin,* "Sri Lanka fighting 'killed 20, 000,"' May 29, 2009.
BBC News Update, "Sri Lanka Rejects Deaths Report," May 29, 2009.

and raped girls to starving mothers, were widely circulated, often with horrifying details accompanied with gory pictures. Moreover, the events were described in politically highly charged language as evidence by the frequent use of phrases such as "Sinhala colonization" "invading Sinhalese armies" and "homeland security." The ubiquitous use of the word genocide, now referring back to events in decades past and the human rights violations of Sri Lankan Tamils, disregarded by international actors, exacerbated the sense of victimization and need for a separate exclusive homeland – Eelam.

The master narrative almost effortlessly took hold of the second generation for two main reasons. The first was their ignorance or unawareness, manifested as a result of the first generation's larger-than-life remembrance of Eelam and forgetting of differences. The Tamil Guardian and Tamilnet, for their part, reinforced the second generation unawareness. For instance, from September 2008 to February 2009, the pride of LTTE propaganda was the recently formed Air Force of the LTTE, also called Air Tigers and Tamileelam Air Force (TAF). The Tamil Guardian published several articles on Air Tigers with many pictures and Tamilnet devoted more than fifteen articles to the TAF during the period.

Two of such articles, first published in April 2007 and reprinted in November 2008 and January 2009, were titled "Air Tigers: Human Capital gathered against the odds" and "The LTTE's air power has been developed in the harshest international climate ever for armed movements[194]." The articles further said that the "post 9/11 era, with its attendant global antiterrorism drives, has arguably been the most difficult period in which the LTTE has had to develop any of its military capabilities. That it was able to acquire the sophisticated equipment, the supplies and, especially, the extensive know-how to run an air force, not matter how small, is

[194] *Tamil Guardian,* No. 346, April 11, 2007.

no mean feat." Further the articles stated that "the sheer scale of this institutional exercise is demonstrated by the extent of the external support that Sri Lanka relies in for its own air operations. Despite being 18,000 strong, the SLAF still relies heavily on foreign personnel…" The references to Sri Lankan Tamil industry and the lack thereof among the Sinhalese are too obvious to mention. Incidentally, the tiger air force was one of the favorite stories that arose during my interviews. Everyone I interviewed knew a great deal about the LTTE air force and most held it as an example of a great step forward in economic and technological prowess in Eelam. Tamil Guardian called it a "quantum leap in Tamil Tigers' technological base[195]."

Furthermore, the protests and LTTE propaganda also focused on Sri Lankan Tamil solidarity while disregarding differences. Caste and Indian Tamils were not mentioned even once and the Muslims were mentioned only as equal victims of Sinhalese oppression with no mention of their expulsion from the Northern Province or other atrocities committed by the LTTE on the Muslims. However, the disregarding of differences was a consequence of long term LTTE propaganda. For instance, mention of caste is noticeably absent in the two news sources. The Tamil Guardian never mentions caste and Tamilnet mentions caste in only three occasions in over 27,200 articles. In fact, caste was last mentioned in March 1998 under the title "Caste clashes on the increase in Jaffna[196]."

The Muslims in the East, on the other hand, merited frequent mention as the LTTE propaganda attempted to portray the Muslims as equal victims of Sinhalese aggression. A typical article would stress the common fate of Muslims and Sri Lankan Tamils and the oppression of

[195] Ibid.
[196] *Tamilnet*, March 17, 1998, 23:59 GMT.

both groups by the Sinhalese. More significantly, the expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province was never mentioned during the entire period except once[197].

In February 2005, the Tamil Guardian devoted almost half of its second February issue[198] to Sri Lankan Tamil-Muslim relations. One article title read: "LTTE and Muslim leaders seek communal amity. Tamil Eelam has to be won on the basis of Muslim Tamil unity." The article further quoted a Muslim who said that "first they [Sinhalese] divided us. Then they divided you. Sinhala leaders will always deny our rights." Significantly, the article never mentioned the expulsions, but only that "in the course of time, there were differences and contradictions" between the two communities. The editorial title of the same issue read: "United Front: Sri Lanka has equal disdain for Tamils and Muslims." This pattern of emphasizing Sri Lankan Tamil and Muslim unity was continued throughout the period covered in the research.

The LTTE's effort to erase differences was even more pronounced in the case of a split within the organization in March 2004. During the period of the peace process, the commander of the LTTE military operations in the Eastern Province broke away from the LTTE. The commander, popularly known as *Karuna*, proclaimed a list of Eastern Sri Lankan Tamil grievances against the "Northern" LTTE leadership and sought the protection of the Sri Lankan government[199]. Interestingly, one of the major grievances of the Karuna faction was that the Eastern cadres, while being the majority within the LTTE was not used to protect the East, but were deployed in defending the North. Furthermore, Eastern senior commanders were slighted in

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[197] Here the absence of Muslim expulsion from Sri Lankan Tamil narratives is similar to the absence of Black July in Sinhalese narratives.

[198] *Tamil Guardian,* No. 293,February 23, 2005.

[199] In fact, this split within the organization was the major factor in Sri Lanka's descent to violence and the sabotage of the ceasefire agreement. Soon after the split in 2004, the LTTE launched a massive and brutal attack on its breakaway Eastern leadership and refractory cadres. The government for its part, covertly supported the Karuna faction in the East. The resulting violence ended the Karuna faction as a military force in the east, but resulted in hundreds of casualties. The episode was the first instance, in which Northern Tamils and Eastern Tamils in Sri Lanka had actively fought each other.

favor of Northern commanders for leadership positions within the LTTE ranks. Karuna proclaimed that the Northern leadership relegated the Eastern Sri Lankan Tamils to a second class within the organization which referred back to the mutual distrust the Eastern and Northern Tamils shared[200].

However, in the Tamil media, the "Karuna split" was portrayed in a drastically different manner, which highlighted Tamil solidarity. In a remarkable twist, LTTE propaganda managed to depict the split as an exceptional contradiction which proved Tamil solidarity. Ignoring the widespread support the Karuna faction enjoyed among the Eastern Tamils at the beginning, the LTTE depicted the split as a result of a mentally unstable, capricious commander lusting for more power. The propaganda essentially represented the leadership of the Karuna faction as isolated from its people and spoke of Eastern Tamils seeking the LTTE's support against the tyrannical Karuna faction. The LTTE propaganda went from initial denial, to vehement attack against the moral fitness and the human rights record of Karuna. On March 03, 2004 a Tamilnet article read: "No Regional Split[201]." Only three days later a title read: "Karuna Removed from the LTTE[202]." A day later an article condemned Karuna as Pol Pot and stressed that in the Eastern Province, "thousands of our people carried photos of our national leader with the slogan 'Tamils are Tigers. Tigers are Tamils[203].'" A few days later Tamilnet said that "Karuna embezzled funds [and that he] feared disciplinary action before split.[204]" The message was

[200] D. B. S. Jeyaraj, "The Eastern Warlord," *Frontline,* Volume 21(07), March 27 - April 09, 2004.
[201] *Tamilnet*, March 03, 2004, 18:18 GMT.
[202] *Tamilnet*, March 06, 2004, 05:45 GMT.
[203] *Tamilnet* "Karikalan condemns Karuna as Pol Pot," March 07, 2004, 06:45 GMT.
[204] *Tamilnet*, March 13, 2004, 00.05 GMT.

finally driven home later in the articles titled: "Karuna's associate returns to LTTE[205]" and "no force can destroy Tamil unity[206]."

Majority of the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils I interviewed in Toronto seemed to have bought into the LTTE version of events which suggested the success of its propaganda. Out of the thirty-four I interviewed, only four Sri Lankan Tamils thought that the Eastern Tamils had legitimate grievances against the LTTE leadership[207]. Twenty-eight people believed the LTTE that Karuna was a power hungry leader isolated from his own Eastern Tamils. Remarkably, this was one of the few topics that did not elicit a single half hearted answer. Everyone seemed to have a strong opinion about dissent within the LTTE. The four who disagreed either suggested directly or implied that the LTTE should allow dissent of opinion within the organization. Most agreed with the LTTE that the split was the result of an elaborate conspiracy by the Sinhalese government, designed to weaken the unity of the Sri Lankan Tamil people.

In this way, the LTTE propaganda was in line with the remembrance and forgetting of the first generation and sought to further the second generation's unawareness or ignorance, which was simultaneously taken advantage of by the LTTE to impress the master narrative on them. The imposition of the master narrative was facilitated by the fact that the Sri Lankan Tamil nation, particularly among the diaspora, is a cyber nation more than a territorial nation.

Cyber Nation

According to Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "it can no longer be taken for granted that the people who identify with a given nation inhabit the same space, nor can be assumed that cultural

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[205] *Tamilnet,* April 14, 2004, 14:51 GMT.
[206] *Tamilnet*, April 20, 2004, 15:01 GMT.
[207] Out of the four who believed Eastern Tamils had legitimate grievances, one was from Jaffna, while the rest were from Colombo.

homogenization takes place at the level of the nation through mass media[208]." He continues that the internet can "be exceptionally efficient [in] reproducing identities across vast distances, utilizing dispersed populations in virtual communities because it can fully exploit the time-space compression characterizing our era." Eriksen further stresses that the Sri Lankan Tamil refugee dispora, along with the Kurdish diaspora, is one of the most active nations in the cyber space and that "as a result of the widespread activity on the web among scattered diasporas like the Kurdish and the Tamil refugees, many have developed a sense of belonging to a community, which would otherwise have been difficult to achieve[209]."

Shyam Tekwani, who has studied the Sri Lankan civil war since 1983, agrees with Eriksen and notes that "Eelam does not exist on any map. It is not recognized by any international body or any other nation, but for the two million Sri Lankan Tamils scattered across the globe, it is a nation that already exists in cyber space[210]." He continues: "The Sri Lankan Tamil movement is among the pioneers in using the Internet to communicate with an international audience. The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora is one of the most networked groups in the world, maintaining dozens of websites engaged in keeping alive the Tamil struggle for a separate state called Eelam…[211]" And that "unlike many other Diaspora sites which use the Internet for interactions of a more social and cultural nature, such as those of various Indian Diaspora and other immigrant groups even

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[208] "Nations in Cyberspace," Short version of the 2006 Ernest Gellner lecture, delivered at the ASEN conference, London School of Economics, 27 March 2006 by Thomas Hylland Eriksen of University of Oslo and Free University of Amsterdam.
http://www.media-anthropology.net/eriksen_nationscyberspace.pdf

[209] Ibid.

[210] Tekwani, Shyam. "Constructing a Nation Online:Tamil Nationalism and the Internet" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New Orleans Sheraton, New Orleans, *LA*, May 27, 2004.
http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p113081_index.html

[211] Ibid., 2.

the sites maintained by the Tamil Diaspora ostensibly for cultural purposes are charged with the politics of Eelam[212]."

The advantages of the internet are obvious. It greatly enhances the propaganda of nationalism because it is cheap, easy to use, difficult to censor and is unrestricted by physical boundaries. Moreover, as Tekwani notes:

> The Internet enables separatists to frame their actions and their ideologies in the manner of their choice without the intervention of government or media censors and gatekeepers. This last is perhaps the single most important advantage of the Internet over other media technologies, new and old. Through their web sites separatist groups can now frame their ideologies and their actions to suit their needs and the political and social environment they function in. The Internet enables such movements to focus their message on their cause rather than the actions reported in the mass media. The Internet allows them to tout the greatness of their cause in a web site hundreds of thousands of miles removed from the acts of violence the group is engaged in on the ground. The Internet allows these groups to frame their political discourse in a manner that portrays them as statesmen rather than terrorists. Most importantly for ethno separatist movements such as the Sri Lankan Tamils, it enables the creation of a virtual homeland which serves to keep alive the cause and engender a sense of belonging and community that years of violence and waves of migration may have otherwise eroded[213].

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No discussion on nationalism is complete today without considering the approach of Benedict Anderson. Anderson, a leading academic in the modernist school, emphasizes the political and social processes tied to modernity, secularism and capitalism, all of which contributed to the dissemination of the written word through "print capitalism," facilitating the

[212] Ibid., 8.
[213] Ibid., 9.

development of collective national mobilization[214]. Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism, especially diasporic long distance nationalism, can be better understood by extrapolating Anderson's thesis to the observations made by Eriksen and Tekwani. Cyber space, has been the main tool that ushered in Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic mobilization, especially that of the second generation; a sort of "digital capitalism," in which the internet, similar to the newspaper and the novel in Anderson's print capitalism, created a new sense of space and time, resulting in a greater sense of community among the diaspora.

However, what is unique about the second generation Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is that there is no majority common language. Many in the second generation can only understand spoken Tamil and cannot read or write in Tamil. Instead, thousands speak, read and write in English, French, German, Dutch, Danish, and Italian etc. Nevertheless, the internet, with sites such as Tamilnet with English, French, German and Tamil translations, has allowed them to receive the same message, albeit in different languages; a sort of speaking the same language without speaking the same language.

It is this fact, that they constitute a cyber nation, along with their unawareness, that allowed the LTTE to impose its master narrative, based on the four sub-narratives of victimhood, territory, history and human rights, which in turn provided a strong impetus to mobilize against what the second generation Sri Lankan Tamils saw as the continued victimization of a united Tamil people, in a historically legitimate Tamil nation, by invading Sinhalese armies, who continued to violate the Tamils' human rights and perpetuated decades long genocide.

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[214] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

Conclusion

The inspiration for the project occurred to me during my junior year abroad in London from September 2008 to June 2009, which coincided with a period of momentous developments in the Sri Lankan civil war and within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. In September 2008, the LTTE was still very much at large albeit besieged and the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in London yet to be mobilized. By June, when I left London, I had seen tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils protest in the streets causing massive traffic jams in Central London, a seventy-four day continuous protest of several hundred Sri Lankan Tamils at the Westminster, a Heroes Day rally in East London for the LTTE "martyrs," seen black flag days in Sri Lankan Tamil dominated Wembley and had been urged to pretend to be an Indian while visiting Wembley.

The change within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, particularly the second generation, was as sweeping as it was unexpected. For two decades, the diaspora had been passive actors in the Sri Lankan civil war, funding the LTTE military machine and carrying out its propaganda in the West, while contributing to Sri Lankan Tamil humanitarian agencies. However, within a span of few months, in early 2009, the diaspora had mobilized full force across the world, in Toronto, London, Paris, Oslo, Geneva, Dusseldorf and Melbourne etc. Thousands took to the streets, thousands wrote to their governments to intervene against the Sri Lankan government and thousands more sought to educate their Western peers about the plight of the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto, the largest of the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic communities, particularly stood out because of its numbers.

However, as the Western governments failed to force the Sri Lankan government quit its military offensive and failed to make the LTTE lay its arms down, the civil war continued until the bitter end with tens of thousands of casualties. In Sri Lanka, the diaspora's protests fell on

deaf ears, partly because of strict censorship by the government and partly because the diaspora was easily dismissed as non stakeholders of the civil war. The second generation, which had for the first time come to the fore, was particularly dismissed as brainwashed, misinformed and misguided.

A systematic analysis of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils' activism proved difficult given the lack of an agreed upon analytical framework in history and anthropology. Diaspora activism, be it Sri Lankan Tamil, Cuban, Palestinian or Sikh, is largely looked upon as a collective phenomenon without distinctions across generations. The concepts of memory and forgetting too have been largely applied to the first generations who immigrated while their manifestations in subsequent generations remain mostly understudied. Even among global diasporas, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is understudied partly as a result of the confusing space they occupy between nationality and ethnicity. As mentioned in the introduction, they share Tamil ethnicity with South Indian nationals while sharing Sri Lankan nationality with ethnic Sinhalese among others.

This thesis used the concepts of memory and forgetting, widely used to study other diasporas, with a diasporic Sri Lankan Tamil perceptive. Large houses and an ethic of hard work and industry were used to show how the remembrance among the first generation, driven by their attachment to land, is translated in the second generation memory into a larger-than-life image of Eelam. Similarly, forgetting among the first generation, driven again by the trauma of displacement from land as well as egalitarian pressures in Canada, is also translated in the second generation into a sense of universal Sri Lankan Tamil brotherhood. The examples of caste and regional identities were used as subjects to analyze the above phenomenon. The resulting

ignorance or unawareness in the second generation, manifested in disjointed narratives and gaps in understanding, made them particularly receptive to the master narrative of the LTTE.

The master narrative of the LTTE, consisting of four mutually reinforcing sub-narratives of victimhood, territory, history and human rights set the parameters for Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist discourse. Almost all discussions and information can be fit into one or more of these sub-narratives. The intensive use of the internet in LTTE's propaganda in early 2009, with the internet's characteristic property of compressing time and space, made the events back in Sri Lanka seem particularly acute to those in Toronto, which providing the motivation for tens of thousands of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils to take to the streets.

Today the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora continues to play a pivotal role in the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. According to Tamilnet, "it is a well known fact that one of the fundamental strengths of Eezham Tamils is the diaspora, without the involvement of which nothing decisive can take place in Sri Lanka[215]." Their wealth and human capital will be crucial to the rebuilding of large parts of the island devastated by more than two decades of brutal civil war. Moreover, the coming of age of second generation nationalist activism will have profound effects on the still precarious situation in Sri Lanka. Their relationship with Sri Lanka and the methods they use to espouse Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism (use of cyber space for example) will be different from those of their parents. Accordingly, Sri Lanka will have to change its strategy in its relations with the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. No matter the course Sri Lanka eventually chooses, be it sincere accommodation or outright hostility, it will no longer be able to dismiss the collective mobilization of the second generation Sri Lankan diaspora.

[215] *Tamilnet,* "It is now the Tamil Diaspora," September 06, 2008, 07:02 GMT.

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