

POST-WAR IDENTITY RE-CONSTRUCTION IN KILINOCHCHI, SRI LANKA:

**NEGOTIATION OF GENDERED IDENTITY BETWEEN THE LOCAL AND
DIASPORA COMMUNITY**

by

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Abstract

Sri Lanka is a tiny island off the coast of India with a population of approximately 19 million and has in civil conflict for over 20 years. In 2002 the Sri Lankan government, aided in large part by the Norwegian Government declared a cease fire and entered peace negotiations with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a Tamil separatist group. Since the 2002 peace treaty, many strides have been made to re-develop the areas devastated by the war. Key players in these re-development strategies are the Tamil expatriate community, who is volunteering their time and money in Kilinochchi. However, some of the expatriate volunteers are quite young and left the country before adolescence and so this thesis focuses on their experiences, especially those of the female expatriate volunteer. The goal of this thesis is to look at the conceptions of identity as negotiated and understood by different groups in Sri Lanka, specifically Kilinochchi. What brought the volunteers to Sri Lanka and motivated their desire to aid in the rehabilitation of Sri Lanka? And how did they feel they could contribute to the re-development of Sri Lanka? The research was conducted under the umbrella of a Canadian NGO, The Student Volunteer Program (TSVP), which sends Canadian volunteers yearly to Sri Lanka to work with local community members on development initiatives.

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My Home, the Divine Pendant

**Skirted by ocean, cogent and clear
Proudly stands Sri Lanka dear,
In verdant green under sunny shimmer
Hills, valleys, fields in elegant flair.**

**My land is not an Indian tear,
Nor a hanging luscious pear;
Neither 'twas a beastly lair
In fables told eons unclear.**

**Abode of ancestors far and near,
Many a faith they did savour,
Diverse richness their lot to revere
But unity, in all they did ensure.**

**Evil times came upon to bare
My land to terrible times of fear
Bigoted politics ripped us in tear
Nature too had its tragic share.**

**One day, my folks will surely hear
The voice of reason and justice fair
My prayers today for my God's ear:
"Hear me Lord, for my land so dear."**

**My land is not an Indian tear
Nor a hanging luscious pear.
But a divine pendant that adorns a wear
On the Himalayan range heavens afar.**

(Karunairajan 2003)

Chapter One: Introduction

The land of my ancestors, the place of my birth, and a nation of conquered people whose colonial legacy has been of a country divided: is this an adequate definition of Sri Lanka? Does this describe the hardships that faced the people of Sri Lanka? Could I truly understand the trials that the people had faced when I was nothing but a “native stranger”?¹ Sri Lanka is a tiny island off the coast of India with a population of approximately 19 million [Government of Sri Lanka 2003]. The Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has been engaged in a 20-year conflict with a Tamil separatist group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE or Tigers). In February 2002, the LTTE and the GoSL began negotiating a peace treaty to end the conflict, returning stability to the land. The peace attempt was instigated by the Norwegian government, which negotiated a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) between the two parties. The MOU was a ceasefire agreement, which allowed the north and east (pre-dominantly Tiger--controlled areas) to become politically stable and thus become accessible for social and economic development.

The impetus for my MA research began when I decided to travel back to the land of my ethnic heritage to volunteer as an English language teacher. I was part of a team run by a Canadian NGO, The Student Volunteer Program (TSVP), which sends Canadian volunteers yearly to Sri Lanka to work with local community members on development initiatives. I felt no nervousness about returning “home”; how could I be nervous? This

¹Toni-Mokjaeti Humber (2001) chronicled the experiences of Afro-Americans “returning” to visit Africa. The idea of a “native stranger” refers to the idea that returning expatriates are connected to the identity of their homeland but are not ‘native’ as they have grown up or lived, for an extended period, outside of the country and its culture. Thus, they do not possess the complete knowledge that will allow them to integrate fully with the homeland culture and society.

was my land. However, it was not my land; in fact, the way that I identified myself would change drastically with my arrival to Sri Lanka and my interaction with the other volunteers.

“This is so my brother will see what has happened here,” my fellow volunteer Sivakami² said, as she pointed to the video camera she was using to tape the scenes of devastation that remained as a testament to less peaceful times. During the ride to our volunteer location of Kilinochchi town, she mentioned that her discovery of her “Tamil identity” had been a recent phenomenon. She re-connected to her ethnic identity when she had accompanied her parents on vacation the previous year and helped with the re-development³ of Sri Lanka. Here we were, two virtual strangers bound by the desire to ‘help’ people that we had neither met nor seen, just imagined. But why *were* we here? Two “Canadian-ized” Tamil females, about to start different volunteer projects⁴ with the Tamil community in the northern regions of war-torn Sri Lanka. There were many places that could use volunteers and yet we had both felt that the only place we were meant to be was Tamil Eelam⁵ in Sri Lanka, a land riddled with the effects of a twenty year civil war between the LTTE and the GoSL.

² For the purposes of anonymity, all names have been changed and are pseudonyms given to protect the identity of the respondents. Whenever I draw from the comments made by the interviewees, I will refer to them by first name in parentheses.

³ Re-development is the official term used to describe/discuss post-conflict development initiatives.

⁴ The projects that each volunteer undertook will be explored further on in the thesis when discussing the role and position of the volunteers within the community.

⁵ Tamil Eelam is the unofficial name of the northern and eastern part of Sri Lanka, which is considered Tamil territory and the area that constitutes the Tamil nation, that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are fighting the Government of Sri Lanka for autonomous control over.

Research Question and Rationale

This study began as a way to understand how Tamil female expatriates, or daughters of Sri Lankan Tamil expatriates⁶, conceived of ethnic identity in Vanni, a region in the north of Sri Lanka that became the home base for the LTTE during their conflict with the GoSL. Thus, the Vanni region has been largely isolated from the larger Sri Lankan society and the residents lived under the protection of the LTTE. However, after the MOU, the Vanni region opened up to many new development initiatives by bilateral and multilateral donors, private companies and the awaiting Tamil diaspora⁷. Over 330 million USD has been promised in aid by bilateral and multilateral agencies; Canada has pledged over 5 million to the peace-related aid effort (GoSL 2002: 3-4). The international Tamil community, in the form of the Tamil diaspora, were also interested in aiding in the post-conflict development of Sri Lanka (ITTPO 2005). Aid was given both in money and through the deployment of volunteers, some of whom were expatriates.

The aim of this study is to generate an understanding of the ways in which female gender identity is a fluid, negotiated concept, which relies on the way that groups within society, i.e. the people of Vanni and the expatriate (TSVP) volunteers, conceive of femininity and Tamil culture. Each volunteer had come with different expectations and goals in mind; but in many ways were bound by the commonality of our Tamil identity. Thus the questions become focused on the interactions between the volunteers and the

⁶ For the purpose of this paper, the term expatriate will refer to people of Sri Lankan Tamil origin, who have migrated out of the country.

⁷ Tamil diaspora refers to the mass migration of Sri Lankan Tamils from Sri Lanka from the 1980s. The reasons for the movement and the effects of the diaspora will be explored in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis.

'local'⁸ community. What brought the volunteers to Sri Lanka and motivated their desire to aid in the rehabilitation of Sri Lanka? What was the local population expecting of the volunteers, and were these expectations contingent on gender? The central question thus become: were the experiences of the female volunteers shaped by their identity as (Tamil) women? The 2004 volunteers were predominately female with the sole male volunteer arriving at the end of my internship, for an overlap of two days.

Upon my arrival at the research site of Kilinochchi, the focus of the research shifted as I noticed the way that Tamil identity in Kilinochchi was different from Tamil identity elsewhere within Sri Lanka. This difference is largely due to the strict LTTE control over the goods, information and people coming into Vanni. Tamil culture and society within the region has been largely isolated from the influences of media, transnational businesses, etc; that have shaped and reformed other areas of Sri Lankan society. My focus area, then, narrowed to the fluid negotiation of female Tamil identity within the constraints of Tamil culture in Kilinochchi. (1) How did the locals perceive the volunteers, and in what ways did the locals themselves adjust their perceptions due to the fact that the volunteers were "Tamil women from the West"? (2) Were the volunteers perceived as "Tamil" or "Western"? (3) Did the way that the female volunteers were perceived impact on their ability to 'get things done'? (4) Did the volunteers themselves 'modify' their behaviour to meet perceived local expectations? Thus, it is my purpose to discuss the way that the female volunteers "experienced" their time in Sri Lanka and how they were able to deal with issues that arose due to their identity as (Tamil) females.

⁸ I problematize the word local as the residents of Kilinochchi, in the Vanni region were not local/native to that area but had been internally displaced as a result of the conflict and had followed the LTTE into the region to settle within the perceived security of the LTTE banner.

Researcher Position

Before discussing my findings, I feel that it is important to establish my relationship to the research. This research project does not claim to be an objective analysis of a TSVP development project but a subjective re-counting of my experiences and those of the volunteers who were a part of the 2004 Internship in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka. This research was the exploration of the experiences of a certain group of volunteers at a specific time and place, framed by *our* understanding of Tamil history in Sri Lanka.

My interest in this research topic was due to my own self-identification as a Tamil person, which both aided and hindered my research. My Tamil heritage has most recently become an important facet of my identity; being a Tamil Canadian has influenced my research, the objectives of this research and my ability to engage in the research. Though I can fluently speak Tamil, it is a version of Tamil that has been marked by my life in Canada. Thus, I was not knowledgeable on the use of idioms and colloquial sayings in Kilinochchi. Secondly, growing up as a Tamil Canadian, I was 'exposed' to stories of the Sri Lankan conflict, which cast the Tamils in a favorable light. This 'affinity' towards the Tamil story became more pronounced as I worked in Kilinochchi, a town that is governed by LTTE. My field work benefited from my Tamil identity, as I was able to interact more freely with the local Kilinochchi community. However, the exchange of dialogue was conducted under the assumption that both parties share the same norms, values and cultural identity as one another. The dilemma I was faced with was that of a Tamil female working in an LTTE context and therefore much of my subjectivity became intertwined with the project, the people and the politics.

As previously stated, I was given the opportunity of not only accompanying a group of volunteers as they worked in Sri Lanka, but to be a fellow volunteer. Thus, I was a researcher as well as a volunteer English Language teacher. During our time in Sri Lanka, the volunteers became each others' confidants, sharing similar experiences and having gone through parallel stresses - of leaving our home and family, coming to Sri Lanka (the place of our ancestors), trying to connect with family still in Sri Lanka, etc. We had all come with a Toronto based NGO, and with the exception of one female volunteer, were all from Toronto, living within a twenty kilometre radius of each other. Therefore my subject position is closely interwoven with my 'alliances' to these groups and my 'research subjects'-the people of Kilinochchi.

Methods

I was in Sri Lanka for seven weeks, arriving in Sri Lanka's capital, Colombo, at the beginning of June 2004 and leaving for Kilinochchi a week later. The main methodology that I employed in Kilinochchi was participant observation. The research site is a relatively small geographical area and has a relatively small population size of approximately 127,263 people compared to large Sri Lankan cities such as Colombo (2,234,289 people) and/or Jaffna (490,621) (GoSL: 2006). Kilinochchi town is in an LTTE-controlled area and is considered part of the Tamil homeland, allowing me to use my Tamil language skills and identity. My cultural knowledge of Tamil customs and rituals, gained from growing up in a Tamil household, enabled me to understand some of the informal cultural rules that govern behaviour in Kilinochchi.⁹ During the time of my

⁹ These "informal behaviour codes" will be explored further on in the thesis.

fieldwork, I lived in Kilinochchi town on the campus of the school where I taught English, herein referred to as the Institute or TI (Technical Institute). This enabled me to closely observe the interactions of the staff, students, and volunteers. The Institute is a technical school set up by an American Tamil NGO, desiring to create jobs and technical development in the northern regions. The Institute catered to students from across Vanni and elsewhere in Sri Lanka, providing residences on campus. The campus consisted of the formal settings of the classrooms, labs, library, administrative offices as well as informal locations such as the canteen, the 'study huts,' dormitories and so on.

I was specifically interested in looking at the way that the locals interacted with the volunteers as the latter group engaged in everyday activities, such as going to the temple and exploring the town. At the same time, I am fully aware that my presence at the research site and in the community influenced the social climate and the interactions within and between the locals and volunteers. This meant that I had to be aware of how I was situated within the Kilinochchi community, both on campus and off, to better understand the implications of my observations.

Another research method that I utilized was semi-structured interviews with people at the Institute and in the community. I conducted interviews in a conversational style, so that the participants were the ones who were controlling the discussion. The people that I was able to interview or discuss ideas with were: 1) "local" teachers; 2) Canadian volunteer teachers; 3) students; 4) local community members; and 5) administration staff. In terms of the interviews, the most notable point of interest was the variation between the 'spoken reality' of the interview and the actual behaviours of the

people interacting with the volunteers and, especially those of the opposite gender, i.e. a male student interacting with a female volunteer.

I have also examined the literature that pertains to my research question. I focused my research on topics of ethnicity, feminism, transnationalism and diaspora. I also analyzed research about Sri Lanka, specifically about the Tamil people and culture and gender. There are not many academic articles that deal with Sri Lankan Tamils and gender; thus I also drew from other sources and case studies. To supplement these I also relied on electronic sources, such as the Internet. Development in Kilinochchi has only been occurring since 2002 and the most up-to-date information is often found on the internet.

Problems and Issues

One of the major problems that arose during my research was the translation of my thesis abstract and ethics package into the Tamil language. Words carry different connotations in English and Tamil and translations of words such as “culture”, “anthropology” and “gender” (as opposed to “sex”) is tricky. It was important to choose the ‘best’ Tamil words to denote these, and other, terms. As it was impossible to fully overcome issues of “trust” and information gathering due to the short period of time I spent in Sri Lanka, the focus of my thesis shifted from the experiences of the locals to that of the volunteers. “Trust” issues arose as the people in the Vanni are still living under LTTE rule and thus are cautious of making comments that could be construed in a negative manner. The LTTE profess to be the “sole representative” voice of the Tamil

people¹⁰ and closely monitor the opinions of the Tamil people living under their control. Though not afraid, participants were cautious of making comments that can be seen as openly criticizing the LTTE and their policies and practices. The contextual background of the 'locals' was so diverse that to attempt to re-tell their encounters with the 'West' would be a superficial exercise, at best.

Chapter Synopsis

Chapter Two will be an analysis of the concepts that I have employed to understand my research and findings. The literature that I review concentrates on transnationalism, diaspora, cultural identity and ethnicity and thus establishes the framework used for the analysis of Tamil diaspora and the research undertaken in Sri Lanka.

Chapter Three is a brief review of the history and culture of the Tamils of Sri Lanka and is crucial to understanding the societal background and the history of the ethnic conflict, which framed the interactions between the locals and the volunteers.

Chapter Four is an exploration of the Tamil diaspora and the way that gender is understood within the diasporic context. This chapter discusses how ideas regarding gender in the diasporic communities are similar to and/or different from ideas about gender in Sri Lanka.

Chapter Five discusses the findings of my fieldwork in Kilinochchi. In this chapter, I analyze gender and the experiences of the volunteers. What was the nature of

¹⁰ This claim is publicly made by the LTTE, however there are many groups and individuals who dispute the LTTE's claim. There are many representations of Tamil identity and versions of Tamil nationalism. I recognize that there cannot be one single definition of 'Tamil-ness' and Tamil Nationalism.

the interactions between the volunteers and the locals and how much of it was influenced by gender? The emphasis of this thesis is to understand the experiences of the female expatriate volunteers within the re-development of Sri Lanka.

Chapter Six concludes with some final thoughts on the role of the female Tamil volunteer in Sri Lanka.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

A characterization of the modern world is that it is made up of many interacting systems (Appadurai 2003:26) - structural, cultural and social. To understand the interactions between Canadian Tamil volunteers working in Sri Lanka and members of the local community, we must examine the identities and the 'locations'¹¹ of both the volunteers and the 'locals'. In this chapter I discuss three concepts which help to give some insight into understanding the interactions between the locals and expatriates, especially in the context of gender relations: diaspora, identity (especially ethnic and civic identity) and transnationalism.

Diaspora: an Overview

Diaspora has become a much-used term in contemporary academic literature. Brubaker (2005:1) discusses the proliferation of the term diaspora in academia, noting that in 2001 over one hundred and thirty theses in the U.S. included the term 'diaspora' in their titles. The term 'diaspora' has become an all-encompassing 'catch-word.' While there are some commonalities between 'diasporas' and all migrants/immigrants, there are distinctions between these terms: diaspora is generally reserved for migrants/immigrants who retain a strong sense of their identity with, and their hopes remain connected with, their home community and culture.

Diaspora, derived from the Greek term *diaspeirein*, literally meaning 'to sow over' (Shuval 2000: 41). The term was originally used when referring to the Jewish

¹¹ Volunteers always exist in dual locations as their ethnic identity is framed within a Canadian and Sri Lankan context.

dispersion from Jerusalem (Brasiel and Mannur 2003:1, Brubaker 2005: 2). The extrapolation of the term diaspora to the experiences of other communities was initiated by George Shepperson's 1966 work on the African diaspora (Brubaker 2005: 2), who employed the framework of the Jewish Diaspora to the forced relocation of Africans, through slavery, to the Americas. The best description for the Tamil diaspora, however, comes from Tambiah (2000:169) who defines diasporas as people dispersed from the centre into at least two other places and carry with them a memory or myth of their homeland. These people feel that they are not fully accepted by the host country and carry with them the idea of a connection to their homeland.

Diasporic communities often retain a very idealistic, idealized, subjective, and historicized sense of what their 'homeland' was and is like, often bearing faint resemblance to other people's 'more objective' notions of what the nature of that home community is. In the context of the Tamil diasporic community¹², home is publicly discussed in a pro-LTTE way and so the conception of home is a very politicized phenomenon. The symbolic relationship of the "homeland" carries with it certain prescriptions of knowledge, which are reinforced through shared cultural identities and lateral networks. However, as with any community existing within a multicultural state, the Tamil community also deals with concepts of 'multiple identities' where they identify with the minority culture, Tamil, as well as the larger nation-state, Canada (McRoberts 2001:684).

¹² For the purpose of this paper I generalize the Tamil diaspora experience to that of the political Diaspora identity of the Jaffna Tamil. There are many other Tamil identities within the Diaspora but subscription to the Jaffna identity, publicly, at least implies an acceptance of certain viewpoints, which permit the individual to engage in discussions of nationalism and participate in nationalistic activities.

More recently some nation-states are seeking to benefit from their diasporic populations living elsewhere (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 347), recognizing their monetary and political clout and are attempting to capitalize on that phenomenon. An example comes from the Tamil diaspora, some of whom provide both monetary and political support for the LTTE in Sri Lanka (Tambiah 2000:168). The reciprocal ties between the Tamil diasporic communities and Tamils in Sri Lanka ensure that each group is embroiled in the politics and practices of the other, making the diasporic experiences a salient process that includes international networks and the movement of capital as well as culture (Brubaker 2005: 8).

For the purpose of this thesis diaspora and diasporic communities are defined by the following characteristics (Brabic 1998, Braziel and Mannur 2003 Brubaker 2005, Segott 2001, Shuval 2000, Smith 1990 and Tambiah 2000).

1. *Dispersion* - generally refers to diffusion of people from the home country to other host countries. Those who are dispersed are immersed in the politics of their homeland and yet bound within the politics of the host country; they are bound by their desire to return home and/or the idea that they would not have left of their own violation.
2. *Conceptualizing a Homeland* - the homeland can be a real (geographic) space or an imagined location, but is the site from where the diaspora's ancestral legitimacy is drawn. Thus, homeland politics provides the diaspora a point of reference to draw upon to emphasize their identity. They strive to maintain connections to the homeland and attempt to influence the politics of the home nation state.
3. *Distinctive Identity* - Diasporas maintain a national, cultural, and/or ethnic identity that differentiates them from the host nation, preserved through myths and histories. The shared identity, history and culture are utilized as a marker of the diaspora's boundaries from the host society. These identities are preserved and maintained, accessible only to those who share similar experiences and conceptions of home, which are also influenced by the way that the community is perceived by the host society.

4. *Longevity* - there is a very fine line between migration and diaspora; however, the term longevity refers to the continued connection of the diaspora to the 'imagined' homeland. The first generation of immigrants may feel a connection to the homeland based on their nostalgia for their 'younger days' or known life. To claim that a population is a diaspora there should be a trans-generational connection to the cultural identity of the diaspora group. I do not make the claim that the identity of the group remains unchanging but that the identity and the links to the homeland are transmitted and maintained by subsequent generations.

The diasporic communities' interaction with the homeland is shaped by the particular community's relationship to both the host country and the homeland. The homeland is used as a marker to frame the identity of the diasporic community and as a focus for solidarity within that community (Shuval 2000: 44). The foremost characteristic of the modern diaspora is the dialogues that occur on an international scale; diasporic communities are located in many different and scattered nation-states and are not confined to the dialectics of home and one host nation. Rather, there is communication and interaction between the homeland and the diasporic communities located in many different host nations (Tambiah 2000:163). However, as with any community existing within a multicultural state, the Tamil community also deals with concepts of 'multiple identities' where they identify with the minority culture, Tamil, as well as the larger nation-state, Canada (McRoberts 2001:684). The homeland need not be a geographical spatial location. What is consistent, however, is the notion of the homeland, and the unity this notion instils in the members of that community.

The identification to the homeland crosses geographical boundaries and enables people from different host nations to connect based on their linkages to the homeland. A group's association with the homeland depends on its historical claim to the land.

The right to the homeland is articulated vis-à-vis myths of the homeland that connect territorial and ancestral claims and linguistic ties (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 353).

In the Tamil diaspora, myths are used to create the idea of a public pan-Tamil identity, ignoring regional and caste differences. Linguistic ties offer the diaspora group another stratum of connection, through which they can identify their unique status. Thus, the homeland provides an imagined spatial location, where discussions of culture, ethnicity and identity can occur in the native tongue.

Discussions of nationalism and the safeguarding of the homeland must consider language as a key facilitator for interchanges of homeland identity and assertions (Segrott 2001: 282). Linguistic nationalism as a component of identity for diasporic peoples can be a large unifying factor in the creation of the diasporic community. Other factors in the creation of homeland politics are the policies of the host country (Shuval 2000: 45). The manner in which the host nation talks about and perceives the diasporic community will impact the community's ideas about their identity and about their connection to their homeland. For example, Canada's multicultural policies encourage the retention of ethnic/cultural identity (McRoberts 2001:684), which allows ethnic groups in Canada to retain, if not refine, their unique ethnic identity and involvement with their homeland.

At the same time, however, the members of the diasporic community are also being socialised in the host nation (Jones and Smith 2001: 39; Tambiah 2000: 163); this leads to a duality of identity, ethnic and civil. Though this may seem contradictory, the manner in which the host nation responds to that duality shapes the individual's ability to utilize their diasporic identity. The host nation becomes constructed as a finite bounded entity (Smith 1990: 177), whereas the homeland is a global culture, whose spatial boundaries are fluid. Thus, the host nation can be seen as a location of legal obligation

and citizenship, while the homeland becomes the place of moral and familial obligation, which transcends geographical boundaries.

National/civic identity versus ethnic/cultural identity

Discussions of diaspora and homeland are centred on discourses of identity creation and maintenance. Brah (1996 cited in Segrott 2001: 284) conceives identity not as being a singular identity, but rather ‘a multifaceted and context-specific construct.’ Identity discourses have moved away from the earlier idealization of a fixed construct of identity that was unchanging and prescribed from birth. In recent literature, identity has been conceptualized as a process.

The importance of identity, within a diasporic context, lies in the utilization of it as a discursive tool (Segrott 2001:291). Identity constructions in diaspora cultures have been seen as a “natural” process, whereby the group draws on old historical myths and stories to discover their ethnic identity and culture (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 344). In this way, the imagined homeland and perceived history legitimize the experiences of oppression (Shuval 2000: 48) faced by some diaspora groups, reaffirming their identity. The speed by which members of a diaspora can have their claims heard and enacted on the global (transnational) level, depends on the manner in which the host nation recognizes the diaspora group and its goals. The interactions with the nation-state’s social and cultural structures by members of a diaspora community is by no means a standardized process but shaped by the host nation’s social environment, which is framed by historically specific linkages of representation and meaning (Hall 2003: 239).

Accordingly, identity discourses is a process of expressing the interchange, “between fluidity and fixity” (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 344).

The flexible notion of identity can be confounded by a tension between two political forms of identity: civic or ethnic/cultural. The civic categorization of identity draws on a separation of church and state. Civic identity is the idea that identity can be granted by the state to a person and not only based on the location of a person’s birth (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 343). However, the construction of diasporic identity, with a nationalistic slant, gives prominence to the linguistic and cultural ties that bind the members of the diaspora. Claims of ethnonationalist diaspora identities are also ones by which people construct the ‘imagined homeland’ - that is the homeland is grounded with geographical boundaries (Segrott 2001: 284). A diaspora population is ‘exiled’ or scattered from their homeland, and yet the national identity that they are bounded by is the identity of their native place. The host nation is seen as a location from where the diaspora can construct new identities to gain political clout and thus have the ability to influence politics in both “homes” (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 344).

However, civic identities are not necessarily separate from ethnocultural identity as is seen in nationalist constructions of ideal types of citizenship and belonging (Jones and Smith 2001: 46), providing a hierarchy of rights. The ideal construction of the ‘perfect citizen’ had great ramifications for Sri Lanka and its move towards nationalistic unity, which will be explored in greater detail in the history section of the thesis.

Conversely, cultural or ethnic identity is generally equated with diasporic discussions of identity. Stuart Hall (2003:23-224) defines cultural identity as “shared oneness, a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race or ethnicity”,

that is fixed and yet characterized by instability. In addition, Barbic (1998: 256) contributes the idea of tradition and heritage as a consideration of cultural identity. Hall reiterates the idea that identity is a fluid concept. The community uses different cultural components to signify symbolic articulations of identity, which are then employed to unite the members and maintain the perceived hegemony of the diaspora group (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002:342). The second component of cultural identity that has to be addressed is found in the questions raised by Smith (1990: 178) as to the nature of culture and its spatial and historical connections. Smith (1990: 180) believes “that collective identity, like imagery and culture, is always historically specific because it is based on shared memories and a sense of continuity between generations.” Shared memory is understood as the repetition of a singular event that connects the members of the community, this memory becomes a fact in the minds of the diaspora.

These memories are re-worked into a story, a common memory of events, which is passed on to subsequent generations, ensuring the continuation of the experience and the knowledge of the people. Based on Smith’s definition, the single most definitive factor of cultural identity is the shared connection to history and memory, whether deliberately created or not. This idea, put forth by Smith, becomes further validated when we examine Drzewiecka and Halualani’s (2002: 363) statement that, diaspora groups “re-invent their cultural identities by collectively reconstructing the past” and thus carry new cultural memories that reshape the diaspora’s experience. For example, the 1980 riots is a definite moment in Sri Lankan Tamil history and has been cultivated into a politically strong cultural memory that unifies the community, discussed in Tamil events. The story

woven through the re-telling of different events during that time is so powerful that people who were born after the riots know the relevance and emotion of it.

In the preceding paragraphs I have discussed the idea of cultural identity, but related to the discussion on cultural identity has to be the discussion of ethnicity and ethnic identity. Ethnic identity may become a marker of diaspora identity; it can be defined as a group's customs, language, cultural institutions, religion, social space and networks, and territory (Barbic, 1998: 255-256, Jones and Smith 2001: 48). Ethnicity is a politicized identity that is considered to be natural and fixed in time (Ferguson, Gallin and Harper 1995: 14, Moghadam 1994: 24, Yuval-Davis 1994: 408). Yet, ethnic boundaries and group inclusiveness is dependant on shifting variables, such as politics, economics, and the larger society. Though ethnicity is commonly understood as being based on biological and phenotypic characteristics, it is still a political tool used to differentiate between people, sometimes from the same nation-state. Though culture is accepted as being fluid, the concept ethnicity and ethnic identity draws heavily on images of the blood that is the idea of a common ancestry as a starting point. Thus ethnicity can be the most exclusive form of identity.

Transnational/Global Links

One of the biggest characteristics of modernity is the flow of information, goods and people throughout the world. The voluntary and involuntary flow of people across borders has enabled people to manifest dual identities, that of the host nation and the nation of origin (Tambiah 2000:163; 170). Even though diaspora people live in, and interact with, their host country, those who recognize themselves as belonging to the

'diaspora' usually do so because they remain deeply connected to their country of origin. These people become involved in a process where they negotiate their ethnic identity create a sense of self, through two phenomena: ethno-nationalism and transnationalism. Ethno-nationalism here refers to the participation of nationalism in the country of origin by diasporic people living in the host country (Tambiah 2000: 171). Transnationalism is a facet of modern diasporic communities (Brubaker 2005: 2, Shuval 2000:43) and refers to the connections that extend beyond national boundaries.

Through the diasporic communities' continued connection to the homeland, the diasporas automatically fulfil the requirements of a trans-national group. Diaspora groups are constantly formulating and repositioning themselves and their identity vis-à-vis their relation to the changing global political and economic contexts (Drzewiecka and Halualani 2002: 341). Transnational links allow groups to become aware of the changing social climate within a global context and within other host nations. However, this awareness is dependent on the level of participation by the groups in the other host nation as well as at home. Diasporas are not simply defined through their existence at one host nation but are generally seen as existing at multiple locales throughout the world.

Transnational networks are created and maintained by many groups throughout the world, as it is not a process exclusive to diaspora populations. As modes of communication improve, technology becomes more accessible and movement between nations become more economical, these networks become easier to maintain (Shuval 2000: 44). The ease with which technology can connect people from across the world and facilitate their communication is perhaps the principal conduit for the proliferation of transnationalism.

Transnationalism exists in the global context in many ways; I will discuss one of these. The first is the creation and utilization of local networks for transnational purposes. Local networks of transnationalism exist only when the diaspora group has created a very definite identity that allows them to remain segregated from others, to a certain extent, within their host nation (Brubaker 2005: 6). The creation of a Sri Lankan Tamil identity in Canada, with defined boundaries, political and/or communal, not only determines who can be a part of that identity but also permits people to utilize the components of that identity; the components being the ability to be involved in diaspora organizations, access to mother tongue language classes and so on. Involvement in these groups and activities permits the group to retain their identity and thus maintain the group's collective identity. Through the endogamous preservation of a specific identity, the diaspora groups fashion themselves as the only ones competent enough to ensure that new migrants from the homeland integrate successfully into the host country, while retaining their diasporic identity. In short, power relations are laced throughout diasporic communities as they make the decisions concerning who is in and who is out and what it entails to belong to such a community.

Social groups also enable the diaspora success in 'places of exclusion'¹³ where they can use local networks to become successful (Segrott 2001: 290, Shuval 2000: 47). An example of this phenomenon would be the ghettoization of ethnic minorities into enclaves, such as Chinatown, Little Italy and so on. These local networks allow members of the community to interact within their ethnic/linguistic/cultural boundaries without needing to become reliant on the services of the host state.

¹³ Place of exclusion are sites, geographical and economic, where members of an ethnic minority community feel that they are unable to access within the mainstream community. Thus, the community creates its own spaces where they use their connection to member within their own group.

In this thesis, the utilization of diaspora theory will permit me to draw conclusions based on the Tamil diaspora and its function in Canada. Canada's encouragement of different ethnic identities has enabled the Tamil diaspora to create and maintain strong lateral networks. Thus, Chapter Four will begin an analysis of the Sri Lankan Tamil population in Sri Lanka and Canada, applying the theories of diaspora, ethnicity and transnationalism covered in this chapter. I will mainly be focusing on the 'maintenance' of Tamil culture in the diaspora. How does the background of the volunteers, growing up and living in the Canadian Tamil context, influence their relationship to the people of Kilinochchi and Vanni? Ethnicity is mainly used as a framework for understanding the history of the Sri Lankan conflict but is also important to note as the volunteers and the residents of Kilinochchi were bound by the idea of a common ethnic heritage. The identity construction of these two groups is intertwined, allowing for a flexible negotiation and construction of identity. TSVP volunteers drew on their claim of "native heritage" to aid them in integrating with the local community. However, even within the connection established by the volunteers to the local community there exists a feeling that the volunteers are part of the community and yet apart from it. This idea will be expanded further on in the thesis, when examining the findings of the fieldwork. Ideas of transnationalism will help to highlight the way that lateral links between the diaspora and people in Sri Lanka, specifically Tamil Sri Lanka are maintained.¹⁴ Transnationalism is an important part of my discussion, as it will help to frame the way that the volunteers are perceived, and how information about 'life abroad' is gathered.

¹⁴ These lateral networks are important not only because of the way that they frame Tamil culture but also in how they provide an image of women in Sri Lanka.

Chapter Three: Sri Lanka: a Brief History

The Move Towards Peace

The move towards peace in Sri Lanka has been an arduous process; however at the time of the research the current ceasefire was appearing to hold. The LTTE's desire to attempt a peace process with the GoSL has been largely motivated by war fatigue on the part of the people (Uyangoda 1996:129) and the post 9-11 anti-terrorism fervour, which had the world ready to condemn the LTTE as another terrorist organization (Shastri 2003: 221). The government, on the other hand, has largely been motivated by its desire for the economic aid that peace and the subsequent rebuilding and 'development' of war-torn Sri Lanka would generate (Shastri 2003: 221).

Sri Lanka is composed of five distinct ethnic communities: Sinhalese (70%), Tamils (22%), Moors and Burgers (4%), and Veddahs (1%); in addition, there is a small Muslim (3%) population. (Austin 1995: 69; Ross and Males 2002:78). Tamils thus constitute the largest ethnic *minority* in Sri Lanka (Bandara-Navaratna 2002: 57). In fact there are two distinct Tamil ethnic identities in Sri Lanka. The vast majority are simply referred to as Sri Lankan Tamils or Jaffna Tamils. In addition, there are a small minority of Tamils in Sri Lanka who are referred to as Estate Tamils¹⁵; they are the descendants of Tamil-speaking tea workers, brought to Sri Lanka from India, by the British in the nineteenth century (Daniel 1996: 31).

As Sri Lanka's largest ethnic minority, Tamils felt that they deserved special consideration, especially since the Tamil population was the demographic majority

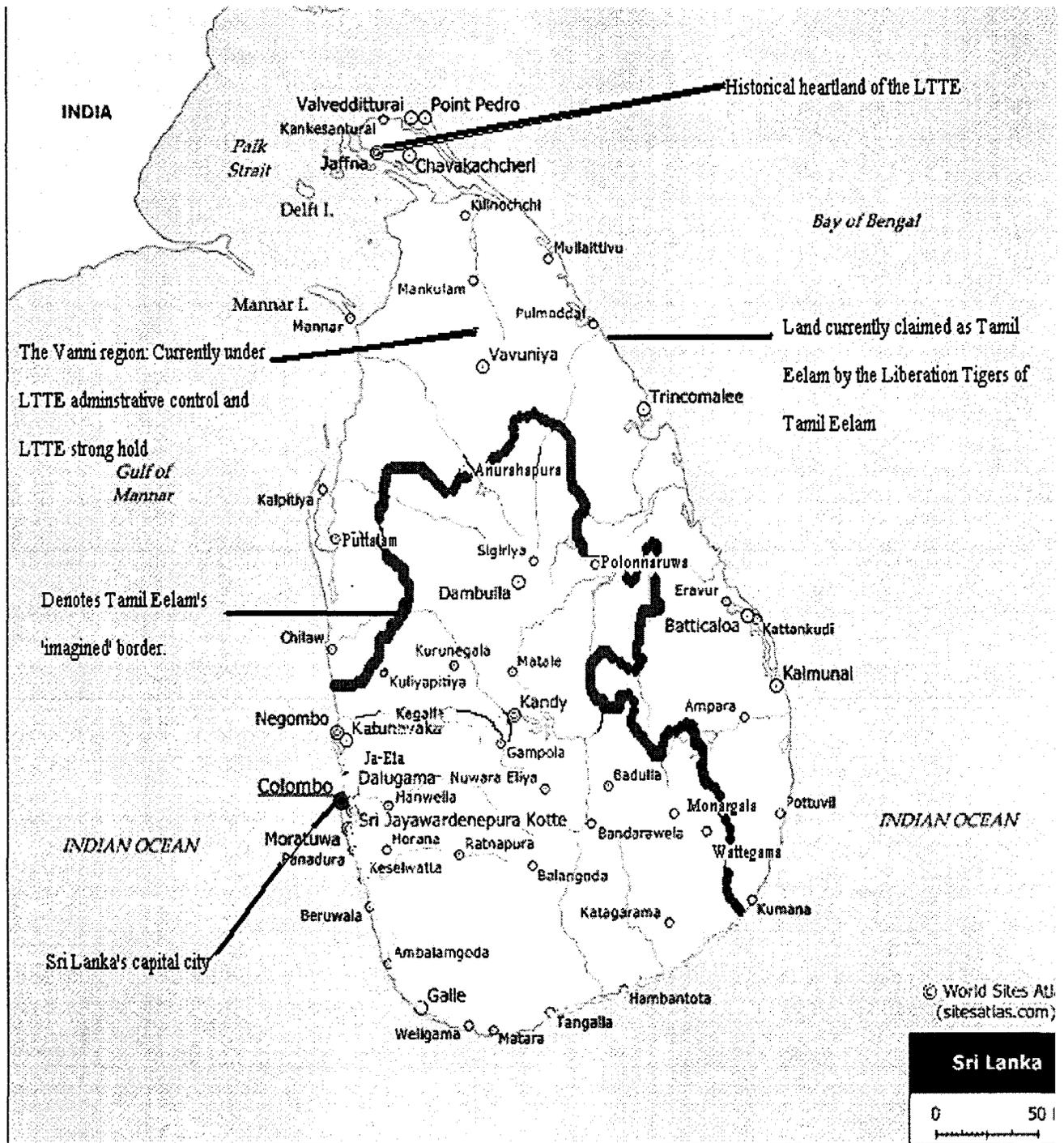
¹⁵ Unless otherwise specified, the term Tamil - in this paper - will refer to Jaffna or Sri Lankan Tamils; all three terms will be used interchangeably. Sri Lankan Estate Tamils will be referred to as specifically Estate Tamils.

within the northern and eastern provinces. Though the LTTE had originally wanted a separate Tamil state, commonly known as Tamil Eelam, they have now seemed to attempt a power-sharing governmental system with the GoSL, based on the ideals of federalism in a single nation-state. The LTTE publicly accepted the federal framework on December 5, 2002 (Shastri 2003: 220), nationally and internationally highlighting their public commitment to the current peace process.¹⁶ The federal system will allow the Tamil-controlled northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka to become semi-autonomous regions with limited powers of self-rule; a province within the existing Sri Lankan state. Figure 1 illustrates the imagined boundaries between the LTTE's Tamil Eelam and the rest of Sri Lanka.

At the time of the ceasefire agreement, the Tigers claim that over 60,000 Tamils have been killed and 800,000 detained by government forces (Tamil Tigers Net 2005; Rothberg 1994:8). International estimates place the death toll for the nation, including Sinhalese, at over 75,000 people killed (Samath 2000) and 450,000 people internally displaced (Dias 2005), while other estimates place the total number of people displaced at 800,000 (*WomenWarPeace.org*: 2005).

¹⁶ Whether or not the LTTE is committed to the current peace process is an issue which cannot be adequately dealt with in this thesis. See Bell, Eelam Web, Government of Sri Lanka webpage, Shastri and Tamil Canadian.

Figure 1: Political Map of Sri Lanka Showing the 'Imagined Border' between Tamil Eelam and the Rest of Sri Lanka



Eelam boundary source: Tamil Canadian.com

Sri Lanka Political Map Source: Tamil Canadian.com and World Atlas.com

Government Policies and the Rise of the ‘Tigers’

“No matter what you say, the Tigers are doing a good thing. Before, every twelve years they would burn a Tamil or attack us but since the Tigers, there have been no more mob violence... They are afraid, they know that the Tigers are watching out for us and they won’t risk that.”

(Personal Conversation: Melissa 2004¹⁷)

The story of the LTTE and the policies of the GoSL are so intertwined that to understand the formation of the Tigers without looking at the history of Sri Lanka would be a futile exercise. Though there were originally many Tamil groups that took up the ‘cause’ of Tamil freedom, by the late 1980s the Tigers would emerge as the *only* (self-defined) Tamil militant group engaged in conflict with the GoSL. The following section will contextualise the current peace process, and thus will also provide an overview of the conflict itself. The Sri Lankan conflict was the culmination of years of riots and ethnic antagonism. Accordingly, this chapter will focus on the political history of Sri Lanka from 1948, the year that Sri Lanka gained independence from the colonial power. However, I will briefly touch on the colonial experience in Sri Lanka.

From Colony to Independence

The colonial history of Ceylon¹⁸ begins with the arrival of the Portuguese explorers, who first annexed Jaffna in 1619 (Fuglerud 1999: 26). Prior to colonization, the island was divided into three Kingdoms; there was the Jaffna (Tamil) Kingdom in the north, the Southern Sinhala Kingdom (in the south) and the Sinhala Kandy Kingdom

¹⁷ Melissa was an expatriate who was visiting Sri Lanka during my time there. She resided in Colombo and was visiting family and thus was not part of my site research, however her comments seemed to reflect the consensus of many expatriates who were visiting Sri Lanka.

¹⁸ Ceylon officially changed its name to Sri Lanka in 1972. When referring to the period prior to 1972, I refer to the island as Ceylon. In the period following the name change, I refer to the island as Sri Lanka.

(located in the hilly central regions of the island).¹⁹ The Dutch eventually seized Ceylon from the Portuguese in 1658, followed by the British who expelled the Dutch in 1796 (Banadara-Navaratna 2002: 62; Fuglerud 1999: 26; Ross and Males 2002: 76) and consciously attempted to unite all three kingdoms within the colony. The British wanted to have the island under one administrative umbrella; thus they deliberately conquered all the kingdoms of Ceylon (the Kandyian Kingdom being the last to fall in 1815) and were the first colonial power to unify Ceylon (Fuglerud 1999: 27).

When Ceylon finally gained independence from Britain in 1948 it was still very much an ethnically divided nation. Although the Tamil and two (Southern and Kandyan) Sinhala kingdoms had been amalgamated, there was no real pan-island unity (Ross and Males 2002: 78). However, it must be noted that there was nationalistic unity within some of the academic population, politicians who had been in power under the British rule and some members of the 'upper- class'. This group was considered to be English-speaking nationalists and was made up of both Sinhalese and Tamils (Wilson 1988:9). They would, however, be dislodged from power in the face of the ethnic nationalist fervour that swept across Ceylon.

Banadaranaike and Early Governmental Policies

The post-independence Ceylon's ability to 'create' a national (nation-state) identity was constrained by the new government's election promises to its citizens (the majority of whom were Sinhalese) and the domination of Sinhala in parliament. The new government under Banadaranaike was unchallenged as his party held fifty-one out of ninety-five parliamentary seats (Eller 1999:128), ensuring that all that motions by his

¹⁹ The western and eastern provinces of today were divided between the Southern Sinhala Kingdom and the northern Tamil Kingdom.

party were passed effortlessly. To aid in his campaign, Banadaranaike propagated the idea of Sinhalese ethnonationalism and painted his supporters as patriots of the state. *Bhikkhus*, the proper title for the Buddhist Clergy, were also very active in Ceylon politics and felt it was their sacred duty to maintain the special status of Buddhism and the rights of the Sinhalese people (De Silva 1986: 196). Consequently, the new Ceylon government formulated policies which favoured the Sinhala majority. These government policies generated apprehension within the Tamil population, which began to feel threatened by the increasing pro-Sinhala legislation, specifically two legislations passed by the new government: the disenfranchisement of the Estate Tamils in 1948 and the Re-Colonialization Scheme of the 1950s.

The disenfranchisement of the Estate Tamils called for the repatriation of the Estate Tamils back to their ancestral home of India. This was publicly advocated, by the Sri Lankan Government, as a way of undoing the 'wrongs of the British' - who took these people away from their native land. However, the disenfranchisement of this group of Tamils served the greater aim of denying a large segment of the Tamil population citizenship rights, and more importantly, voting rights. It would be no exaggeration to claim that the disenfranchisement of the Estate Tamils had very significant repercussions for the history of the nation-state. The first of these effects was the reduction of Tamil voting power, creating the loss of a strong opposition party in Ceylon's politics. The Estate Tamils had their citizenship revoked with the Disenfranchisement Act. The governments of Ceylon and India then negotiated an agreement by which 250,000 of the 600,000 Estate Tamils would be repatriated to India, and another 250,000 would be given

Ceylon citizenship, leaving the fate of 100,000 still undetermined, living as stateless people in Ceylon (De Silva 1986: 223).

The second effect of the disenfranchisement was the fragmentation of Tamil identity and political unity. Though Jaffna Tamils looked at the Estate Tamils as inferior, there was some unity between the two groups on the basis of their common Tamil ethnicity. In effect, the government had split the broader definition of Tamil into sub-categories (De Silva 1986:223; Daniel 1996:17), making Estate Tamils another political minority, with different political concerns and goals. The Estate Tamils' primary concern now dealt with the issue of citizenship rights, but they were cautious about trusting the Jaffna Tamils, and finding a home in Tamil Eelam, as it was not their ancestral land and they realized that in the eyes of the Jaffna Tamil, they were of a lower status. Thus, Estate Tamils and Jaffna Tamils split along political as well as ancestral lines.

The second legislative change was the Ceylon government's re-colonialization scheme, which began in earnest in the 1950s (Manogaran 1987:48) and relocated Sinhalese into what had historically been Tamil regions. The Ceylon government felt that the Tamil people occupied more land than they required demographically, and thus the land should be divided out proportionally based on the size of the population. The re-colonialization scheme had actually begun in the 1930s by Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake, though the repercussions were not fully felt until the late 1950s. Senanayake felt that re-colonialization was a way to meet the high labour demands of agriculture in the north and east, but as Sabaratnam (2001:196) states the policy was not really designed to "alleviate overcrowding and unemployment problems in the Tamil districts.' The focus was on Sinhala landless and dense districts in Sinhala areas."

As per the policy, the government relocated Sinhala citizens, the majority of whom were landless peasants and slum dwellers-- those who did not have any land of their own (Fuglerud 1999: 31) -- into Tamil territory. Estimates are that between 1931 and 1981 a quarter of a million Sinhala settlers were shifted to the north and eastern areas of Sri Lanka (Sabaratnam 2001:196). Tamil politicians felt that the re-colonialization scheme was a threat to the Tamils' claim of majority representation in the northern and eastern provinces (de Silva 1986:24), the only places that Tamil politicians had been able to claim victory in the elections.

The Tamil leadership also felt insulted as the people the government 'transported' were from the lowest levels of society, creating feelings of resentment. The history of a family is traced through their land and most villages are caste based - that is all people in one caste reside in a certain village and thus one's ancestral village becomes the signifier of one's caste status. Tamil identity is essentially tied to the land and the location that a person identifies with. For example, the Estate Tamils' identity is strongly drawn from their ties to the tea estates despite the fact that not all of them continue to work in the tea estates (Daniel 1996:23). The movement of *landless* people without any consideration of these facets was seen as an attack on the Tamil way of life and belief system. Tamil people began to feel as if their identity, culture and home were being forcibly redefined and narrowed.

In 1958, Tamil protestors in Polonnuruwa, in the east of the island near Batticolore, marched against the Ceylon government's re-colonialization scheme. The (Sinhala) colonizers attacked the Tamils in retribution, setting off mob violence throughout the country (Fuglerud 1999:32). The violence lasted for days before the

government and police were able to control the mob. The length of time that it took the authorities to control the mob further raised questions, in the Tamil public mind, about the Ceylon government's concern for its Tamil citizens. As Melissa's quote earlier in this chapter highlighted, the Tamil populace began to wonder if the government encouraged these acts themselves.

The above two legislative changes of the government culminated in the 1952 declaration by the Tamil Federal Party (TFP), the major political party representing the Tamil people, that "the Tamil speaking people were a distinct community based on three factors: different historical past, different language and traditions and different territorial claims- which constituted one third of the total land mass of the island" (Bandara-Navaratna 2002: 60) and as such required their own sovereign, self-governed, nation-state. The TFP no longer believed in the possibility of a co-existing Tamil and Sinhala nation-state. The face and goals of Tamil politics had been irrevocably altered by the disenfranchisement act and the re-colonialization scheme and was to get worse. In 1972, the state changed its name from the colonial name of Ceylon, to Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is Sinhalese for "blessed Island", which made the name of the nation reflective of only one ethnic group. These acts made many Tamils feel as if their identity was being rejected and they feared assimilation into the Sinhalese state (Bandara-Navaratna 2002: 63-64). However, the militarization of the Tamil populace was connected to the disillusionment of the Tamil youth, which was also a result of constitutional changes implemented at the same time as Ceylon's name was changed.

The Militant Students

For Tamil youth, the most significant legislative change, which led to their disillusionment with the government, was the 'standardization' of university exams in 1972. Standardization was the idea that university entrance should reflect the population demographics of Sri Lanka. Since Tamils constituted only 22 per cent of the population, they should only be allowed access to 22 per cent of the available university seats. The policy was an attempt to give *all* Sri Lankan youth access to higher education (Austin 1995:66). Conversely, Tamil youth were frustrated as they were denied the opportunity to go to school, as Tamils generally were "over-represented" in the university system (Hyndman 2003: 254; Fuglerud 1999: 32): due to missionary work in Tamil areas, Tamils systematically scored better than their Sinhalese counterparts. A great number of missionary schools had been set up across the Tamil areas, providing education for Tamil families.

Standardization policies led to the next major violence in response to these policies; Tamil youth had marched in protest, only to be disrupted by Sinhalese rioters. The outcome of the riots was the establishment of the Tamil New Tigers in 1972 by the Tamil Manavar Peravai (Tamil Students' Union-TSU). In 1973, one hundred students participated in a demonstration organized by TSU to coincide with Bandaranaike's cabinet ministers' visit to Jaffna. The demonstration led to the arrest of two hundred Tamil youth on suspicion of being militants (Chelvadurai 1987:60). The arrests were the catalyst for many militant student movements and groups who began to covertly attack Sri Lankan Army (SLA) sites and officers. In 1976, the Tamil Manavar Peravai became the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Fuglerud 1999:32; Chelvadurai 1987:63);

however, they did not openly attack the SLA under the banner of the LTTE until 1978, at the time Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, was eighteen years old (Rothberg 1994:8). Though I focus exclusively on the LTTE, as they currently consider themselves the “sole voice of the Tamil people”, other Tamil youth militant groups also arose during the 1970s including People’s Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Eelam People’s Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS).

By the 1970s, Tamils, particularly the radicalized youth, felt that the Sri Lankan state had taken away the Tamils’ distinctive past, language, and ancestral territory. In 1976, The Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) which was a combination of the Tamil Federal Party and the Tamil Congress, passed a resolution asking for the right to a “separate sovereign Tamil state known as ‘Tamil Eelam’” (Wilson 2000:10). A year later, in 1977, ethnic tensions would rise again when riots swept the nation-state. Sinhalese police officers, angered that they were not allowed free admission to a carnival in Jaffna, started to attack Tamil civilians and burn businesses and homes (Chelvadurai 1987:62). The 1977 riots were the first time that the riots had occurred in Jaffna, which is considered the historical heartland of Sri Lankan Tamils, the effect of which was the solidification of the idea that Tamils could only live in peace in their own nation-state.

After the 1970 elections, TULF became the official opposition to the United National Party (UNP) but only held sixteen seats (Tambiah 1986:39), fourteen from the north, which were all the northern seats, and two from the east (Chelvadurai 1987:62). The victory of the TULF clearly stated that the Tamils stood behind their political leaders but was ineffective in terms of providing Jayewardene with a strong opposition. Thus,

Jayewardene's UNP, who had swept the rest of the seats, were able to enact many controversial policies, such as the implementation of the Presidential system in 1978. The Sri Lankan president enjoyed immunity from any Sri Lankan laws and was vested with more and more power by the parliament. The President could change, without notice or majority consent, MPs' portfolios, by-laws and so on (Tambiah 1986:39-40). In 1979, Jayewardene implemented the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), which granted special powers to police to detain without cause or evidence, anyone who was suspected of belonging to Tamil militant groups (Fuglerud 1999:33). The PTA policy made retroactive from the date of Ceylon's independence from the British. In other words, individuals could be arrested, in 1979, for activities that created discord and/or undermined the Sri Lankan Government, if these acts occurred anytime after 1948 and not just after the passing of the PTA. The GoSL used the PTA to ban TULF from the parliament (Tambiah 1986:43), by arguing that by their demand for a separate state the TULF was creating discord and was thus an enemy of the Sri Lankan people.

The notorious²⁰ '80s riots began in July of 1983; starting in Jaffna and Colombo and spreading throughout the country. The spark for the riots was actually a response to the meeting of Jayewardene and TULF. The LTTE feared that TULF would side with the government and decided to bring events to a head. The LTTE detonated a land mine under an SLA vehicle, injuring 13 Sinhalese soldiers (Wilson 1988:172), claiming the event as a response to Sinhalese attacks on Tamil civilians. Though the open conflict between the Tigers and the GoSL did not *officially* begin until after the 1983 mob

²⁰ The riots are notorious, as they have become a touchstone of Tamil identity and Tamil history. The riots were also the catalyst for many Tamils to leave Sri Lanka and thus started the mass expulsion of Tamils from Sri Lanka. Though the riots began in 1983, the Tamil population commonly refers them to as the '80 riots.

violence, the Tigers had been attacking and sabotaging Sri Lankan officers and offices of the Sri Lankan government since their inception. Reaction to the LTTE's attack was an island wide riot, which lasted for three days before the government declared a state of emergency and enforced a curfew; making it the first time the government had enacted martial law.²¹

The perceived failure of Tamil politicians to gain a separate state or fundamental changes in the Sri Lankan political situation provoked the youth wing of the TULF, known as the LTTE, to declare that action must be undertaken to end Sinhala oppression (TamilCanadian 2005). To state it simply, the Sri Lankan conflict is rooted in the politics of identity and self-determination for the Tamil people.

India's Attempt at Peace

Early ties to India

The next major tide to change the face of the Sri Lankan civil war was the Indo-Lankan Accord, which was India's attempt to bring peace to the nation-state. The Accord went into effect on July 30, 1987, with the arrival of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka (Balasingham 2001:130; Chelvadurai 1987:60). However, India's role in Sri Lankan politics began even before the signing of the Indo-Lankan Accord. Due to its proximity to Sri Lanka and its position as one of the superpowers of South Asia, India has monitored, aided and turned the tide of the civil war (Austin 1995:71). The Indian state of Tamil Nadu took an active interest in protecting their more vulnerable 'ethnic sisters and brothers' in Sri Lanka. During the 1980s, India actively worked to aid

²¹ Personal conversations with people in Sri Lanka mention that the state of emergency was enacted when the Tigers started attacking Sinhalese as retribution. Whereas the official view is that the government intervened as soon as they could to restore order.

Tamils in Sri Lanka by supplying arms, funds, food and relief aid as well as establishing refugee camps (Austin 1995: 71).

In fact, much of Tamil militants' training and growth was funded and provided by the Indian government. Indian governmental organizations supplied Tamil militants with arms (Wilson 1988:178), financial and political support (Tambiah 1986:109) and militant groups were permitted to use Tamil Nadu as a base of operations (Chelvadurai 1987:70). The LTTE was given patronage of Tamil Nadu's chief minister M.G. Ramachandran (Austin 1995:72; Balasingham 2001:77; Wilson 1988:202) and Tamil militants enjoyed relative freedom and support in India during Indira Gandhi's reign as Prime Minister. However, with the assassination of Ms. Gandhi in 1984, the tide of the Sri Lankan civil war shifted again, as her son Rajiv Gandhi became India's Prime Minister.

Rajiv Gandhi, the Indo-Lankan Accord and IPKF

Rajiv Gandhi believed that there was a role for India to play in ending the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and was encouraged to this conclusion by the GoSL. Rajiv Gandhi saw the increasing number of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in India as a sign that India was morally responsible to end the conflict (Chelvadurai 1987:70). The years 1984-5 saw the relationship between the Indian government, the GoSL and militant groups significantly alter. The Indian government's involvement initiated the talks at Thimpu, organized by Romesh Bhandari, India's policy maker for Sri Lanka, and attended by the GoSL, TULF, PLOTE, a team representing the LTTE, EPRLF, TELO and EROS (Wilson 1988:185). This was greatly significant as it was the first time that these various Tamil representatives had banded together to present a unified concept of Tamil nationalism (Balasingham 2001:100).

In the end, India was not happy with results of its moderation in the conflict and was unable to gain the LTTE's trust. On May 26 1987, the GoSL and militant conflict came to a head as the SLA launched "Operation Liberation", with the goal of liberating the Jaffna peninsula (Balasingham 2001:125). Operation Liberation was also a turning point in LTTE 's combat strategies, as on July 5, 1987 the Black Tigers, LTTE's suicide wing, were first used in combat. India was not reassured by the way the conflict was progressing and, using political pressure, urged the LTTE to sign the Indo-Lanka Accord, giving India permission to police the north.

The Indo-Lankan accord gave India the authority to 'peacekeep' the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka and disarm the militants, who would receive India's guarantee of (Tamil) safety and the promise of ambiguous change within the Sri Lankan constitution. The IPKF held Jaffna from July of 1987 to March 1990 (Fuglerud 1999: 36), during which time the IPKF massacred many Tamils civilians and ex-militants, including those who had already given up their weapons. On October 10, 1987, the IPKF made the formal decision to disarm the LTTE by force (Balasingham 2001:143). To see this idea come to fruition, the IPKF lent its financial and military support to other Tamil militant groups interested in overthrowing the Tiger organization (Taraki 1991:1,5).

The period of conflict with the IPKF was notable because it led to the demise of all other Tamil militant group, except for the LTTE. When the IPKF left Sri Lanka, after being unable to disarm or neutralize the Tiger threat, the LTTE looked at the other Tamil militant groups, giving them a choice of fighting under the Tiger banner, leaving the struggle completely or fighting the LTTE. At the end of this violent period, the Tigers had emerged as the (self-defined) sole voice and representative of the Tamil people, in

Sri Lanka and by default in the diaspora, with a reputation for “eliminating” those who did not agree with them, and/or those who criticized them. All in all the Indo-Lankan peace accord had been a dismal failure, especially as one of its major principles was to 'de-militarize the ethnic question' (Uyangoda 1996:119).

The final point of interest in the history of the LTTE struggle is to note that in 1995, the LTTE abandoned Jaffna as their headquarters. The LTTE's resources were spread too thin to maintain control of the peninsula and thus the LTTE was forced to withdraw from Jaffna, chased the whole way by the SLA. In the jungles of Vanni, the LTTE successfully made a stand against the SLA and have since used Vanni as their stronghold. Vanni, as an 'unfamiliar' jungle for the SLA, provided the LTTE with the advantage they needed to keep fighting for their cause. Currently, development in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka is occurring in the Vanni region as the new home of the LTTE, and in LTTE controlled parts of Jaffna, which has always held a historically significant place as the heart of Tamil culture..

The flow of funds to the north led to the first major split in the ranks of the LTTE. In February of 2004, Pirabakaran's second in command, Major Kruna, defected from the LTTE. Kruna was the overseer of the eastern provinces for the LTTE and his defection split the LTTE troops into two. Kruna stated that his split from the LTTE was motivated by what he considered the northern leanings of the LTTE, which is the fact that all relief and rehabilitation funds were being siphoned to Jaffna [ditto?] and Vanni, while Batticolore and the rest of the eastern provinces were being ignored. Kruna's defection was the first time in the history of the LTTE that there was a split in the organization.

Currently, Krupa's location is unknown and many of the soldiers who defected with Krupa have been 're-recruited' into the LTTE.

Historical Influences on Current Study

The goal of this chapter was to create an understanding of the historical factors that lead to many Tamils leaving Sri Lanka. To fully understand the volunteers, it is important to be aware of the events which caused Tamils to leave Sri Lanka but more importantly the way that the LTTE became the self-proclaimed "sole representative" voice of the Tamil people. By becoming the main militant force in the north and east of Sri Lanka, the LTTE became important to the Tamil diaspora. To remain involved and informed of the activities of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the diaspora has to engage with the LTTE. The Tamil diaspora recognize that the way to stay abreast of developments in the Northern and Eastern provinces is to maintain the connection to the LTTE and its information sources.

To understand the significance of the LTTE in Sri Lankan Tamil history and politics, it is also important to understand how the LTTE became the only (self-defined) representative of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. As shown in this chapter, when the question of Tamil autonomy began, there were many groups who were working for the goal of a Tamil homeland. However, with the LTTE defeat of the IPKF and other Tamil militants, not only did they become the (self-defined) sole voice of the Tamil people and culture, they also became the (self-defined) guardians of Tamil culture. In places such as the Vanni, the LTTE are the final word on what is accepted as Tamil behavior. The influence of the LTTE on Tamil culture and the maintenance of LTTE's version of Tamil

culture is illustrated in greater detail in Chapter Five, while examining the fieldwork and interviews conducted during my time in Kilinochchi.

LTTE politics and policy has become the true signifier of Tamil identity, especially in the diaspora. Thus, the diaspora engages in a negotiation of Tamil identity with the Tamil population in Sri Lanka, filtered through the lens of the LTTE. This negotiation of identity is constantly changing and fluid but creates networks that are then utilized to promote a pan-Tamil identity. The pan-Tamil identity is very much a political construct that changes as the needs of the diaspora and local community change and is dependant on the individual. However, as the LTTE became prominent in Tamil politics, the emphasis of Tamil identity focused on the Northern parts of the peninsula [?], leading some to feel that other Tamil identities and concerns were being ignored. Despite the LTTE claim of Pan-Tamil identity there is no single Tamil identity but many identities that are dependant on the needs of the individual.

Finally, it is important to understand that when the volunteers went to Sri Lanka, they were working in an area heavily hit by the conflict. Though not responsible for knowing the entire history of the conflict, the volunteers needed to be aware of the way that certain events in Sri Lankan history impacted the people that they would be working with. For example, the people in Vanni were themselves very reliant on the LTTE and had followed them from Jaffna, when the LTTE retreated. Whatever the volunteers' personal politics were, they had to acknowledge the role of the LTTE in the lives of the people in Vanni.

Chapter Four: The Tamil Diaspora and Gender

The Dispersion of Sri Lankan Tamils

The conflict and changing political situation in Sri Lanka has led to many Sri Lankans, especially Tamils, seeking refuge from the war both within Sri Lanka (internal migration) and internationally. Since the 1980s, there has been an estimated 1.5 to 2 million Sri Lankans who have migrated, both internally and externally (Fuglerud 2001:197; Sriskandarajah 2002:288). It is also estimated that one-third of the Tamil population of Sri Lanka has left the country, with another one-third being internally displaced (Fuglerud 1999:2). The one-third that migrated from Sri Lanka is mainly concentrated in the United States, Australia, Canada and Europe.

Though Sri Lankan migration is not a new phenomenon, after the 1980s the characteristics and type of migration altered significantly. Prior to the 1980s, the majority of migrants from Sri Lanka were economic migrants who can be defined as the educated middle and upper classes of Sri Lankan society, who were leaving Sri Lanka for economic opportunity (Fuglerud 1999:141; Sriskandarajah 2002:291). However, “1983 marks the start of widespread refugee flows from Sri Lanka to India and the rest of the world” (Sriskandarajah 2002:290). The ‘new’ Sri Lankan immigrants were not formally educated but had stories of ‘oppression’ and the claim to refugee status and protection. The period from 1983 to 1987 saw the many asylum-granting countries facing the issue of how to handle the newly emerging Tamil refugee claimants (see Ferrabee 1987); it was also a time in which the Tamil diaspora was actively seeking political aid from their countries of settlement (see Weerasinghe 1988; Gazette 1987; Toronto Star 1987; Rabinovitch 1987). To say that the Tamil diaspora were making an impact on their host nation would be an understatement. With the increasing number of Tamil refugees, international focus was shifted to Sri Lanka and many host nations attempted to negotiate

peace between the two sides, including Canada, Israel, the United States, India, and Norway, which succeeded in securing the current MOU in 2002.

In the first part of this chapter, I will look at the Tamil diaspora in Canada and the manner in which connections to the homeland are maintained. The second section of this chapter will look at Tamil women, specifically those in Sri Lanka, and how they are conceptualised in academic literature and within the Tamil diaspora.

The Diaspora and Canada

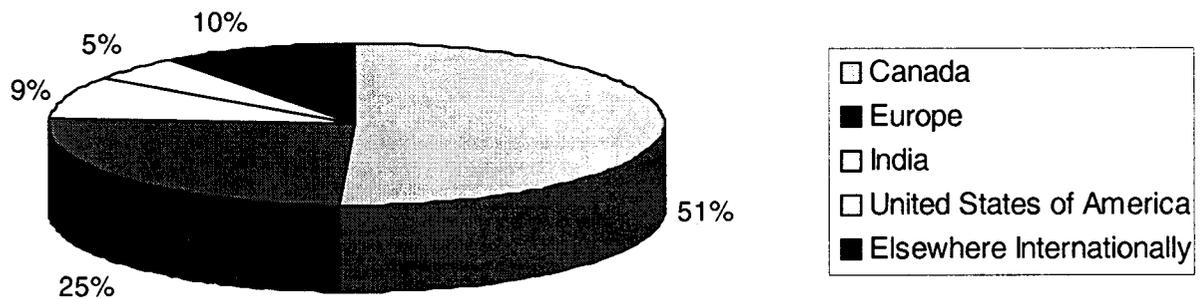
Before beginning the section on the Canadian Tamil diaspora, it is important for me to establish why I chose to examine the Sri Lankan Tamil Canadian population, given the fact that the Tamil diaspora is vastly spread out. The first and most obvious reason is the fact that I am a Sri Lankan Tamil in Canada, and thus can easily draw upon my experiences of growing up as a Tamil in Canada. Secondly, the NGO that sponsored my research was a Canadian youth organization. In this chapter, I aim to establish the way that the volunteers that I worked with conceived of Sri Lanka. .

The Tamil diaspora occupies an important place in Canada as there are 817,000 Tamils living abroad and with the majority residing in Canada, as found by a 2001 United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR) study. The Tamil diaspora in Canada is the largest Tamil diaspora group in the world. UNCHR (2001) estimates place the total number of Tamils in Canada at 400, 000, twice the number of Tamils living within the continent of Europe. Canada occupies an important space in Tamil diaspora politics just by the sheer number of Tamils living in the country. Canada is home to half of the Tamil population living internationally (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Host Countries of Internationally Displaced Tamils in 2001 (%) according to UNCHR

(Source: Sriskandarajah 2002:293)

Though there is a large Tamil population spread out globally, there is not the same



intensity of people living in 'close proximity'; close proximity here refers mainly to Ontario, as it has the largest Tamil population in Canada.

Figure 3: Distribution (%) of Tamil Population in Canada by Province (2003)

Province	% of Tamils by Province
British Columbia	3.03

Alberta	0.67
Saskatchewan	0.08
Manitoba	0.20
Ontario	88.83
Quebec	7.56
Nova Scotia	0.03
New Brunswick	-
Prince Edward Island	-
Newfoundland	0.04

(Source: Asian Pacific Research 2005)

The overwhelming majority of Tamils in Canada are in Ontario, which is home to over 88 % of the Tamil population in Canada (see Figure 3). The province with the second largest Tamil population is Quebec, with only 7 % of the total Tamil population in Canada. Tamils in Ontario are concentrated within the areas of Scarborough, Toronto and Mississauga. The draw to Ontario exists due to lateral networks that are found in Ontario between the Tamil community and Tamil cultural identity. Toronto hosts the head office of many Tamil cultural organizations, which are concerned with the improvement of life for Tamils in Canada and 'at home' in Sri Lanka. A very brief list would include the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), Tamil Health Organization (THO), Tamil Isai Kalamundrum (Tamil Music Association), Canadian Tamil Youth Development (CANTYD), etc. In fact, Toronto produces the only Tamil directory in Canada; the 2005 directory has 1664 pages of which 80 pages are used to list organizations, which are concerned with Tamil culture. The lists include temples, groups, associations, language classes, Tamil social service organizations, media information and so on. The other 1584 pages hold advertisements for Tamil businesses.

Homeland Politics and Tamil Identity

In Chapter Two, the key characteristic of a diaspora community was discussed, focusing on the way that identities are formed and maintained through lateral networks. In Chapter Three, I briefly discussed the history of Sri Lankan Tamils, to lay the 'foundations' of both the identity of Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tamils within the diaspora. In the proceeding section I aim to examine the way that the Tamil culture and identity is maintained in Canada, in part due to Canada's social climate and the preservation of information networks between Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora in Canada. The Tamil community in Canada can be understood as a diasporic people and though there are many variations and understandings of diaspora, for the purpose of this paper I will be looking at the politicized Tamil identity. The homeland is a place of sanctuary for the Tamil people but that sanctuary is found within the larger oppressive state. Thus, borders are drawn between the sites of violence and the sanctuaries, so that violence shifted away from the sanctuaries, both that of the Tamils and the Sinhalese. As Fuglerud argues for the Tamil diapora:

In the move to maintain security at the 'heart' the buffer zones act as the main sites of violence and fighting between the two groups. The symbolic reproduction of border zone has served in Sri Lanka to codify cognitive geography into a tripartite structure of 'sanctuary' – 'interface' – 'targeting community' along a mutual, interlocking inside/outside polarity; the Tamil and Sinhalese sanctuaries being Jaffna and Colombo respectively. While the border zone interface is by tacit agreement transformed into a scene of absurd theatrical violence, sanctuaries become idealized spaces, substantiating sacred values of political ethnicity. This structure is something more, or other, than simply the withdrawal from the explosive mixed areas in order to ensure civilian life; the creation of the sanctuary is not a primary way to *avoid* violence, but to *channel* it, to impose form, to manage it through spatial devices. (Fuglerud 1999:44; emphases in original)

The sacredness of Jaffna is carried within the politicized Tamil diaspora, regardless of what host nation they settle in. The ability to trace their cultural roots to Jaffna is of

utmost importance, as it serves as the method to unify the Tamil collective, for a political project, and differentiate it from the host nation. As with any political or cultural group, Tamil identity is by no means homogeneous, but even within the diversity (see *Uthayan* newspaper, Tamils' Information Magazine, tamilcanadian.com, Canadian Tamil Youth Development, tamiltigers.net, tamil-media.com)²² there is a hegemonic sense of obligation to Jaffna. Obligation can be as simple as sending money to family still in Sri Lanka or more complex involvement in the struggle. However, subscription to the Jaffna diaspora identity, publicly, at least implies an acceptance of certain viewpoints, which permit the individual to engage in discussions of nationalism and participate in nationalistic activities. I postulate the idea that Jaffna has become sacred, in the political Tamil diaspora discourse, by highlighting the fact that it was the LTTE's home base for years and even now the LTTE refer back to Jaffna as the heartland of the Tamils and the place of their culture. In that way, the Tamil community in Canada is encouraged to promote Tamil cultural identity through its clubs and organizations with the understanding that the maintenance of Tamil culture relies on maintaining the sacredness of Jaffna (RYETSA 2004). The Tamil Canadian community also has a strong nationalistic presence through organizations such as the World Tamil Movement (WTM), FACT (Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils), and University Tamil Students Association (TSA), which promote and fund Tamil cultural events and sometimes political sentiment. At this point, it is pertinent to point out that TSA executive changes on a yearly basis and the political leanings of the TSA are dependant on the politics of

²² Tamil media represent different segments of the Tamil Community. *Tamils' Information* is a monthly magazine which focuses on the local Tamil community and provides info on living in North America, where as *Uthayan* newspaper provides the Tamil diaspora with more newspaper style content, such as editorials, features and most importantly news from Sri Lanka. *Directions* and *TOTamil* are a youth centred annual and bi-weekly, given Tamil youth the opportunity to present their point of view.

those on the executive. I point this fact out to highlight that the TSAs cannot be labelled as 'pro or anti LTTE'. These cultural groups are committed both to the well being of the Tamil diaspora, as well as the Tamils back in Sri Lanka, re-affirming the cultural and political link between the Canadian diaspora and their "native home" (Hyndman 2003:252). The Canadian Security Intelligent Service (CSIS) has stated that CAD \$1 million to \$2 million a year is sent by the Canadian Tamil diaspora to the LTTE (Hyndman 200:19; Bell 2002:2) while other CSIS estimates place the amount at 4 million USD a year (Chalk 1999). During the Sri Lankan civil war, Canada spearheaded numerous attempts to generate peace within the island (Rae and Cameron 2003).

To fully and publicly engage in the life of a Tamil is to ascribe to certain understandings of culture legitimized by the Tamil community and the cultural objects that defines them. The objects, however, are coded in duality: what the object symbolises to the diaspora population and to the larger community; the relationship between what the object means and what it is (Szersynski 2002:58-59). In the case of Jaffna, the existing political situation places the Tigers in Kilinochchi and the SLA in Jaffna, a situation that most Tamil people in Sri Lanka can live with, but Jaffna is still understood (to the diaspora) as being the heart of the LTTE and the absolute signifier of freedom despite the fact that the LTTE has begun to develop Vanni as their home base. The paradox of geopolitical location and idealized space exists without undermining the Tamil nationalist fervour in the diaspora. The real location of Vanni, occupied and maintained by the Tigers, does not shift the focus from the imagery of the Tamil land centred on Jaffna.

Ethnic identity in diaspora communities is seen as a way of maintaining the culture, usually bereft of the fighting and bloodshed that characterize it in the homeland.

There is more of an emphasis on external cultural behaviours, such as donating to the cause, supporting Tamil events and so on, over the individual's internal feelings of cultural connection (Szersynski 2002:59). Participation in LTTE sponsored events demonstrate the Tamil people's support of the LTTE, yet there is a question as to whether all that support is genuine or partially due to compulsion and a sense of political obligation; a question which I will not be able to answer in this thesis (see previous citations). On another scale, 'solidarity' of cultural identity means the existence of the idea that Tamil people are responsible to help other Tamils settle in Canada; this support can exist in the form of kinship groups, community services, and so on. This sense of moral and cultural obligation draws on cultural networks and ideas of reciprocity that exist in Sri Lanka (Sriskandarajah 2002:297).

These symbolic cultural actions of the individual are seen as a way of maintaining group solidarity, which becomes evident when we examine the two trends discussed earlier in the paper: ethnonationalism and transnationalism. These phenomena generate support for national struggles in the home country while the group is living in the host nation. Many Tamil diaspora events reiterate the commitment of the diasporic community to the struggle at home. A prime example of the above statement was the Pongu Thamizh event held in Ottawa on July 13, 2002 and organized by Tamil associations and groups. The event was a rally to show support for the Tamil independence movement. There were 'cultural events' such as dances and songs but also speeches on the 'righteousness of the LTTE struggle' (Tamil Canadian 2002:1). Though Pongu Thamizh events, which occur on a yearly basis, play an important role as a point of unity for the Tamil diaspora, the Pongu Thamizh event in Ottawa was also important for its explicit messages, the

articulation of the idea that *all* Tamil support the LTTE, whether true or not. Here I would like to highlight three resolutions passed at Pongu Thamizh (Tamil Canadian 2002:3):

Resolution 5: “Tamils in Sri Lanka have accepted the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as their sole representatives. Through this event, the Tamils of Ottawa are also proclaiming the LTTE as our sole representatives.”

By couching the diaspora’s commitment to the LTTE in this way, commitment is shown for the Tigers, the nationalistic struggle and the Tamils still living in Sri Lanka.

Resolution 6: “Since it is now a well established fact that the LTTE is the sole representatives of the Sri Lankan Tamils, to help the peace process, the ban on the LTTE should first be lifted in Sri Lanka and then the rest of the world.”²³

With this resolution, commitment to the cause is brought to the international sphere as the Tamil diaspora brings their ‘political’ weight to bear on their host governments’ and their stance on the LTTE.

Resolution 7: “Canadian government has included the LTTE in the list of banned organizations due to misunderstandings. This event urges the Canadian government, on behalf of the 250,000 Tamil Canadians; that the ban on the LTTE should be lifted in order for the LTTE to fairly participate in the peace process as the legitimate representatives of the Tamils in Sri Lanka.”

The above resolution is perhaps one of the most important as it also restates the idea that the LTTE is the voice of *all* Tamils and that the Tamil diaspora in Canada is a homogeneous group who desire *only* the LTTE to represent them. As stated previously, the Tamil diaspora is by no means a homogeneous group but for the LTTE, the creation of the image of a homogeneous group will aid in the advancement of the cause of Tamil Eelam.

²³ The hope is that pressure from a ‘unified’ Tamil diaspora will remove the LTTE from the list in Canada.

The relevance of Pongu Thamizh can be seen in the way the event connects people to their Tamil identity and re-states ideas of Tamil nationalism and transnational ties. The link to the shared cultural identity is also carried over to the international level. Thus, the national character of the Tamil people, both in exile and 'at home' is maintained by connections to a common place, Tamil Eelam, which in effect denies any variation between local Tamil groups (*Times* 2000:197).

Tamil NGOs and associations work at the international level to promote a homogeneous Tamil cultural identity and bond people of the Tamil diaspora through space and time (Szersynski 2002:56; 60). Modern media, such as movies and newspapers also work to connect diasporic people together (Tambiah 2000:172) and produce a Pan Sri Lankan Tamil identity, which becomes an important way of uniting people (Tamil Canadian 2004). International networks are set up connecting the Tamil people in Canada to an international network of Tamils articulating a singular goal of Tamil freedom.

To reiterate, the Tamil community is by no means a homogeneous group, Tamil people's views cross the spectrum, in terms of politics and culture (TSVP 2004). However, interaction with the public and political identity of a diaspora Tamil carries with it a certain sense of culture cohesiveness. Individuals are defined through their interactions, or lack of interactions, with the community. Thus, identity and issues of belonging are still managed by the Tamil networks. There are many Tamil events which are run by organizations whose membership consist of people who went to the same college in Sri Lanka (Mahajana Old Boys' Association, Puthru Old Students' Association, Hindu Ladies Old Students' Association and so on), or are from the same

village (Kondaville²⁴ functions, Zambia- a group Tamil people who were in Africa before coming to Canada - functions and so on). The interesting aspect of these organizations (which I will not deal with in the thesis) is the creation of a generation of Tamil children who are bound by their affinity to these groups, though they have never gone to the school or lived in the village. These groups underline a central idea in the Tamil diaspora; that the cultural survival of Tamils cannot only exist in Sri Lanka. In fact, the survival of Sri Lankan Tamil culture is largely dependant on the Tamil community abroad (*Times* 2000:197), while the LTTE fight for a place for that culture. The fulfillment of the diaspora's obligation is the founding of Tamil music, arts, etc.

Understanding the value of the Tamil diaspora is essential in order to understand the role that the diaspora plays in development in Sri Lanka. As the preceding section illustrates, the Tamil diaspora is not only a source of income for Tamils in Sri Lanka, but also a source of cultural and nationalist support. However, the relationship is not all one sided as the LTTE also have a role to play in the development of the Tamil diaspora and its politics and culture. In return for the monetary and emotional support offered by the diaspora, the LTTE provides Tamil people with news about family in Sri Lanka, organizes cultural events, which again highlight support for Tamil Eelam, and encourage the teaching of Tamil language and arts to children (Fuglerud 2001:198). The LTTE's involvement in the maintaining Tamil identity aboard and at home, in Sri Lanka, also further works to legitimize their claim as the representative of the Tamil people.

The Next Generation of Tamils

²⁴ Kondaville is a village a few kilometers outside of Jaffna. Many village groups have meetings and dinners annually, so that they can maintain the village ties and connections that existed in Sri Lanka.

Tamils in Canada are entering an interesting stage of the diaspora experience, as children of the Tamil diaspora are coming of age. Most Tamil youth left Sri Lanka when they were too young to remember the country or were born outside of Sri Lanka. One can assume that the relationship between the younger generation of the Tamil diaspora and the homeland will shift dramatically, as Tamil youth depend on organizations to help define their cultural identification. Amongst the Tamil Canadian diasporic community the LTTE and its branch organizations have been the most aggressive in maintaining Tamil culture and identity.

As with any diaspora group, as future generations are born, their familial and friendship ties to the homeland grow weaker, the next generation does not necessarily have the same experience of growing up in the homeland. There is a space created by the loss of information provided by those connections, a space either filled by the LTTE and/or media. The reason that I point specifically to the LTTE is because any information and news coming directly out of Tamil Eelam will most likely be with the approval of the LTTE. The LTTE are the only source for information in certain regions of Sri Lanka, as they control these areas. The LTTE strictly monitor information entering and leaving their areas and ensure that the 'outside' public is informed by releasing information directly to the Tamil population, including the diaspora, through new letters, web sites and international branch organizations. When I returned from my fieldwork in Kilinochchi, many of my father's Tamil friends would ask me what I thought about the area. My answer would always be how impressed I was with the way that Kilinochchi was developing and with the way the LTTE was overseeing that development. However, most of my dad's friends would then say to my dad "Of course she likes them, she was

not there when they began or saw what they did.” By questioning my father’s friends further I was able to get stories of the LTTE that cast them in an unfavourable light, but stories that most people (in my generation) are not aware of. Due to my lack of direct involvement with the LTTE, my interactions and opinions of them were guided by my understanding of the Sri Lankan conflict, which naturally was biased towards the Tamil side and thus the LTTE.

The “natural” bias towards the Tamil side of the story is oneway in which the LTTE unifies Tamil youth, by presenting themselves as the advocates for the protection of the ‘true’ Tamil story. In 2002, the LTTE organized a protest at Parliament hill to end the Canadian Government ban of the LTTE as a terrorist organization. Though the protest never happened, with the Canadian government passing the bill on an earlier date, the organization of the event drew on Tamil sentimentalities, underlining negative outcomes for Tamil people in Sri Lanka if the LTTE were banned. In fact, the organizers of the event approached all Ontario universities and their Tamil Students’ Associations to make a presence at the protest, in this way directly involving the Tamil youth. The main message presented at this meeting was “don’t do it [protest against the banning] for the LTTE, but for the oppression of the Tamil people by the SLA and the GoSL. Show them the strength of the Tamil population, and that we (the Tamil diaspora) will not stand by while groups discredit the Tamil people.”²⁵ The ban was seen as a way of disempowering *all* Tamil people.

²⁵ This comment was made at the York University Tamils Students’ Association (TSA) meeting, to the general members. The comment about discrediting the Tamil people harks back to an earlier protest organized by the same group in 2000. That protest will be discussed in greater detail further on in the chapter, but was attended by all university TSA and was more of a youth centred protest. The decision at the end of the meeting was to attend the event and show our support.

Tamils living in Canada are shaped by the many events, which aim to unify, create and solidify their Tamil identity. The above-mentioned protest was not the only one to occur in Canada in support of Tamils and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Protests by the Tamil diaspora have been occurring since 1985. In 1987, Tamils protested at Parliament Hill when the GoSL cut off medical support and Red Cross aid to the northern provinces (see Rabinovitch 1987 and *Toronto Star* 1987). In 1988, the Tamil population protested outside the Indian High Commission, asking for the withdrawal of the IPKF (see Weerasinghe 1988). In 1995, 3,500 Tamils held a candlelight vigil at Queens Park to make a stand against the Canadian government's support of SLA military attacks on Jaffna (Millar 1995). All of these protests worked to create the image of an Tamil identity existing within the Tamil diaspora. It also worked to introduce Tamil youth to the plight of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka and re-discover their connection to their homeland.

Establishing a connection to the homeland is important as it creates a desire in Tamil youth to aid the homeland. As mentioned previously, the TSA's goals are to create and maintain Tamil culture, providing an access point for those who would like to 'rediscover their roots' and meet other Tamil youth. However, with the current ceasefire, we find that the movement to re-discover roots have shifted to Tamil youth venturing to Sri Lanka and the northern provinces, to see their "motherland" (Vision TV 2003). Tamil youth are becoming invested in Sri Lanka (Sriskandarajan 2002:301) and student groups are a prime example of this commitment.

In Canada, The Student Volunteer Program sends volunteers to work in the redeveloping north and east; the Tamil Youth Movement raises donations and sends volunteers to harder hit areas of the north and east. Canadian Tamil media are perhaps the

most significant example of Tamil youth identity. There are currently over fifty Tamil-Canadian magazines, half of which are also in English, two twenty-four hour (private) radios stations,²⁶ a Tamil television station and a Tamil radio station on the mainstream FM band wave, both located in Toronto. This list does not even include web pages and Internet sites, the most popular method by which people express their identity as Tamils. For example, Tamilcanadian.com was started by a group of students from Canadian universities and colleges and their Tamil Students Associations whose goal is to “keep the public informed” (Tamil Canadian 2005). Whether support from the diaspora can be maintained in subsequent generations is the question that I believe faces the LTTE and Tamil nationalists. Also within that larger question is that of the role and place of Tamil women within the changing Tamil diaspora, Canadian society and what the LTTE call the ‘new Eelam state.’

Tamil Women and their Stories

Although there have been many people who have written on gender in Sri Lanka, most have focused their efforts on gender in the Sinhala community. Joke Schrijvers’s article, “Motherhood Experienced and Conceptualized: Changing Images in Sri Lanka and the Netherlands” (1993), focused on motherhood and societal interactions in a rural fishing village and her article *Fighters, Victims and Survivors: Constructions of Ethnicity, Gender and Refugeeness among Tamils in Sri Lanka* (1999) examined the changing role of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. Even works on the pre-colonial analysis of gender, such as Sirima Kiribamune’s (1990) “Women in Pre-Modern Sri Lanka”, are

²⁶ To gain access to Tamil Radio, a specially modified radio is required and is only available from shops that serve the Tamil Canadian population.

focused on the role of women in the Sinhala kingdoms. The limited academic attention to gender in the historic Tamil community can be attributed largely to the previous inability of academics and researchers to access the north and east regions of Sri Lanka during the conflict.

The ability of women within the diaspora to understand the status of women in Tamil Sri Lanka largely depends on the materials and research that they can access. The fact that there is very little written on women from Sri Lankan Tamil society means that the volunteers' expectations of women in Sri Lanka would be largely drawn from stories handed down to them by their parents of growing up in Sri Lanka, news from the LTTE and their portrayal of women as well as comparable literature from India.

In terms of writing by Tamil women in Sri Lanka, the literature reflects the current military and political situation instead of ethnographies of women's everyday life. Much of the literature is concerned with the way that Tamil women's roles have been altered as a result of the conflict: for example there is an ethnohistory of the 'Birds of Freedom,' the women's wing of the LTTE. The major writer on the lives of Tamil women in the conflict has been Adele Balasingham, wife of LTTE negotiator Anton Balasingham and an LTTE feminist writer. Her books, *Women and Revolution: The Role of Women in Tamil Eelam National Liberation Struggle* (1983) and *The Will to Freedom* (2002), explore the role of women in the LTTE. Adele Balasingham pays attention to the ways that women in the LTTE have responded to the crisis of the Tamil situation, thereby justifying their role and position within the struggle.

However, there are authors such as Qadri Ismail whose article "'Boys will be Boys': Gender and National Agency in Franz Fanon and LTTE" (1992) and Radikha

Coomaraswamy, a UN agent, whose article “A Question of Honour: Women, Ethnicity and Armed Conflict” (2003) criticizes the exploitation of Tamil women by the LTTE. Both authors are critical of the supposed role that Tamil women play in the nationalist struggle. They reiterate the idea that the LTTE is a masculine organization, and thus cannot successfully incorporate women in its proto-masculine framework. Thus, they argue that the roles that women play are at best minimal and superficial.

Information on Sri Lankan Tamil women in the diaspora is only just beginning to emerge. As mentioned before, the first generation of Tamil-Canadian immigrants, that is children of the 1980s immigration to Canada, are coming of age armed with the knowledge of both their Tamil and Canadian histories. They are actively engaging in debates about identity and the role of women. Tamil diaspora magazines are beginning to address the roles of women within Tamil society (see *Tamils' Information, TOTamil*) and Tamil web pages, such as Tamil Canadian.com, ensure that gender issues are dealt with in the community by providing information on gender in the struggle.

Gender in the Struggle: Women of the LTTE

Prior to the 1980s, there existed a strict code of behaviour and social conduct within Tamil Sri Lanka. In the words of Fuglerud (2001:202) it was a “code of conduct, in which the segregation of the sexes and restricted behaviours of women are central elements, a code expressing itself in an extreme female prudishness.” In fact, women’s position before the struggle was seen as being limited and their role confined to the private, not public, sphere. For women fighters, the desire to join the struggle sprung from the same desires as their male counterparts, permeated in nationalistic discourses

(Alison 2003:39). However, the automatic inclusion of women in nationalistic movements is not a fact but a struggle within itself (Balasingham 1983:11).

Sri Lankan Tamil society has been described as one in which a women's position is dependant on her family and thus her behaviour is reflective of the family. To wilfully engage in the public sphere removes her from the ideals (obedience, passiveness, timidity and ignorance) of femininity desired by the Tamil social and moral codes (Balasingham 1983:10; de Mel 2003:65; Fuglerud 2001:202). Women within the movement had to fight to be included but, at the same time, the LTTE had to ensure that they maintained the respect of the larger Tamil community by making sure the women involved in the struggle were above reproach. Thus, involvement in the struggle for women was, at the beginning, within a very limited space and consisted of activities which were of a 'feminine nature', such as cooking, medical care and so on (Balasingham 2004:1). These tasks did not place women on the front lines and were purely symbolic in nature (Ismail 1992:1677). However, the LTTE itself is proud of being very inclusive of women in the struggle and boasts of its Birds of Freedom (Alison 2003:32; *Asiaweek* 1998:30; Balasingham 1983:30; Balasingham 2004). The Birds of Freedom officially began on July 1, 1987 but women have been fighting in the nationalistic struggle since its inception (de Mel 2003:57). The position of women within the struggle can be seen when looking at LTTE web sites, such as Eelam web, where Adele Balasingham's article appears to commemorate International Women's Day, with a article on the Birds of Freedom, providing their "proof" that the LTTE both values and works towards women's emancipation.

A woman Black Tiger brought the involvement of women in the LTTE to the world's attention with the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, on May 21, 1991. The justification for the murder of Rajiv Gandhi was that there had to be accountability for the 'crimes' committed by the IPKF on the Tamil populace, especially on Tamil women. Thus, the LTTE used a female cadre seemingly for two reasons: Firstly, she could get closer to Gandhi than a male counterpart (she killed Rajiv Gandhi while placing a flower garland around his neck) and secondly, she became the symbol of women empowered through their involvement in the LTTE.

With the assassination of Gandhi, the LTTE released stories which spoke of the anonymous suicide bomber's rape and molestation at the hands of the IPKF; she was the natural choice to carry out 'justice'. By 'empowering' the female cadre to seek 'revenge' on the person responsible for her 'humiliation' and loss of honour, the LTTE was granting back a measure of that 'honour' by making her death and sacrifice a testament to the suffering of her people and making her a martyr on behalf of her people. Her anonymity also perversely ensured that she had no history; her story was that of the Tamil woman, and her suffering. Thus, by de-victimizing her, the LTTE made her a symbol of victimization within the Sri Lankan state. The involvement of women in the LTTE and in acts such as the above-mentioned, play on the image of women as the main victims of the crimes of the IPKF and the GoSL, and seeks to grant a measure of moral latitude to the LTTE and their violent acts of revenge.

By using the exploitation of women's bodies as a justification, the LTTE is able to appease both the desire for revenge by Tamil women who were accosted by the IPKF, as well as reclaim their role as the protector of Tamil people, as they failed to protect

women. By allowing the woman cadre to commit the act of killing Gandhi, the LTTE invokes the image of equality within its ranks and also sanctions women's desire for revenge, no longer making it a masculine emotion. Thus, the assassination of Gandhi can also be viewed as a marketing tool for new recruits. Women in the LTTE are now able to *publicly* participate in the struggle and occupy a place of honour for their sacrifice; they are no longer bound by the codes of conduct imposed on them by Tamil society. Ironically, women in the movement become bound by the discipline and modes of behaviour imposed on them, by the (largely male) LTTE leadership.

Women's involvement in nationalist struggles presents an image of moral righteousness and sanctions, as women are perceived to be the moral guardians for society (de Mel 2003:57). Conflict itself is understood as being a masculine form of engagement, and the LTTE itself had very masculine beginnings (de Mel 2003:57; Ismail 1992:1677). The organizational set up of the LTTE was based on a patriarchal idea, drawing on the imagery and power of the older brother. The cadres refer to Prabhakaran as *Anna*, literally meaning older brother. In referring to the leadership in such a way, control is given, in faith, to the older brother whose responsibility is to care for the 'family'. Thus, the question of women in the LTTE must address the issue of whether women are an active part of the 'violent struggle' (de Mel 2003:57) or purely symbolic in nature, especially considering the LTTE's very masculine framework (Ismail 1992:1677).

Despite this very pertinent question, it is important to recognize that women's role and position in Tamil society has changed in the last twenty years. Participation in the LTTE opens up venues to women that had previously not existed for women in Tamil society. The women's political wing of the LTTE is said to be currently working on

“abolishing the dowry system, eliminating all sexual discrimination and ensuring that Tamil women have control over their own lives” (Fuglerud 2002:202). Women involved in the movement have also had the opportunity to become leaders, fighters, poets, intellectuals and philosophers (de Mel 2003:57). The women’s wing has their own newspaper that addresses women’s issues in Tamil society and is funded by the LTTE. The newspaper presents women within the struggle with an opportunity to voice and address their concerns. War and nationalist struggles are not limited in the way that they impact women in the society. However, real change cannot be seen nor claimed until the struggle is over and the ‘new roles’ that women have undertaken are sustained into the new society.

Gender Conceptualised in “Tamil Canada”

For the purpose of this thesis, I am going to focus on the manner in which Tamil women in Sri Lanka are represented to the Tamil diaspora as opposed to a study of Tamil women in the diaspora.²⁷ By examining the way the Tamil women living in Sri Lanka are presented to the Tamil diaspora, the gendered assumptions the volunteers carried with them can be better understood; how did the volunteers think about Tamil women in Sri Lanka? Let us start by examining the LTTE’s relationship to women as portrayed to the diaspora. The LTTE utilizes the image of the great protector and especially uses the image of the oppressed women to garner the support and sympathies of the Tamil diaspora.

²⁷ As the focus of my research was on the experiences of Tamil women in Kilinochchi, it would be unfair to discuss the diaspora experience of Tamil women, as I did not talk to a sample of Tamil women in Canada.

Prabhakaran has been quoted as saying that the involvement of women in the LTTE is the greatest achievement of the movement (de Mel 2003:59). However when mentioning the oppression of women, Prabhakaran does so in terms of fighting as a nationalist to change the greater Tamil oppression (Alison 2003:45). The image is thus created that only a woman involved in the nationalist movement can create change and stand against her oppressors, embodied in state policies. Her participation with the male cadres is implied to create change within the new society that she is working to construct. The idea is that change can only occur when the LTTE is victorious and Eelam, the embodiment of LTTE ideals, is thus passed on to the diaspora. The Pongu Thamizh event, mentioned earlier in this chapter, also underlines the image that a 'free' Tamil homeland will equal the liberation of women from male domination.

However, as mentioned before, despite the images of empowered women that the LTTE presents to the Tamil diaspora, they still utilize images of the victimized mother/sister to mobilize the Tamil diaspora. For example, in the 1995 candlelight vigil in Queen's Park, a Tamil Canadian vigil organizer said, "120 people have been killed...out of which 20 are children, 13 are women and still bodies are being dug out of the debris" (cited Millar 1995:1). Sympathies for children and women are played upon as they represent the vulnerable sections of society. The speaker also follows up the image of women with the macabre image of bodies being dug out, thereby almost forcing the listener to picture *women's bodies*, the symbolic site of the motherland, being callously destroyed and brought to the surface, as one would unearth the ruins of a civilization. There was no mention that over 80 males had died and in deliberately omitting the male from the suffering, the woman becomes the one to bear the burden of the crimes

committed against the Tamil people. Thus the power of the female to actively change her life is invalidated and she becomes a passive participant in death and in the use of her imagery.

The desire is to create anger and a sense of injustice in the Tamil diaspora, by invoking the image of the helpless female or the wronged female. By drawing on Fuglerud's comment that Tamil diaspora functions on a hierarchal nature, the imagery of the helpless female strikes a chord with diaspora's sense of moral obligation to Tamil women. The moral obligation is established by the patriarchal codes that still govern the diaspora. For example, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, in 2000 the university TSA organized a protest at Parliament hill to stand against 'atrocities committed by the SLA' in Jaffna. The story that was highlighted at this event was the gang rape of a young Tamil woman by the SLA. The story, told by her family in Canada, gave a sense of moral righteousness to the protest, but more significantly to the cause. It also created a sense of justice being served on behalf of the girl, who could not receive justice in Sri Lanka. By exposing her circumstances to the larger global community, the story of the girl's life and rape was sacrificed to the righteousness of the Tamil cause.

The imagery of helpless females does not only extend to women in Sri Lanka but also in Canada. In 2000, a protest was held in front of the Sun Media offices across the country in regards to an article that they published stating that the LTTE garner funds in Canada by methods such as drug-trafficking, welfare fraud, prostitution and so on. The organizers of the protest chose to highlight the comment that Tamil women were forced to become prostitutes to raise money for the cause as a way of gaining support from the

Tamil community (Times 2000: A3). The organizers used the defamation of the character of Tamil women to symbolize the humiliation of Tamils and Tamil culture.

The statement that Tamil women were prostitutes was seen as the greatest insult (Times 2000: A3) to Tamils and an error that required correction. An interesting point of notice here is that women in the Tamil diaspora participated in the protests and thus were actively involved in the 're-claiming the honour' of Tamil women. Again, when the York TSA was presented with the 2002 protest, one of the presenters drew upon this earlier event by saying, "they called our women prostitutes but we showed them who our women were when you marched that day. Like that, let us show them who we are and that Tamil people will not take this lying down"(Personal notes, York University Tamil Students Association meeting on marching on Parliament Hill, March 14: 2002) Though the 2002 protest was supposed to stop the Canadian government from banning the LTTE and had no direct relevance to women, the imagery of women was still utilized, this time as symbolic of the wronged movement.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the Tamil diaspora in Canada and gender in the nationalist movement, themes which are essential in understanding the perspectives towards Sri Lanka, the LTTE, and Tamil women volunteers who went to Sri Lanka in the summer of 2004. Our interactions and understanding of our cultural identity shape us. The politicized Tamil diaspora has attempted to maintain and pass on Tamil culture and sentiment to subsequent generations; the maintenance of those transnational ties will depend on how connected the future Tamil diaspora feels to Tamils in Sri Lanka. The

current Tamil diaspora holds strong links to the homeland, which enables Tamil culture, framed partly by the LTTE, to remain as well as the sense of obligation to the homeland.

I also attempted to discuss the way that women in Sri Lanka were perceived in the Tamil diaspora. Only by understanding the way that the diaspora was encouraged to think about women in Sri Lanka, could one fully comprehend the impact of the volunteers in Vanni and Vanni on the volunteers. There are two images of women that are presented to the Tamil diaspora, both quite different. There is the image of the 'noble' LTTE cadre, who is fighting for her rights and that of her people. She is active and empowered to seek revenge on those who wronged her. The second image is that of the 'innocent civilian', those women who could be your mother, sister and/or friend. She symbolises the destruction of Tamil society, culture and people. She must be protected, as it is the obligation of all Tamils to watch out for their own.

Paradoxically these two conceptions of women exist side by side without seeming to conflict. The empowered woman is utilized within the Tamil provinces to give hope to the women of that area, while the innocent civilian is presented to the global public as a person with no hope, save the LTTE and the Tamil diaspora. This key difference in imagery, presented abroad and 'at home' in Sri Lanka, is important to note as it influences the way that the volunteers perceive the locals and the local perceive the volunteers.

Chapter Five: Tamil Development Volunteers in Kilinochchi

Introduction

I arrived in Colombo on July 8, 2004 amidst the quiet solitude of a midnight flight, the atmosphere lacking the usual hustle and bustle of an international airport, the signs of a thriving economy and cultural metropolis. Though I had been to Sri Lanka before, this was my first solo visit to the place of my ancestral roots. I was met at the airport by my cousin, whose home I would be staying in while I made preparations to continue on to Kilinochchi. Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka, was the location where I would be awaiting final travel confirmations from my contacts in Kilinochchi.

The most significant aspect about my stay in Colombo was the tension that remained in the city over the peace processes between the LTTE and the GoSL. Newspaper articles (see *Sri Lankan Guardian* June 2004- August 2004) reported on the rising ethnic and regional tensions and the sporadic outbreaks of violence. Propaganda was evident in the posters, sponsored by unknown groups, which wallpapered the main streets of Colombo, in Tamil, English and Sinhala about the distrustfulness of the “Vanni Tigers.” The posters stated that while the “Peace Tigers” were working with NGOs, implicitly hinting the LTTE was acquiring international funding, the “Vanni Tigers” were preparing for war. The posters epitomized the level of distrust that exists within Sri Lanka. Distrust not so much along ethnic lines but along regional lines: there was distrust of the militant Vanni Tigers, at the same time there was hope of working with the LTTE representatives who were working in Colombo, with the GoSL, for peace.

Colombo was also filled with great expectation, apprehension, resignation and cynicism about the upcoming elections. Though most people saw the elections as a positive step towards the peace process, there were still many unanswered questions about what the 'other side', the Tamils, and their 'representatives,' the LTTE, wanted from the government. At the time, the average Sri Lankan seemed indifferent to the war. During my time there, a survey showed peoples' ranking of upcoming election issues and ethnic conflict was the third most important concern after the economy and rural development (GoSL 2004).

Colombo was a city caught in the heart of the conflict. Even though an official ceasefire had been declared in February 2002, the city was still caught between the possibilities that peace afforded it and the distrust that arose from over twenty years of conflict. Ironically, the fear that was experienced was already set in the minds of the volunteers. Volunteers had been raised on stories of ethnic violence committed during our parents' time in Sri Lanka. Whenever the volunteers thought of Sri Lanka, they conceptualized Sri Lanka as it was in the 1980s, at the worst time in Sri Lankan history, the riots. They did not experience Sri Lanka's change from the 1980 to 2004 and so the impressions that existed were ones where the volunteers knew that life for Tamils had been dangerous.

For example, one of Sivakami's first questions was "Were you (Manivillie) afraid to go around in Colombo, since you didn't speak Sinhala and you are a Tamil?" (Personal notes: August 2, 2004). The fear of being Tamil was more ingrained into the volunteers as it further increased our natural apprehensiveness about working in a 'new' land. For the volunteers, the tensions that existed were more remembered experience of the past but

not from our memory but that of our parents and others who had lived through the ethnic conflict. None of the volunteers had lived in Sri Lanka for a great length of time and thus did not have our memories to provide us with an impression of life in Sri Lanka. In this instance, the past was shaped by the memory of escaping oppression and mob violence. These memories have shaped the lives of the people who remained in Sri Lanka, those who left for Canada, and those who returned after the ceasefire, leaving permanent stains on the Sri Lankan landscape.

Arriving in Kilinochchi

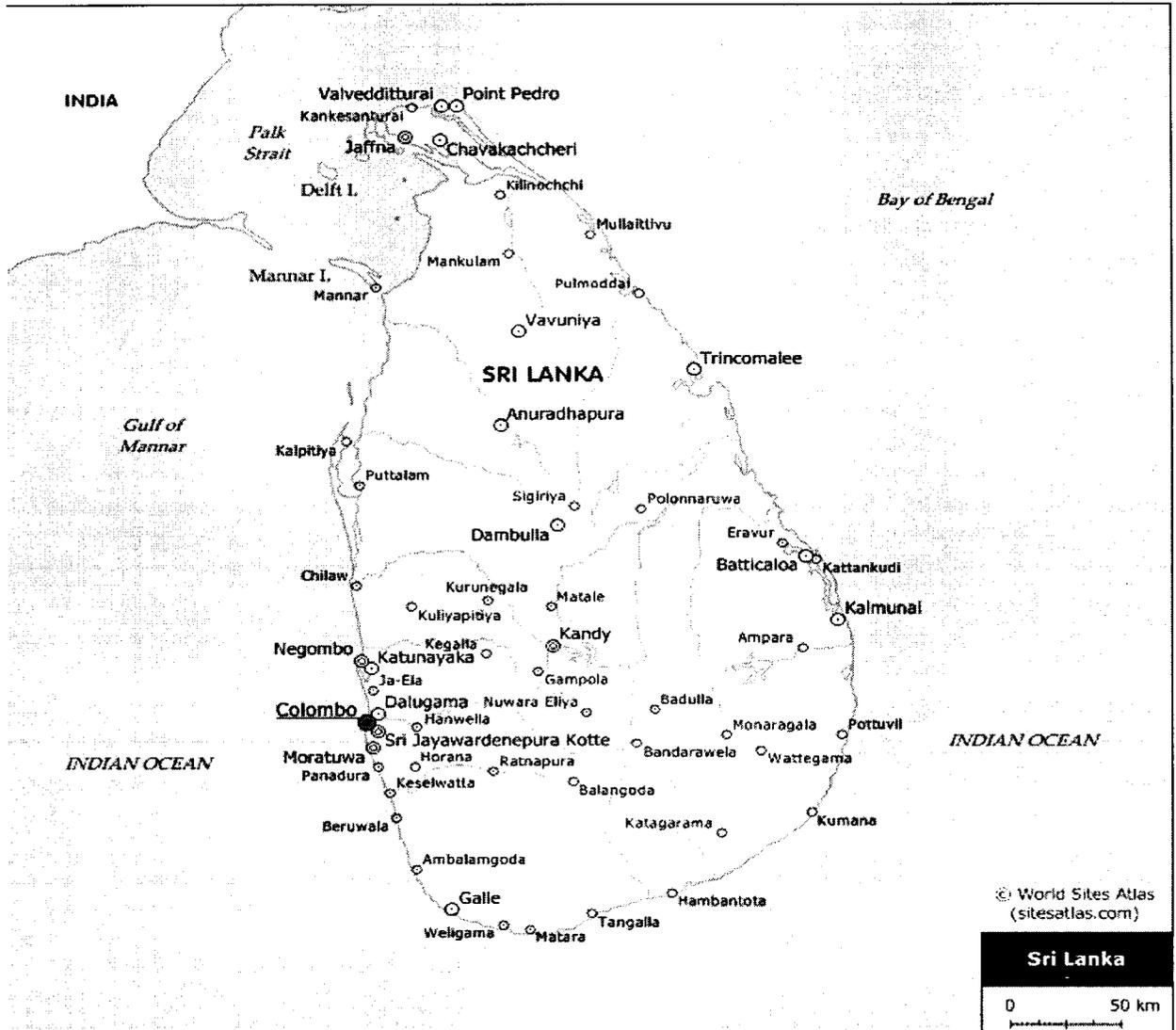
As you sit in the van, traveling 200 kilometres towards Vanni, the differences between Colombo and Vanni become apparent. In many ways, with its ethnic tensions, Westernized buildings,²⁸ capitalist economy, Buddhist and Hindu temples and so on, Colombo is the archetype for modern Sri Lanka. Vanni, Kilinochchi town specifically, on the other hand, is the heart and home of the LTTE and the prototype of Tamil Eelam. Kilinochchi is seen as the last place where ‘true’ Tamil culture remains (Father Michael, Bharma, Inbun and Varni). Though Jaffna still occupies an important part of the LTTE struggle, many people that I talked to considered it “corrupted by the Sri Lankan Army (SLA), who was enticing Tamil youth away from their culture and traditional way of life”; the SLA were doing this, my informants alleged, by showing Tamil youth “blue films,”²⁹ forcing them to smoke and other activities prohibited by the LTTE (Alagi; follow up interview Inbun and Panbu). The border regions are patrolled by both the

²⁸ Colombo boasts of many architectural features that reflect its identity as the metropolis of Sri Lanka and gateway to the “West.” Colombo city hosts its own set of twin towers, an occurrence due partly to its status as the capital of Sri Lanka and in part to the high level of foreign investments, and company headquarters in Colombo.

²⁹ Blue Films are movies that have scenes of sex and/or nudity.

LTTE and the SLA, with 100 meters of no-man's land between the two checkpoints monitored by the Red Cross.

Figure 4: Political Map of Sri Lanka



Source: Tamil Canadian.com

However, the real value of Vanni, to the politicized diaspora, lies in the ideological space that Vanni signifies, which can be understood as being the nucleus of Tiger 'culture'.

Thus, even with the tentative peace talks, both sides scrutinize entry into and out of

Vanni stringently. I deliberately use the term ‘Tiger culture’ as life in Kilinochchi is vastly different from other Tamil areas. There are prohibitions on drinking, smoking, teasing girls and any other behaviour that is banned within the LTTE organization itself. Tamil culture, mannerisms and language are enacted in a manner that is itself descriptive of the political struggle to maintain the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Tamil identity and ethnicity. In other words, Tamil culture in Kilinochchi is bound and constricted by Tiger politics and definition of ‘Tamilness’, a fact deeply evident when one considers the fact that the political wing of the LTTE undertakes the administration of Kilinochchi.

Within Kilinochchi the Tigers are referred to as *Iyakkam*,³⁰ a Tamil term meaning “movement” and thus carries less aggressive connotations than the LTTE, which invokes images of the militant nature of the group. *Iyakkam* monitors everything that occurs in Kilinochchi. In one instance an informant told me not to worry about anything because “*Iyakkam* would make sure that I was okay and would not be bothered”. When I asked if I just go to them with any problems, she said, “no they are always watching and noting people’s behaviour” (Panbu). Many participants re-iterated this fact but also emphasised the fact that they, especially the women, felt safer because *Iyakkam* was there taking care of them and looking after their own (Elili, Jennifer, Nadanam and Nalayani). Many other people expressed an absolute faith and trust in *Iyakkam*’s ability to take care of the people in the Vanni (Bharma, Chelvi, Elili, Gnanam, Inbun, Jennifer, Nadanam Nalayani, Panbu and Siva).

The ability of *Iyakkam* to look after the residents of Vanni was seen through the Tamil Eelam police force, courthouse, town hall, office buildings and so on. The Vanni

³⁰ When discussing the national or militaristic leaning and acts of the LTTE, I will continue to use the terms Tigers and/or LTTE. However when discussing the administrative ‘governing body’ of Kilinochchi, I will use the term *Iyakkam*.

region had its own political structure with a centralized authority. In many ways it was a working city-state. *Iyakkam* is concerned with proving its ability to show the world that Tamil Eelam can exist as a separate entity, thus they created a social-political system that would monitor local level problems in Kilinochchi and the rest of Vanni. For example, the Tamil Eelam Police Force had standardised uniforms, a centralized headquarters and maintained a strong presence on the A-9 road, the only major highway in or out of Kilinochchi. The police officers also maintained a strong presence at the Vanni end of the checkpoints; they are the face that first greets you as you enter Eelam.

As mentioned before, entry into and out of the Vanni is strongly monitored both by the LTTE and the SLA. Checkpoint procedures ensure that no one brings any illegal substances (e.g. contraband, weapons and so on) into and out of the Vanni and certain luxury goods, private vans and appliances, were taxed. All CDs, tapes and DVDs were checked for content. Finally, all visitors had to check into an immigration centre, which noted the people's entry in and out of Kilinochchi and required them to carry visitor "passports".

NGO relations

The 2004 Summer Internship was the third of its kind for The Student Volunteer Program, TSVP. This year was the second year that the NGO sent English language teachers to this specific technical institute. An American NGO, set up by Tamil ex-pats, created the Technical Institute (TI) in hopes of promoting Information Technology services for Sri Lanka's north and east. They were interested in making TI "the MIT of Sri Lanka," providing both employment and education options for the newly developing

northeast region (Personal Conversation Hari). However, development in Kilinochchi is severely hindered by the lack of both school supplies and well-trained English teachers (Chelvi and Gnanam). The general consensus was that in order for the youth of the newly emerging Tamil semi-state to succeed, they would have to be given the 'proper' tools, of which the ability to speak and comprehend English was of vital importance. However, before exploring the role of the volunteers as English teachers in Kilinochchi, I am going to briefly establish the history and the workings of the NGO under whose umbrella the research in Kilinochchi was completed, TSVP.

TSVP is an organization that was established in March 23rd, 2002 by Tamil students at University of Toronto and McMaster University in Canada. Impetus for the establishment of TSVP was motivated by news of the peace talks between the LTTE and the GoSL and urged on by the desire of the students to aid in the rehabilitation and reconciliation of post war Sri Lanka. The most vital members of TSVP and central to all their development incentives are the volunteers. TSVP prides itself on being a student-initiated organization that enables other students concerned with issues of development to participate in development work. TSVP is not concerned with creating ethnic solidarity as 75 percent of their membership is non-Tamil (TSVP 2004), but their current volunteer placement is focused on Sri Lanka. All their volunteers in 2004, however, were Tamils.

As mentioned before, the summer of 2004 was the third time that students had been sent over to volunteer in Sri Lanka. The first internship in 2002 was focused in the Jaffna peninsula (TSVP 2005). In 2003, TSVP moved out of the Jaffna area and worked with local organizations, such as schools and orphanages, within the Vanni territory. The summer of 2003 was also the first year that volunteers were specifically sent to teach at

the TI. Using the TI as a home base, TSVP volunteers were able to expand their interactions with the community at Vanni.

The summer internship of 2004 was in some ways different from previous years as the volunteers were now separated in terms of work. The first batch of summer interns were comprised of four women: a nurse who was pursuing her Masters in Nursing (Sivakami), a Doctor about to begin her residency in Canada (Chandra), a newly graduated university student with an interest in medical studies (Radha) and myself. Two undergraduate volunteers arrived for the last two weeks in August, overlapping with the original four volunteers for a period of a few days. As I did not spend more than a day or so with the second set of volunteers, I do not feel that I can adequately discuss their experiences in Kilinochchi and thus are omitting them from my analysis. However, the debriefing reports of all the volunteers will be used in the analysis of experience and gender in Kilinochchi.

The volunteers were situated at two locations in Kilinochchi; one was the TI, where Radha and I taught, though I was the only volunteer to live there. The rest of the volunteers resided at a guesthouse, which was set up specifically for health interns from abroad who work in Kilinochchi. Radha stayed at the guesthouse, as she was volunteering in both sectors of health and education. Radha, Chandra and Sivakami shared one room and were housed with other health volunteers from different organizations. I stayed at the TI and shared a room with three other staff members, one of who was a private volunteer from the UK. Though we were housed at two different locations, the health volunteers spent most of their off time and evenings at the TI campus, as TI dorms housed other volunteers, students and staff, and thus created a more

social atmosphere where the volunteers could relax and interact with other people.

Therefore, the TI became the focus of interaction.

As mentioned previously, the summer of 2004 was the second time that the TI entertained student volunteers from TSVP. Thus the school was accustomed to a “foreign” presence on campus; our group was the sixth volunteer group to come through the school (Nakkeeran), as the parent organization sent its own volunteers to the TI.

During the time of my fieldwork, there were sixty-three students from various regions of Sri Lanka studying at the TI. Twenty-eight of them lived on campus, eleven boys and seventeen girls with the average age of the students being twenty-three years. The teaching, administration and special project staff also lived on campus with the students. The staff was composed of three volunteer staff members, myself not included, who were the (male) president of the school, a male volunteer who was heading up the TI projects and an older female volunteer English language teacher from the UK, Chelvi. Of the remaining fourteen staff members, three were female, the admissions assistant, Thangam, the librarian, Alagi, and Nalayani, who managed the servers. The rest of the staff were male teachers, who all came from Sri Lanka. Meals were served on campus for the residential students, and other students who were on a pay plan. Classes ran from 9 am to 6 pm, Monday to Friday and Saturday until 1 p.m.

The fieldwork for my research consisted of twenty-one formal interviews, the majority of which were with students who lived on the campus itself; they contributed nine interviews. Two of the respondents were members of the community who were not affiliated with the Technical Institute at all. Five of the respondents were staff members who worked at the TI, and another four of the informants were international volunteers

working in Kilinochchi. Finally, I have included an interview with students who were at the TI when the first batch of TSVP volunteers was there. The selection was done through cold calling; I approached the students to see if any of them would be interested in talking to me. I also specifically targeted a few students who seemed to have very defined ideas about the volunteers and gender in Sri Lanka. Sometimes, students and staff who wanted to talk to me about my topic approached me. The remaining data were gathered through less formal methods, including (but not limited to) personal conversations, stories told to me, and participant observation on 'site' -the campuses and in the volunteer run classes (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: List of Informants, Position in Kilinochchi and Sex

Informant	Position	Sex (M/F)
Chandra	TSVP volunteer; Intern ³¹ Leader	F
Radha	TSVP volunteer	F
Sivakami	TSVP volunteer	F
Alagi	TI staff	F
Gnanam	TI staff	M
Nakkeeran	TI staff	M
Nalayani	TI staff; TI graduate	F
Thangam	TI staff	F
Chelvi	TI volunteer; expatriate	F
Elili	TI graduate	F
Adaleru	TI student	F
Bharma	TI student	F
Dina	TI student	F
Inban	TI student	M
Jennifer	TI student	F
Kadhir	TI student	M
Nadanam	TI student	M
Panbu	TI student	F
Varni	TI student	F
Father Michael	Priest; social service sector	M
Siva	Bank manager	M

³¹ Though I recognize the differences in responsibility, for the purposes of this paper the terms intern and volunteer will be used interchangeably, though intern is the official title.

Local Perceptions

How can we develop without people to turn to? We don't yet have the resources to become independent and there are many needs that have to be met here, so we the people interested in bringing up Kilinochchi- need to entice people to come here. When the volunteers come, it is a benefit because you come with the intention of helping, but it still doesn't solve our long-term needs. (Gnanam)

The above comment, made by a teacher on campus, highlighted both the immediate need for volunteers and the frustration of development in Vanni. Though there was appreciation for the work and aid by international groups, there was also an accompanying knowledge that those who volunteer were only there for a short time. Many respondents talked about the fact that the volunteers were an acknowledged 'temporality', that is they spend only a short period of time in Kilinochchi. Their life is understood to exist outside of Sri Lankan customs and local norms but also away from the geographical and social reach of Sri Lanka. The volunteers were there for a certain period of time, after which they returned to the life that they have abroad and would not return (Alagi, Dina, Jennifer, and Nalayani). Thus, the role of the volunteer was interesting as the way the locals interacted with the volunteers was coloured by their knowledge that the volunteers were not there on a permanent basis.

The non-permanent status of the volunteer was a catalyst for people who lived on campus, as the students were eager to meet and interact with the volunteers before they left. The explicit desire to learn about the volunteers and their life abroad allowed many of the students to open spaces of discussion that they would not have otherwise asked of staff at the institute. It is also interesting to note that the volunteers occupied a separate place from the other teachers and staff members in both the minds of the students and the other staff, which was influenced by our age range as well. The youngest volunteer was

20 and the oldest volunteer was 28. Both the staff and students continuously referred to their pride in our “return” to Vanni, and yet felt a need to keep watch over us as well, as we were untutored in behaving in the proper manner (Personal notes August 2: conversation with Alagi). The ‘return’ home was a reference to the return to Tamil Eelam, and Tamil culture. None of the volunteers had been from the Vanni area; in fact none of us had friends or family who had been displaced to the Vanni region. The idea of ‘returning home’ encapsulated all that was to be achieved through the fight for Tamil Eelam, the seeming desire of the Tamil diaspora to have and maintain a Tamil homeland. Thus, the interaction between the locals and volunteers was also influenced by the way that the locals conceptualised the volunteers. However, before analyzing the way that the volunteers were framed, I am first going to discuss the location of my fieldwork, the Technical Institute’s campus.

On-Site Behaviours

The site of the TI campus is important to understand because it was there that gender was framed and discussed. As mentioned previously, the volunteers spent much of their ‘off-time’ on the campus, interacting with the students and staff. Thus, as a site of participant observation, it yielded many interesting interactions. The TI itself occupied an important place for the students who were studying there. When asked why they chose to go to TI as opposed to another program, many of the respondents discussed the fact that the TI was funded by an American NGO. Upon further questioning the respondents stated that they felt that by studying with TI they would have access to up and coming technology, technological innovation and research from the United States. The idea of TI

being an American institution and thereby providing access to “America” is an idea that must be understood to fully comprehend the ramifications of interactions between the volunteers and the students.

As noted, the TI campus was a middle space: in certain respects the space of the TI campus was both situated within Kilinochchi and the Vanni; in other ways it was a completely separate space of interaction and daily life. The unspoken but understood rules that existed in Kilinochchi were slightly less rigid on the campus, as both male and female students saw life at TI as being more open and closer to what they conceived of as life in the “West.”³² Life on campus, mainly for those who lived at the site, afforded the students a measure of freedom and independence that they did not have at home. Though it could be argued that the students were just going through the ‘normal’ processes of leaving home, the way that the students conceived of the space itself was different from the way that they looked at other locations in Kilinochchi. The differentiation could be seen in the way students felt that their behaviour was governed on campus. An incident, which highlighted this aspect, occurred during my time at TI; the Institute’s teaching staff, at the local bar, had seen a group of male students and though they were of age to drink, the LTTE disapproved of it. Drinking was not considered to be a part of Tamil culture and as stated previously, acts banned within the LTTE were closely watched in Vanni. The bar, 1-9,³³ was “specifically built to cater to the ‘foreigners’, as the locals would not be seen drinking in Kilinochchi” (Alagi). Though they had been reprimanded by the school president and put on probation, the common complaint was that they should be allowed to go to 1-9, as members of the staff

³² Notions of Western life will be explored further on in this chapter.

³³ 1-9 is a reference to A-9 road, which is the main road that connects Jaffna to Kandy.

also went there. The students were upset as they felt that the school did not treat them as adults and did not allow them the level of freedom that they expected at the TI. The president's argument was that the students were at TI because of the trust that their parents had placed in TI. However, after this incident both Radha and myself were approached by the four boys on probation and asked if we did not drink in the "foreign" bar and "were we not allowed the liberty to live a life the way we desired to in Canada" (Personal Notes July 23, 2004).

What is interesting to note here is that the boys made the assumption that both Radha and I drank, though they were aware that it was taboo within Tamil culture for girls to consume alcohol. The students assumed that since we were not brought up within the constraints of Tamil culture in Sri Lanka, and Eelam, that we had adapted to life in the west. Radha and I chose not to answer the questions but deflected the queries as we did not want to lie to the students nor create the image that drinking was allowed of Tamil women in Canada.

Conceptualizing "Western" Life

However, the idea of the volunteers being different from girls in Sri Lanka and Eelam requires one to ask the question of how the students perceive life in the West. When asked questions about how they conceptualized the West, the answers markedly differed between male students and female students. Broadly male respondents spoke of the West as something to be wary of, recognizing that the term "West" encapsulated more than a geographical location, but ideology as well. Their responses highlighted the way that Tamil women from "the 'foreign'" were dichotomized from Tamil women in

Eelam. The reason that I use the term Tamil women in Eelam is due to the fact that my respondents differentiated between Tamil women of the north and Tamil women of the south (mainly in reference to Colombo). A few respondents overtly called the Tamil culture that existed in Colombo a “corrupt culture, where women were not at all like the women of Tamil Eelam. The women have lost too much of their culture” (Inbun and Kadhir). I deliberately do not include Tamil women from the eastern regions in my analysis, as when I spoke to some of the students they discussed those women as being a mysterious group and not like other Tamil women. They, mainly the female students, also held deep superstitions about women from the east, telling me of a quote which states, “Any man that goes to the east will be so captivated by the women there, that he will not know his own family” (Interview Alagi and Bharma). The rupture in the LTTE solidarity between the north and east may have also caused the return of superstition and mythology regarding the east, as the scars of Karuna’s defection from the LTTE, were still fresh in the minds of many of the students there.

The male students saw the West as a place of economic opportunity, but that was also framed by the contextual developments necessary for Kilinochchi. The “West’s” role in Sri Lanka was seen in a development perspective, where innovation, funding and aid were made available to developing Eelam (Father Michael, Gnanam, Kadhir, Inbun, Nakkeeran and Panbu). One respondent, Kadhir, made the statement that though he appreciated help from the West, he at times did not like the way that those helping changed the culture. Kadhir made the point that when visitors from the ‘West’ come, they change the culture, especially Tamil culture. He went on to provide an example using clothes to answer my inquiry of how Tamil culture was changing:

As soon as the first person came back from 'foreign'³⁴ [life abroad], our culture changed. You always bring gifts to your family here, right? So did they, they brought clothes for their families. Clothes that we do not wear here. You bring us Western styles and Western fashion and people see it and want it. The girls especially see the way that you- the returning family members- dress and they want to look like that; they forget that they are not there but here. So, all these volunteers change culture because now there are more of you in western clothes.

Kadhir's definition of "Western" clothes did not just mean jeans or short skirts, as the volunteers dressed in long skirts and traditional "Indian" clothes, such as selva kameez,³⁵ but aspects such as the clothing, the style of the skirt (more fitted and tighter) differences in fabric weight, and so on. Kadhir's explanation not only highlighted the idea that culture was still embodied in the female form, as he specifically referred to changes in women's clothing, but also the ambiguous place that the "West" holds in development in Sri Lanka. Kadhir did not speak of male clothing and when prompted, Kadhir made the statement that most of the boys from abroad wore jeans and t-shirts, like their Sri Lankan counterparts. Though he did mention the difference in the fit of the clothes, men from Canada tended to wear loose clothes, while in Sri Lanka the style was more fitted.

Pragmatically, aid from the "West" is an acknowledged necessity, especially in terms of monetary aid, which was a sentiment expressed by almost all of my interviewees. But the impact of the volunteers' presence in Sri Lanka is approached cautiously and sometimes seen as being detrimental culturally. Another interviewee, a member of the Kilinochchi community, Siva, discussed the infusion of western 'style' which was accompanying the volunteers and aid workers in Sri Lanka: "As more people come from 'foreign', the more that 'foreign' fashion ends up in Sri Lanka, our girls see it

³⁴ "Foreign" was a term used to describe life in "West" or people who may have lived outside Sri Lanka and subscribe to ideas that are seen as 'Western'. In many ways, 'foreign' is a method of othering the volunteers, their experiences and lifestyles.

³⁵ A selva kameez is a long pant worn with a long, loose, flowing shirt. It is usually also accompanied with a shawl draped across the front of the shirt and over the shoulders.

and they want to dress in the same style.” Discussions with male participants about the “West” revolved around issues of change and though they were not adverse to the change itself, they were wary about the long-term effects on both Tamil culture and femininity. In the gaze of the majority of male participants, the “West” automatically took on connotations of “change.” By framing the male respondents’ views in this context, of cultural colonialism, I aim to highlight the idea that the participants of the study, and the students of the school, were aware of the unintended influence of volunteers and expatriates in the social space of Kilinochchi, Vanni and Tamil Eelam; regions which had been largely isolated from ‘outsider’ interaction by the conflict.

However, not all male responses to the “West” were negative; an informant from the Kilinochchi community discussed the changes that volunteers from abroad brought with them. Another informant, who will remain completely anonymous, saw the potential of volunteers to be critical of the prototype (Tamil) culture that existed in Vanni. The informant felt that “there are the problems in Kilinochchi that others can ignore. They- the administration of Kilinochchi- says that war has brought equality but I do not see it. I still see husbands hit their wives, the fathers their children. The role that you young people [i.e. the volunteers] can play is just by coming with an open mind and opening our mind to what is wrong with culture here.” The informant voiced the idea of change coming from outside as positive and, especially, since the volunteers were not “outsiders” entirely, they could potentially create change without seeming to do it from a Western perspective. The criticism and observations of the volunteers were perceived as coming from a more “informed space” than by non-Tamils working in Kilinochchi (Chelvi). The latter group’s observations and (at times un-popular) suggestions could be discounted on

the fact that they did not truly know nor understand Tamil culture. A comment made by a Tamil person, albeit one who either grew up or lived outside Sri Lanka, could not be discounted using the same argument, as it would undermine the Pan-Sri Lankan Tamil identity the Tigers worked to create as well as the volunteers' own feeling of giving back to their community.

Female participants of the study also discussed the “West” as a process of change but their remarks concentrated more on the way that the “girls returning from ‘foreign’ were very different from the people in Sri Lanka” (Alagi, Bharna, Dina, Jennifer, Nalayani and Thangam). The female participants also referred to the concept of ‘*style*’³⁶ and used it as the main differential between themselves and the volunteers. The implication of the word ‘style’ was not used to refer to specific clothing style, as had been the case with the younger male respondents, but was utilized to refer to the overall look of the volunteer and the ability to pursue that look. The look of the volunteers was situated within ‘Western’ concepts of style and was seen as affecting the girls (Siva). The volunteers were believed to have a different and ‘fresh’ look about them, which led to many students, boys and girls, to ask about beauty regimes and skin care maintenance. Adversely, there was also a desire to see the volunteers in ‘traditional garments’, such as the sari (Personal notes July 23).

The donning of the sari, or even pictures of volunteers in the sari, made them less ‘foreign’ and more Tamil. In Kilinochchi, clothing was conservative and served a purpose of differentiating people: most girls at the TI wore loose fitting long dresses, skirts and blouses or traditional selvar kamees; the LTTE cadres wore army pants, a plaid

³⁶ Style is italicised, as it is the term that the respondents used; they specifically used the English word ‘style’.

shirt and a utility belt; while women working in Kilinochchi 'government' sector wore saris. The volunteers generally subscribed to the same type of clothing worn by the TI students, loose clothes and salvar kamees, as it was the level of clothing that most volunteers were comfortable with and allowed them the most flexibility. It should also be noted here that generally all professional women in the Tamil areas of Sri Lanka wear saris, including and especially teachers. Thus, the sari worked as a tool to demystify the nature of the volunteers and construct the volunteers as being 'authentic'. Even though it was not worn on campus, the fact that we knew how to wear the garment or had pictures of us in saris made us Tamil.

Additional comments made by the female students centred on the idea that life in 'foreign' were more liberal. The comment made repeatedly when discussing the difference between women in the north (LTTE areas) and the volunteers was the statement, "in 'foreign' no one will talk (about what you do and your behaviour) but here everyone will talk (about you and what you do)" (Alagi, Adaleru, Bharna, Dina, Jennifer, Nadanam and Thangam). The students' images of life in the West was shaped by their interaction with the volunteers, by pictures from family abroad, media, family members who visit from abroad; however the group of women volunteers that they were interacting with was a very select, specific group of Canadian Tamil youth. To a certain degree, the volunteers were not defined by traditional cultural roles, as can be seen by the fact that these women were given permission by their family to go alone to Sri Lanka. The women volunteers' ability to leave their family and financial ability to travel to Sri Lanka itself was indicative of both their class and their upbringing, which is not necessarily a common phenomenon.

The idea that the community will not gossip about the activities of Tamil female volunteers recreated the 'foreign' space as one that was anonymous and thus less constrained. Behaviours of the volunteers that were not reflective of 'traditional Tamil culture' were excused on the basis that the same behaviour was how the volunteers acted in 'the West' with no problems. Thus many of the concepts of anonymity,³⁷ which could be understood as the idea that the volunteers were unbound by Tamil cultural and social norms in Canada, continued to surround the volunteers even in Kilinochchi. Here I return briefly to Humber's (2001) native stranger. The volunteers were seen as "native" in ethnicity but strangers in terms of actions and manners; as 'strange' as some aspects of Tamil life was to the volunteers, the volunteers were strangers to the locals and thus had a level of independence from most cultural restraints that other Tamil women would face. The students, staff and locals of Kilinochchi repeatedly told the volunteers "what you do here is okay because everyone knows that you are not from here" (Personal Notes July 22 and Aug 6; Adaleru, Bharna, Jennifer, Nadanam, Siva, Thangam and Varni). The irony of that statement lay in the fact that the actions and behaviours of the volunteers were carefully scrutinized by *Iyakkam*, a reality that the volunteers were made aware of both in Canada and Kilinochchi by TSVP, our intern leader and the higher administrative staff at the TI (personal notes July 21).

However, the comments made by the students further highlighted the duality of volunteer life, which was at the same time anonymous and public. The volunteers were anonymous as there were no family networks in Kilinochchi and thus 'community and ancestral' knowledge about the volunteers was limited. The TSVP volunteers had not

³⁷ By concepts of anonymity, I refer to the idea that volunteers were more socially permitted to behave in a certain manner, including behaviour that would be prohibited in native Tamil women. The behaviour was allowed as people felt that the volunteers would not have been socially reprimanded abroad.

grown up in Sri Lanka and so there were no 'stories' or facts about them within the village and thus they were an 'unknown' influence in the community. Essentially, this meant that the volunteers had to establish a place within the community and create connections. On the flip side, the other non-TSVP volunteers,³⁸ such as Chelvi who left in her 20s, were older and had grown up in Sri Lanka, had connections in Sri Lanka and could draw upon common histories, family histories and so on. Chelvi had a lesser degree of anonymity; however, she said it permitted her to move more freely within the community and more as a member of the Tamil community. The volunteers were also public figures as we were easily identified as the volunteers from Canada, and were representing TSVP.

Volunteer Encounters

The other side to the interactions between the locals/students and the volunteers is the experience of the volunteers themselves. Researching the 2004 TSVP volunteers in Kilinochchi was made easier by one fact: it was the TSVP volunteers' first time in the Tamil Eelam area and so they were neither haunted by personal memories of past events nor did they have romanticized notions of their past life in Sri Lanka. When the volunteers talked about Vanni and the people that they met, they were giving me their first impression not comparing it to what it was before the war. The volunteers were also more able to tell me about the differences between what they thought they would see and what life in Kilinochchi was like. Again, this was helpful because it allowed me to understand where their perceptions of gender in Sri Lanka were rooted. Their 'image' of

³⁸ I will also refer to this group as expatriate volunteers.

Kilinochchi was based on and drawn from stories from their family, old photos and general knowledge. When comparing the views of returning expatriate volunteers (i.e. those who had lived in Sri Lanka before the idea of Tamil Eelam) and the TSVP volunteers (those who had grown up outside Sri Lanka), the latter were largely unencumbered by 'past histories'. Returning expatriates tended to discuss Kilinochchi in comparative terms. I do not say this with the intention of meaning that the volunteers are 'better off' than other volunteers who had lived in Sri Lanka previously, just that in terms of research it was simpler to map the 'identities' of the TSVP volunteers and the ways in which the identities changed.

Due to Kilinochchi's political importance as the centre of LTTE activity, it had many volunteers to aid in its 're-development.' Many of these volunteers were older (30 years old and above) than the TSVP volunteers, professional level people who were returning expatriate volunteers. The expatriate volunteers, those who actually lived in Sri Lanka prior to the war and had memories of living in Sri Lanka, had a completely different experience than the student volunteers. Returning expatriate volunteers kept describing feelings of shock, surprise, pride and sadness (Personal Notes July 23 2004). The reason that I dichotomize the differences between both groups is to highlight the way that TSVP interns were framed and the ways in which they differed, based on the specific life experiences that provided a background for the TSVP volunteers and a comparative basis for the expatriates.

The returning expatriate volunteers were not just volunteers, they were people who had lived in the areas that they were now volunteering in. Thus they held identities as not just expatriate Tamils or volunteers but as members of the pre-war Tamil

community, which remained in people's memories. They were already connected to the people in the village and to the land. Thus, when the community and students discussed these volunteers, they continually talked about them as if they were still "Tamil" and not a product of the 'West' or the 'diaspora' experience as the TSVP interns were. Adversely TSVP volunteers were framed and understood by the locals as a product of Western hybridity and enabled the students to see the volunteers as a door to the 'West' with 'Sri Lankan' roots.

Framing the Volunteer

The way that the students interacted with the volunteers was framed by both the location of the Institute, and by the way that they conceptualized 'Western' life. As mentioned previously, the volunteers were an acknowledged temporality in the Vanni landscape. Therefore, volunteers in Kilinochchi were framed within a specific set of expectations and behavioural rules. The context within which the volunteers were framed was not the product of a one-way engagement but interaction between the volunteers and the people in Kilinochchi.

During my time in Kilinochchi, the volunteers 'altered' their personality and views so that they presented a more uniform representation of Canadian culture. Each volunteer had a different reason for being in Kilinochchi and felt differing levels of connection to their Tamil heritage but the locals were unaware of these differences and saw the volunteers in a more homogeneous fashion. There was a sense of solidarity created within the minds of the volunteers as well as the students. The volunteers drew upon their commonality as being children of the Tamil diaspora to create a connection

with each other (Canadian) and the students (Tamil). In many ways, the return to Sri Lanka reaffirmed the Tamil identity of the volunteers.

Sivakami felt the connection to her homeland and the need to improve the status of life for people in Kilinochchi when she came to Sri Lanka for the first time the previous year; she had left Sri Lanka when she was one year old and moved to Nigeria for a while before her family settled in Canada. Sivakami had always wanted to work in a developing country providing medical services; on her first trip to Sri Lanka, she felt the need for her skills in Sri Lanka and her loyalty to the land rekindled. Throughout our time in Sri Lanka, Sivakami reiterated that she only recently started to discover her Tamil roots and she hoped that her brother would one day be able to open up to his heritage as well. The concept of land was important to Sivakami, as the village that her father was from was completely annihilated during the conflict and she had visited her mother's town on her last trip. On that trip and during the internship, Sivakami visited her mother's house and collected soil to bring back to Canada; it was to remind her of her roots and her connection to the land of her birth.

Radha had grown up in Vancouver, where the Tamil community had just sprung up.³⁹ She was curious about her cultural roots and wanted to explore Tamil culture. Due to her lack of exposure to other Tamil people, she admitted not having any Tamil friends in Vancouver; she was the volunteer who was most 'insecure' about her Tamil language abilities. Radha's desire in coming to Sri Lanka lay in the fact that she was curious to explore the Tamil aspect of her personality. She felt that she had lost some of her Sri Lankan Tamil identity as she had not grown up in Toronto and did not have access to

³⁹ The Tamil community in Vancouver is partly made up of Tamils who immigrated to Vancouver directly, but the largest proportion of the population of the 'community' is comprised of Tamil people who were first part of the Toronto Tamil population (Radha)

Tamil cultural resources, which were easily accessible in Toronto but non-existent in British Columbia. Radha, it turned out, was fluent in Tamil but she did not see her fluency until she was encapsulated within the Kilinochchi realm and was “forced” to act as interpreter for Sivakami. Radha’s comprehension of her depth of Tamil linguistic ability reflected, in many ways, her reconnection to her identity as a Tamil. She was constantly surprised by how much she knew about the language and the people when she had not grown up in that atmosphere, binding her to the experience of re-connection.

Chandra was one of the older volunteers, and had been in Sri Lanka more times than any of the other volunteers. Chandra recently graduated from medical school and was working with a local NGO in Kilinochchi, as well as with TSVP, as team leader of the 2004 summer interns; she was also responsible for networking future health projects. Chandra’s background itself was diverse, as she had lived in both Malaysia and Toronto, two places with large Sri Lankan Tamil populations. She had always been interested in returning to Sri Lanka and working with the Tamil community there. In Chandra’s case her Tamil-ness was defined and ingrained in every aspect of her mannerisms; that is to say, she felt strongly connected to her Tamil identity. Of all the volunteers, she was the most aware and conscious of her behaviour and the need to present the image of being “Tamil” to effectively do the necessary volunteer work (Chandra).

I⁴⁰ was there to engage in research and find my sense of place in Sri Lanka. I wanted to know what the country that I had researched, written and talked about was really like and what needed to be done there. To say that I was deeply connected to my Tamil heritage would be false, but I had spent my years at York University’s

⁴⁰ I include an analysis of myself, as I was also a volunteer at the institute and do not want to seem like I have removed myself from the events which occurred or the analysis of the relationships between the locals and the volunteers.

Environmental Studies undergrad program ‘re-discovering’ my Tamil roots. I believe a large part of what drove me back to Sri Lanka was the sense that this was my country and I must do what I can to help development in the area. However, my main motive for travelling to Sri Lanka was the curiosity about whether “my country and my people” (specifically Tamil Eelam) would accept me as a Tamil woman; whether I still maintained some Tamil identity or if I had become “Canadian” and only held ‘true’ to my Tamil culture only in a superficial sense.

Each volunteer was different and their reasons for going varied, but to the local population they presented themselves as expatriates with common knowledge and they were defined, by the locals, in terms of the knowledge that they imparted to the people of Kilinochchi. Many people in Kilinochchi saw the primary role of the volunteers as the providers of knowledge and a resource for the further development of Tamil Eelam (Chelvi). The image thus created of a ‘Tamil native’ returning to help the people of Tamil Eelam was not illusory but a representation that was beneficial for both the interns and the NGO to maintain. The process and reasons for maintaining the connection to Tamil Eelam will be explored in the next section.

Preparations and Training

Soon after the peace talks commenced TSVP was instigated by a group of Canadian Tamil students who were interested in seeing the development of what they considered their ancestral home. After the first year of interns went to LTTE controlled areas- what was the disputed areas in Jaffna - there was pressure for the TSVP to fall under the banner of the TYM (Tamil Youth Movement), which was under the umbrella

of the LTTE. TSVP declined that offer and changed its mandate to become more international. However, to successfully work in the Vanni and to promote their programs, TSVP volunteers are expected to present a certain image. Interns are reminded that they must always be aware of the activities that they are engaging in and be aware enough to minimize the societal impact that they have (Chandra, Radha and Sivakami; personal notes July 25). TSVP strongly adheres to its reputation of neutrality and volunteers are not to become involved in any political activities during their internship.

The key image that the volunteers wanted to present was that of a resource for the people of Kilinochchi. To be otherwise would make the volunteers' ability to work in Kilinochchi a struggle and an uphill battle (Chandra). When the health volunteers first arrived in Kilinochchi, they had to fight with the administration every day to have someone take them to the hospitals where they could do their rounds and assist the doctors. Sivakami had to visit the local coordinator every day for a week to remind him that she was a trained resource that they were squandering unless they put her to use. Once Sivakami and Chandra were identified as resources that were beneficial to the development of Eelam, their interactions with the local NGO changed. The change occurred with the arrival of a male doctor from the United Kingdom; he had been to Kilinochchi before and was well acquainted with the hospital administration. His sex, age and status afforded him automatic respect from the hospital staff. He used his influence to install Chandra and Sivakami at Kilinochchi General Hospital.

Though the students automatically associated with the volunteers in a certain way, the volunteers themselves were there to 'learn' from the people in Kilinochchi town (Chandra, Radha and Sivakami). TSVP's mandate focuses not on a top down

development structure but a process by which the local population is an active participant and actively engaging in all (re-) development activities. The volunteers were made aware that there was a fine line/balance between taking over and “saving people” and helping the people (Chelvi). Thus, the image that the volunteers had to project was one that was both of the ‘teacher’ and student, which made the volunteers more approachable and the students more willing to talk to the volunteers. The idea of being able to converse with the volunteers is perhaps the largest draw for the students. Though the volunteers were there to teach English, the fact that they knew Tamil helped to seal relationships between the students and the volunteers. During our time in Kilinochchi, to encourage the students to talk in English, Radha pretended not to speak any Tamil and claimed only to know English. Rather than making it harder for Radha to interact with the students, the “lack of knowledge” encouraged the students to attempt to teach Radha Tamil. They desired to re-connect Radha to her Tamil roots and her Tamil language. The staff and students at the institute were proud of the way that they had helped many of the previous volunteers learn Tamil (Alagi) and explained Tamil culture to the people who volunteered there.

In this chapter, I have thus far introduced the way that the students thought about the volunteers and life in the ‘West.’ I have also looked at the way that the volunteers themselves were framed and the reasons for the particular framing. However, the question that has yet to be considered is how both of these phenomena are reflective of the socio-political culture that has developed in Sri Lanka, Vanni in particular, since the MOU. Thus, the following section will attempt to examine the particular reason behind the way that volunteers were perceived a certain way.

Narrated history, imagined realities and finding a 'home'

As the volunteers crossed the checkpoint into Vanni, we all heaved a sigh of relief, sharing feelings that we were now in “our own land” (Chandra, Radha and Sivakami). The idea of Vanni being a special site and a privileged region was consistently re-iterated to us by our drivers, as well as people in Vanni. The volunteers were told to inform anyone who asked that we were going to Vavuniya and only in Vavuniya admit that we were travelling further north to Kilinochchi. In essence, this created the Vanni site as a special place where few were given entrance. The traffic in and out of Vanni was composed largely of LTTE cadres, international and local aid workers and some government officials. Vanni was not a place for ‘tourists’ yet and travel was restricted and carefully monitored. The volunteers were given entrance to Vanni because we were part of the TSVP, a group that had started by claiming its Tamil identity and was still committed to the idea of development in Sri Lanka but we were still under surveillance by the Tigers.

Sri Lanka itself is undergoing an interesting stage in its development since the inception of the MOU. The costs of the war were becoming evident as we see the population dynamic of the Tamil population alter significantly, mainly due to death and emigration. In many cases, the grandparents are raising their grandchildren or many children have become orphans. With the change in the population structure, the traditional ways that knowledge is passed on to subsequent generations is also lost (Chelvi). The passing of oral histories and knowledge was not passed on from father or mother to child. The volunteers become essential here, as in many ways they are able to provide the “missing knowledge”. Chandra and Sivakami approached medicine in a

holistic manner and treated patients in Kilinochchi; however while talking to the returning expatriate volunteers, it became evident that some of the treatments that Chandra and Sivakami recommended were localized treatments which the expatriate volunteers knew from their time in Sri Lanka. Unfortunately for the Tamils who had been scattered during the war or had lost their parents, this knowledge was new. There was no older generation to pass on the 'wisdom' acquired through the generations. I remember a story that a TI worker told me. He had run into a very young man who said he had a sick cow and did not know what to do. When the TI worker went to see the cow, he realised that there was nothing wrong except that the udder was full of milk and had to be milked. He was surprised, shocked and upset that this person lacked even this basic knowledge of milking a cow. I also heard stories from expatriate volunteers about families headed up by 14-16 year olds who had no adults in their life to guide them and help them. So these families 'forgot' things such as how and when to milk the cow, what natural ingredients cure fevers, and so on (Chelvi and Sivakami).

The knowledge of the volunteers became a substitute for the knowledge of the missing generation and in that way the volunteers became a part of the social landscape in Kilinochchi. The idea that the volunteers became a part of Kilinochchi's social history is key to understanding how the locals see the volunteers. As mentioned previously, the volunteers are not 'foreign'/strangers to the land, so their knowledge and way of seeing the world is viewed as having similarities with the local Tamil population. These commonalities that bind both groups create the idea that the knowledge from the volunteers is more valid or relevant as it comes from a similar cultural point of view. The idea of the volunteer being from inside the culture not only benefits the volunteers, as it

gives them a place in the Vanni social landscape but also aids the locals and the LTTE as it ensures that the volunteers are given a sense of belonging to the Tamil homeland, and thus ensures their support for the Tamil people, land and cause and by default the LTTE.

The idea of missing knowledge can also be seen when one examines the volunteers that are identified as being necessary in Kilinochchi. These programs are based on the needs of the community and are reflective of a needs assessment done by TSVP prior to starting any project; they include specific aims such as agriculture, animal husbandry and so on. The LTTE itself has a well-developed agriculture program but in a style that is suited for growing crops during war time and specific to the organization. Since the MOU, there were people returning to claim their ancestral homes after twenty years, and they needed to know how to return to a life relying on the soil that they had not gotten to know. Agriculture is a very specific example; there were also others such as rebuilding the village networks.

Though many people were returning to their villages to live, the sense of community was not the same as it had been prior to the war. The missing generation meant that the knowledge about village networks was not always passed on to the younger generation and they were not able to identify the needs of the people and community. An NGO head officer discussed the fact that soon after the war they began going to the communities and talking to people about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and how to identify it. She had lived in Sri Lanka all her life and was saddened to see the old social/community networks that would have identified a problem (maybe not specifically calling it PTSD) had collapsed. The people who now made up the village network had not grown up around each other (many times moving with the war) and so

had lost the knowledge about each family, losing the old system of checks and balances that existed previously.

Through the utilization of both the returning expatriates and the volunteers, many local administrators felt that Kilinochchi was filling the gaps in its history, as it appeared to be. The volunteers and the expatriates were there to provide a service based on the needs of the community and in doing so they became part of the history and the stories of the community. The process of becoming a part of the social history of Vanni reinforces the notion that Tamil Eelam is a conceptualization of 'home'.

From the “West” to the “East”: We Are Still All Tamil

“The Tamil people look at us because we don’t look Tamil, the white people look at us because we don’t look white” (Sivakami)

Were we foreign or local Tamils? That was the question that was in the minds of the volunteers as we met and were approached by people in Kilinochchi. The ‘ethnic’ identity was a more fluid concept for the volunteers but for the locals we were seen as being Tamil first and foreign second. As mentioned previously, the donning of the sari was important in how the locals thought about the volunteers. There was a desire to see the volunteers as Tamil girls with proper clothes. The desire to see the volunteers in “traditional clothes” can be attributed to two phenomena: the first the desire to bring out the Tamil heritage of the volunteer and second to recreate the notion that even Tamil girls from ‘foreign’ are still Tamil girls at heart, like those in Sri Lanka.

By bringing out the Tamil heritage of the volunteers, the notion of change from the inside, as opposed to from the ‘West’ is maintained. The help that the locals were

getting was help from people in their own community, people with a vested interest in seeing Kilinochchi succeed and survive. When I asked why the locals thought of the volunteers this way, the locals simply said, “You came back.” The statement implied, correctly, that the volunteers returned to Sri Lanka because at some level they felt bonded to their identity as Tamils and felt they had specific roles and duties as Tamil people to ensure that ‘their people survived’.

The notion that the volunteers were “Tamil girls” at heart was an interesting concept as traditional garments were maintained on the female form. What I mean by that is the sari is one of the symbols of Tamil culture but it is not a unisex garment. The sari symbolises the female as belonging to a culture and subscribing to a way of life. The knowledge of how to wear the sari meant that the interns also subscribe to those notions themselves. I am not saying that the students expected the interns to wear saris in Canada for everyday living but they were curious as to what was worn during cultural and religious events and why those garments were chosen. As one interviewee, Krishanty, said, “You dress a certain way according to the place you are at.” Since the volunteers were of Tamil background we were automatically associated with having the proper garments to wear for Tamil functions, even if they occurred in Canada.

The Place and Relevance of Gender

Before analysis of the way that gender shaped the interactions of the volunteers with the local population in Sri Lanka, it is important to briefly explain the changes to gender that were occurring in Kilinochchi during my time there. As mentioned previously in this thesis, women cadres were allowed to join the LTTE in the latter part of the 1980s.

Though there has been controversy surrounding the nature and extent of their involvement in combat, the fact that women were involved in the liberation struggle cannot be disputed.

During my time there it was evident that the LTTE was doing everything right in terms of gender equity on paper. In the ceasefire negotiations, they had set up a sub-committee on Gender Issues and have an assigned gender-planning officer to analyse the impact of all development and ceasefire projects on gender. At the same time however, women in the LTTE were both losing their place in the community and within the organization. They were going through a period of transition that had some women in the community concerned about where the final place of women would be. Key to this concern was the issue of gender being pushed to the 'back-burner' when looking at the social issues that the LTTE wanted to first address, such as caste. Women's involvement in the struggle has enabled their voices to be heard (Father Michael) and women have begun to occupy high-ranking positions in the LTTE peace office, a highly visible post. However, the reflection of women in the culture of Sri Lanka is changing once again since the MOU.

During the conflict, their short-cropped hair and uniforms easily identified women cadres. The short hair prevented the 'enemy' from grabbing hold of the fighters by their hair and was a tactical manoeuvre. In many ways, it reinforced the notion of fighting as a non-feminine activity. Sri Lankan Tamil women are tied very symbolically to long hair. This was one way to differentiate non-combatants, as they wore long skirts, dresses, selva kameezs and/or saris. Non-combatant females never wore pants or had short hair. However, once the MOU was signed the women cadres were given a new 'uniform'.

They now wear their hair long with two loosely looped braids, a plaid shirt, army pants and a utility belt. Symbolically, the new uniform was seen as the return to the previous position of women in Sri Lanka prior to the war, which is the (re-) feminization of the female LTTE cadres.

When I talked to the students and asked why hair was so important they replied that all Tamil girls should have long hair. Some of my respondents discussed the fact that the volunteers were lucky because we could cut our hair (Adaleru, Bharma, Jennifer, Nalayani and Varni). They also spoke about the fact that they could never do it here, as it would cause an uproar within the family. One respondent, Bharma, whose boyfriend was living in Canada, mentioned that as soon as they got married and moved there, she was going to cut her hair. The cutting of the hair was seen as an expression of being liberal and free. Short hair allowed a sense of movement and ease that was no longer associated with the traditional long hair. This sense of self and liberty that was tied to hair was, most likely, not just a reflection of the locals' interaction with the volunteer community but also a reflection of seeing LTTE women cadres with short hair for over fifteen years. The 'Birds of Freedom' were treated as equals and given equal status in the community (personal conversation, LTTE cadre). As I had another cadre tell me, during the war they were not men or women but cadres.

The notion of equal treatment was also seen in the interactions of the volunteers with the local students. When I was talking to students about what they specifically liked about the volunteers, the response that I was mostly given was that the volunteers treated both men and women equally and were friends with both. They (the volunteers) did not discriminate in terms of friendship and time spent with both groups.

The belief that the volunteers were there for both groups is a fascinating concept, as it opened the door for both the male and female students to ask questions that would have been taboo under other circumstances. The male students felt comfortable asking the volunteers advice about their relationship issues and girlfriends, questions one does not usually ask of a teacher, specifically a female teacher. The female students were also given a chance to ask personal questions as the women volunteers could go into the 'private' space of the girl's hostel. The private space is still the most important female space (Chelvi) in Sri Lanka and allows the women a sense of liberty to discuss ideas and questions they will not talk about in any space outside of the hostel.

Conclusion

In the end, the volunteers in Kilinochchi were placed in a specialized category that straddled many dualities: they were both east and west; teacher and student; friend and stranger; native and foreign. The dual nature of the group created a sense of greater accessibility, as the volunteer were both a part of the state of Sri Lanka and the imagined state of Tamil Eelam but were also seemingly separate from the conflict and moral questions that surrounded the GoSL and the LTTE. The volunteers were not dependant on the LTTE or the GoSL, they could always return to Canada but by their desire to return and work in Kilinochchi had shown a commitment to their homeland and thus became a valuable resource, one that could be used to re-develop Sri Lanka. It is not my intention to paint the locals as a simpler group but to show that the locals understood the potential role and position of the volunteers in Vanni, maybe better than the volunteers themselves. As development in Kilinochchi continues, the volunteers and the Tamil

diaspora need to feel that there is a space for them in Tamil Eelam; as mentioned before, much of the LTTE money comes from external sources and the worldwide Tamil diaspora. Creating and maintaining the link of the Tamil youth to Sri Lanka is essential to aid the cultural, economic and social growth of Eelam.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Re-telling the Stories

Eventually, it was time to return and the volunteers trickled out of Kilinochchi. As with any new experience the volunteers left Kilinochchi changed and reconsidering their life in Canada through their new experiences. The effect of Kilinochchi and its people would be discussed by all of us repeatedly, and the friendships with other volunteers would grow in Canada. The volunteers all felt connected to the people of Kilinochchi, to Eelam and more importantly, to their identity as Tamils. This is not to say that at the end of the internship, the volunteers' politics had fully embraced the Tigers, or that they no longer had a Canadian identity. Rather, they were able to strengthen their perceived ties to their 'Tamil-ness'.

The desire to remain connected to the experience of life in Kilinochchi manifested itself in the re-telling of stories. The sharing of experiences and stories of connection reiterated the volunteers' connection to each other and the locals. It was a way of maintaining the connection to their Tamil history. There can also be no denial of the cathartic effects that sharing volunteer experiences had on the interns. The re-telling of their time in Sri Lanka affirmed the experience of the volunteers as a whole unit and as an individual component of the whole. TSVP volunteers formally fulfill the creation of first hand knowledge for Tamil Canadian youths through the submission of written personal reports and a group report. These reports are posted on the web-site permitting access to others interested in volunteering in Sri Lanka, continuing the transference of knowledge by highlighting the needs still evident in the Kilinochchi community.

Preliminary Analysis

The Tamil diaspora has an important role to play in the rehabilitation of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. The role they can play is still being determined, as the diaspora itself is not content to simply send money to Vanni but also to aid in the restructuring of the Tamil areas. The sheer numeric force of the Canadian Tamil diaspora makes it a key group to consider when looking at the rehabilitation of the Vanni. However, with the Tamil diaspora in Canada, we find a generation of Tamil Canadians who left Sri Lanka at a young age but yet desire to return and volunteer in Kilinochchi. Understanding the perspectives of these volunteers is paramount to understanding the potential that these volunteers have to influence the development of Sri Lanka's Tamil areas, and the continued 'preservation' of Tamil culture in the Canadian Tamil diaspora, through transnational ties.

The experiences of female volunteers analysed in this thesis provide insight into the direction of gender issues and diasporic dynamics amongst Tamils in Sri Lanka, given the importance of transnational linkages in shaping development interventions in LTTE-controlled Sri Lanka. As discussed in the thesis, the nature of identity in Sri Lanka is a very fluid concept, allowing female volunteers to work both as members of the larger Tamil society, in Sri Lanka, and as members of the Canadian 'Western' influenced diaspora. Many 'controversial' behaviours of the volunteers were forgiven on the basis that they were in Vanni, yet they were expected to act in accordance with the codes of 'Tamil culture' when in Kilinochchi, i.e. modes of dress. The ability to negotiate both

identities set the volunteers apart, yet allowed them an insider perspective of development in Vanni.

However, the volunteers do have an important role to play, as they can be both the insider and outsider for development schemes and changes to Kilinochchi society. Female volunteers, especially, have a key role as they also present a different view of Tamil women. I postulate that the reason the volunteers were able to easily work in Vanni was because of the perceived unity between Tamils in Canada and Sri Lanka. Whatever beliefs the volunteer held about Sri Lanka, the LTTE and/or the GoSL did not matter, as they were Tamils in Vanni during their internship. The volunteers were deeply aware that they were working in an LTTE controlled area and their actions would not only reflect on them, but the NGO and their ability to work in the region again. We were working in a politically sensitive area, and the LTTE is very careful with the images that it permitted to be projected of Kilinochchi. This again reflected on the LTTE's partnership with the TSVP and their approval of TSVP activities within Kilinochchi. This situation both helped and hindered the volunteers. They were able to work as one of the community but they had to 'keep' much of their personality hidden to maintain the illusion of Tamil oneness.

As stated throughout this thesis, the volunteers occupy a special position, as they are able to discuss change and implement change from an 'insider position.' The ability to be considered an insider permitted members of the local community to feel a sense of kinship with the volunteers. The insider position of the volunteer also enabled them to become close to the locals, through traits such as language, ethnicity and nationalism, as well as through familial, social and village ties, reaffirming both connections to the

homeland and to their Tamil identity, both on the part of the volunteer and the locals. The ancestral and social connection to the home also allowed the volunteers to overcome the barrier of a stranger easier than someone not from Sri Lanka.

The other side of the insider position was the idea that there was an assumption that the volunteers understood the cultural codes that governed Tamil behaviour. The volunteers were expected to understand and conduct themselves in a manner befitting Tamil women, albeit ones who had more freedom than the local girls. The perception of the roles and personality of the volunteers were carefully orchestrated to be inoffensive to the sensibilities of the Kilinochchi administration. The volunteers made sure to dress modestly, not go out to late, not create any major problems during their stay in Kilinochchi. This is not to say that the volunteers were not themselves, just that the information that was shared was selectively done, such as with the incident of alcohol consumption.

Further Research

The research that I undertook in Kilinochchi was very specific to a time and place. The history of the conflict in Sri Lanka and within the LTTE was still playing an important role in shaping the way that people interacted with each other and the volunteers. For example, Krana's defection was still fresh in the minds of the locals and this shaped their perceptions of people from the eastern provinces. I remember one student telling me that they would never allow anyone in their family to be named Krana and his sentiments being echoed by others at the table, including the students from the east. Some treated even the volunteers' comments of wanting to see the east as a waste of

time. It would be curious to see if this division between the east and north would impact interactions with volunteers whose ancestry is in the eastern provinces. Though I infer a bit about the ease of Tamil volunteers' becoming part of the Kilinochchi landscape, the study would have benefited from a comparative analysis of the experiences faced by Tamil volunteers and non-Tamil volunteers.

Volunteers and Development

The aim of this study was to understand the contribution that volunteers could make to re-development in Sri Lanka, especially when the volunteers are 'connected' to the volunteer site by ancestry. Expatriate volunteers are a valuable source for development in Sri Lanka, especially for the north and east regions. This study began as a way to understand how Tamil expatriate women conceived of identity and their role in the development initiatives, while working in the place of their ethnic heritage, Sri Lanka. However, during my fieldwork in Kilinochchi, I discovered many layers to ideas that I had always thought constant, the role of Tamil women changed depending on the area. According to the participants, in Colombo, the Tamil woman (and man) had been corrupted by the corrupt Tamil culture that existed there; in Batticaloa, in the eastern province, the Tamil woman was a temptress, who seduced men into forgetting who they were, in Kilinochchi women were empowered by the LTTE and their involvement in the struggle and in Jaffna, women were still the same as they had been before the conflict but they were being exploited and corrupted by the SLA.

Within all these conceptions and understanding of the Tamil woman, there were two groups who stood out because of their ability to cross cultural boundaries and yet

'remain' Tamil women; the women of the LTTE (Birds of Freedom) and the expatriate volunteers. Both these groups had circumvented accepted cultural modes of behaviour for women. For the Birds of Freedom, they became active participants in violence and fought with their fellow male cadres. The volunteers, on the other hand, had pushed boundaries when they came to Sri Lanka alone, without parental or spousal supervision. However, the actions of both groups were redeemable as the Birds of Freedom was participating in the emancipation of the Tamil state and expatriate volunteers 'had returned' to fulfil their duty to the homeland.

This is perhaps where the power and the usefulness of the volunteers are best realized. The volunteer is very similar to a civilian version to the Birds of Freedom and enjoys the same "liberties" as a female cadre, i.e. the ability to cut her hair, wear pants and so on. The volunteers ability to occupy the boundaries between the many conceptions of Tamil women, allows her the position of being able to interact with different segments of society. This is not to say that the local population does not desire to interact with different people, but the volunteer also has the benefit of 1) only staying temporarily in Kilinochchi and 2) of not having connections to the greater Kilinochchi town and area. During the fieldwork chapter, I mentioned the idea, held by many of the women of the local community, that volunteers were more free because they did not need to be concerned that their activities would be reported back to their parents and community. Thus, the idea that the volunteers had the ability to do what they wanted without societal reprisal, but still with the understanding that the volunteers were under the watchful eye of LTTE, translated into more freedom for the volunteers, as their behaviour, when

negative, was excused on the basis of ignorance. Shielded by their 'strangeness' volunteers were able to ask questions and provide, sometimes, unpopular answers.

Overall, the role of the female volunteer is more interesting than her male counterpart as she provides a new venue for Tamil feminine identity. The role of the volunteer will continue to grow and change, as development continues to occur in Sri Lanka.

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