Title
How Women Rebel: Gender and Agency in Sri Lanka

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1hz4k6ww

Author
Gowrinathan, Nimmi

Publication Date
2012

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

How Women Rebel:
Gender and Agency in Sri Lanka

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

Nimmi Gowrinathan

2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

How Women Rebel:

Gender and Agency in Sri Lanka

by

Nimmi Gowrinathan

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Mark Sawyer, Chair

Rebel movements in Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Nepal, Columbia, and El Salvador among others report between 20-40% participation by female combatants. These women have largely been excluded from the literature around the recruitment, mobilization, and participation in violent social movements. If we acknowledge that young women are among those who might rebel, then existing paradigms on how rebellion occurs must also be re-imagined to include the experiences of the female combatant.

Looking at the case of women's involvement in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE in Sri Lanka) this dissertation aims to address two main overarching questions around female participation in rebel movements. The first set examines how we take seriously the politics around female participation in violent politics, without resorting to a feminist debate on agency.

Assuming that female fighters are agentive actors, how to we understand their politics at an individual and collective level? The second explores how variations in state repression shape political identities and impact the eventual nature of political participation for Tamil women. How do we understand the agency of women confronting multiple forms of repression?

Drawing upon existing theories of mobilization and participation, I argue that in order to understand the impact of state repression on female participation, we must adopt a new theoretical framework. This dissertation highlights the interactive nature of the relationship between the individual and the collective, expands the timeline of analysis to incorporate entire life histories, and understands female combatants as exercising 'restricted agency'. The analysis uses a unique data set, relying on significant field work done over ten years as both an academic and a humanitarian worker. Significant trust built over time in local communities, allowed for entry into controversial spaces (detention centers, training areas, refugee camps) and difficult to access populations (female fighters, victims of gender-based violence). The theories developed in this qualitative study rely on the insight and concepts generated using an ethnographic approach to data gathering that includes CPOs, person-centered interviews, focus groups, and gathering testimonies.

Working within the framework established above, I find that given pre-existing conditions of inequality (both political and gender), the identity of Tamil women are mobilized by multiple mechanisms, among which experiences of direct and indirect state repression are most likely to shape political identities and the nature of political participation.

The dissertation of Nimmi Gowrinathan is approved.

Raymond Rocco

Jason C. Throop

Mark Q. Sawyer, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

To my Amma and Appa,

for the love that guides me to ask questions, seek answers, and insist on change.

And to Mohan Mama,

who shared his love of knowledge, a gift I'll never forget.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In a dissertation that tries to tell the stories of so many other women, it seemed only fair that I allow my own story and experiences to frame the very important process of acknowledging how individuals, organizations, and moments can shape, and eventually, define you. My intellectual interests and curiosities began years before I took (and did very poorly in) my first statistics course at UCLA.

Being raised by Jaffna Tamil village norms, in Beverly Hills, makes for, well…an awkward little girl. Add to that an early growth spurt, senior year braces, and a pigeon toed gait that refused to correct itself as the doctors promised it would..and I was the character in an after school special who gets stuffed in a locker, except I was too quiet for anyone to notice I was there. My parents (forcibly at times) infused in my siblings and myself a sense of culture, community, and self that set us apart in all the wrong ways..and eventually shaped us in all the right ways. To my older sister, my Akka, it was my constant desire to emulate you that allowed me to escape into the written word, and embrace it in ways that made it my own. Thank you for being right next to me --to share the pain of adolescence and the joys of motherhood. To my younger brother, you have always had the unique ability to bring laughter to intense moments and a thoughtfulness laced with hope to the most serious of challenges. Even as a child you were an example that a man can gracefully navigate politics, identity, love, and life. To my Appa, you made me love politics, believe that change was possible, and have faith that I would be the person to make it happen. Thank you for being both my biggest fan and my constant example of what it means to support justice and equality, as much in your daily life as in your political beliefs. To my Amma, there were pieces of you in every woman I interviewed. A disarming intellect coupled with a shy humility, an exhausting sense of duty that sustains families (and communities), a political perspective filled with insights and empathy, a love for us that is at once guarded and deeply felt. In many ways, I see this accomplishment most clearly as a reflection of you. To Ish and Swap, you have been the strength of my siblings and added the extra support and love our family tree needed to keep growing. And to my nephews– Sohan, Sathyan, Bada Cherian, Makana, and Tadashi…thank you for all the happy distractions, and constant reminders that with each generation there is a renewed possibility for change.

Surrounding us, consistently, closely, was a family that was, in itself a reflection of the complex community on the island. Our brood came from Trincomalee, Jaffna, and Colombo – a clan as loving as they are large. My Appa's seven sisters and mother gave us more food than we needed, and enveloping us in a warmth that still lingers as a security blanket over all of us. More than that, they produced a gang of cousins who have given me a sense of home in the most distant locations, and laughter when it was most needed. Among these, Tania and Ghaya, thank you for believing in my work and supporting me in so many different ways. My Amma's side was historically deeply entrenched in politics and progress on the island. On every trip back to Sri Lanka, I learn more about the passion, independence, and strength of character that defined my grandparents, and my Pata and Pati. I am always proud to claim my lineage. My uncles and cousins from this side so closely replicate the wit and intellect of the older generation, in their presence I was often inspired and amused in the very same moment. To my Chithi and Yoganchithappa…thank you for the time spent and love shared that shaped my budding political consciousness at a very young age. One step removed has been the Sri Lankan community that

grew with me, that reminded me every weekend who I was, and where I was from. Among them, Uncle K, Hari Uncle, and Ethir Uncle – your quiet dedication has pushed me to be more thoughtful, your own life stories shaped my empathy, and your concern for me has been a protective shield all these years. The seeds of my life's work were planted by you…thank you.

After my marriage, I never experienced traditional life under the same roof as my in-laws, but have felt a closeness that doesn't rely on space. To Shobita and Priya, you have confirmed my belief that a woman can be both strong and sensitive, thoughtful and joyful, passionate and peaceful. Thank you for the moments you saw the strength hidden deep within me. To Mom and Sheila, you have shown me love in so many ways, and I have felt all of them. To Tom, Carrie, Amit, Lori, Zac, you have empathized, listened, worried, and loved me as a part of this family, our family. I am so grateful for your presence in my life.

 There is something indescribably reassuring in knowing the daily struggles of another woman, and feeling them beside you in yours. To Meyer, Viji, Fanta, Meera, Tasha, Nicole, Kristy, Rupa, Sheriden, Anjana, Kav, Chrissy, Ssanyu, Karen, Emily, Katie, Shakti, Shilpa, Valeria, Meena – you have each inspired, uplifted, and at various points been the person holding a glass of wine and making me laugh. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. Our interactions have shaped my understanding of the potential within women everywhere. At countless times in my research I watched the closeness between two women, whether in a camp or an orphanage –and desperately felt your absence. To Dlo, Tapan, Arjunan, Eric, Neil, Sumana, Nitin, Anthony, Ham, Adam, Sam, Dustin, Rishi, Varun, Jason and all the other impressive men I have been fortunate enough to know…witnessing your intellect and sensitivity, I know that that the rock for me to lean on extends a bit deeper than my incredible husband.

I imagine most grad students have an ambiguous relationship with their home departments of Political Science, shaped by the inevitable contentious politics. Within UCLA's however, I will be forever indebted to the guidance of Mark, Ray, Ed, and Glenda who helped me navigate academia and created unique spaces for me to engage with it on my own terms. Jason, my decision to take your class changed the course of my academic career. You have always given me the space for my story to be told, a space you insisted this dissertation give to Tamil women. To Joseph, whose blood pressure may be slightly elevated as a result of being my advisor in recent years, this could not have happened without you. Thank you for your patience, support, and persistence. To Marielena, Temura, Raquel, Murrell, Dontraneil, Alfonso, Dena, this dissertation couldn't have happened without the humor, support, and advice that pushed me through the early days and the very end. To the financial support from the UCLA Globalization Center, and the Center for the Study of Women – your support at crucial moments in my trajectory enabled me to complete my research and writing, thank you.

I followed my passion for marginalized populations in Sri Lanka into an unexpected career path as I began my time at UCLA. To the renowned journalist Tom Plate, your unwavering faith in young minds taught me to formulate an opinion, and to never shy away from expressing it. To Sothida and Susan – your kindness eased me through the most difficult time in my life, your interest in my work made me believe it was of interest, and the lunches and laughter brought the light into my life at a very dark moment. To Richard, you never questioned my politics and encouraged my passions. You have been my example that humanitarian aid can be both

intelligent and effective. Because of you, Tamil women in Sri Lanka have opportunities they may not have had, and I have a PhD that I may not have had the chance to complete. Thank you.

To the academics, NGO workers, community mobilizers, artists, politicians, combatants, and civilians who took the time to share with me their tales. You may never read the analysis produced by the hours, days, and weeks I spent in your presence – but please know that those moments had a profound impact on both my intellect and my soul. If there are pieces of your truth in this work, I can only hope it will be translated into positive change. The voices in between the quotes are the ones missing from local politics and international policy. Of all the blessings in my life, I am most grateful to have had the time, opportunity, and space to sit down with you, and constantly re-imagine the meaning of revolution.

There is one person who is all of these things to me. My friend, my family, my colleague, my mentor, my co-conspirator, and my love. I usually insist that my words be ideally suited to convey the meaning I intend for them…but I fear, in this case, we shall fail each other. My dearest Zac , you have helped me see past insecurity to insight. You have protected my passions as if they were your own. The ideas between us, and around us, have shaped our life and defined my politics. As my friend, you pushed me to apply. As my fiancée, you wouldn't let me quit. As my husband, you gave new intellectual life to my wandering thoughts. As the father of my child, you were my strength to finish. Thank you.   For who you are, and for everything I am, because of you.

And finally… to my son, my dearest Cherian Raja. When you were born, I found the discipline that eluded me all these years. Your smile, your infectious energy, your love of life -coax me out of the darkest recesses of my head -every day. This dissertation is a part of your history, and it is my greatest hope that lessons within it will shape your future.

VITA

1999	Study Abroad Lorenzo de Medici University Florence, Italy
2001	B.A., International Relations/South Asian Studies Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, MD
2001-2003	Masters Coursework, International Relations School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Baltimore, MD University of Southern California (USC) Los Angeles, CA
2002-2003	Assistant to the President Pacific Council on International Policy (PCIP)
2003-2004	Director of Research, Asia Pacific Media Network Los Angeles, CA
2004-2012	Director of South Asia Programs UN Representative Operation USA Los Angeles, CA
2004-2006	Teaching Assistant Department of Political Science University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
2006	Globalization Center Fellowship University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
2007	M.A., Political Science Department of Political Science University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
2007	Graduate Summer Research Award University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
2009	Jean and Irving Stone Dissertation Fellow Center for the Study of Women University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

2010	Rockefeller Foundation Conference Grant
	Rockefeller Foundation
	New York, NY
2011	Consultant
	International Crisis Group
	Brussels, Belgium

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

"What To Do About the Chaos in Sri Lanka" (February 3, 2009), Nimmi Gowrinathan and Tom Plate, Khaleej Times. www.khaleejtimes.com

"Behind the Barbed Wire: Civilian Suffering in Sri Lanka's IDP Camps", (August 5, 2009), Guest Blog, CIVIC, www.civicfieldreports.wordpress.com.

"One Nation, Under Rajapaksa?: Sri Lanka's Presidential Election", (February 2, 2010), World Policy Institute. www.worldpolicy.org

"Aid and Access and Sri Lanka", Nimmi Gowrinathan and Zachariah Mampilly, Humanitarian Exchange Magazine, Issue 43, June 2009.

"Beyond the Borders of the Nation State: Can Transnational Governance Offer a New Paradigm for Political Representation?" (May 1, 2010). www.themonkeycage.org

"Why Do Women Rebel?", Center for the Study of Women Journal, UCLA (May 2010)

Review of "Devising a Theory of Suicide Bombing"- Mia Bloom
Presented at UCLA-Department of Political Science, 2005

"Why Women Rebel? Understanding Motivations of Female Fighters"
Paper Presented at Thinking Gender Conference- UCLA, February 2007

"Women and Political Activism in Sri Lanka"
Paper Presented at Women and Activism Conference- Pomona College, April, 2007

"Politics of Aid: Sri Lanka, Sudan Iraq"
Hosted Conference with Operation USA/Columbia School of International and Public Affairs-SIPA, November, 2007

"Culture & Trauma: Culturally Appropriate Responses to Disaster"
Invited Speaker at American Red Cross Conference on Psychosocial Interventions- AMRC HQ, January, 2008

Chapter 1: Introduction
Women Who Fight: Overlooked and Misunderstood

I. The Question of Female Fighters

In an impoverished village in North Eastern Sri Lanka Menake lost her mother at a young age. After watching her brother tortured by the Sri Lankan Special Task Force, she spent years facing daily sexual harassment at checkpoints and living in the overcrowded home of relatives, before joining the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) at the age of fifteen. She now awaits trial in Colombo, after a failed mission to assassinate a government minister as a suicide bomber. [1]

When Sri's father, a fisherman, was forbidden from fishing by the Sri Lankan Army, the family lost its primary source of income at a time when food and fuel prices had nearly doubled due to the conflict. Unable to care for her properly, and fearful that their daughter may be harassed with the increased military presence in their village, Sri's parents sent her to a children's home/school in Batticaloa, where she received the highest marks in her class. At sixteen, unable to gain entrance to government universities (Unicef 2007) or find work, Sri lived at a church-run orphanage. Within a few months, Sri was abducted to join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, eventually becoming a leader of her women's unit before leaving the movement in 2007 [2]

Menake, Sri, and thousands of other young women like them in the third world have largely been excluded from the analysis of likely recruits to rebel movements. Rebel movements in Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Nepal, Columbia, and El Salvador among others report between 20-40%

---

[1] Anonymous, *"When the Suicide Bomber is a Woman"*, Marie Claire, September 25, 2007 (Hearst Communications Inc: 2007)
[2] "Kala", Personal Interview, January 2008, Offer Refugee Camp, Cuddalore, Tamil Nadu, India.

participation by female combatants (Viterna 2006; Balasingham 2001; Hale 2001; Laboa 1998, Cunningham 2003). If we acknowledge that young women are among those who might rebel, then existing paradigms on how rebellion occurs must also be re-imagined to include the experiences of the female combatant.

State repression, traditionally understood as the restriction and/or violation of civil liberties and state-sponsored violence against a specific community during a particular time period (Freedom House 2007), has been found to play a significant role in the process of recruiting female combatants (Viterna 2006). However, the variation within forms of state repression, its relative significance among other factors, and its connection to variations in levels of participation have not yet been incorporated into existing analyses. The question then remains, how did the state repression experienced by Menake and Kala, shape their individual politics and the nature of their eventual participation in an armed rebel movement?

On May 17, 2009 the Government of Sri Lanka declared a military victory over the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, an insurgent group who had waged a 30-year-war for a separate state for ethnic Tamils living amongst the Sinhalese majority on the island. Formed in the mid-1980s the self-determination platform of the LTTE was modeled after liberation movements in Latin America and elsewhere, and the group soon became known (and feared) as one of the most ruthless and sophisticated rebel movements in the world. While there has been extensive research done on male combatants in movements such as the LTTE, little attention has been paid to the women who fought alongside them.

The existing literature surrounding insurgencies in Political Science has either entirely overlooked the effect of state repression on female activism, or treated the gender dynamic of rebellion as a descriptive characteristic, rather than a variable with the potential to challenge deep-seated beliefs about participation in violent politics (Ritter 2005; Peterson 1995). Even with relatively high numbers of female combatants globally (Viterna 2006), limited scholastic research on the subject has affected our ability to fully understand the experiences and motivations of women who engage in rebel movements.

Within traditional understandings of rebellion is a set of authors that claim pre-existing conditions of marginalization or class inequity define a collective identity (ethnicity among others) and collective grievance which mobilizes groups to join rebel movements with attractive governing ideologies of ethnic separatism, nationalism, or socialism. (Horowitz 2002; Clapham 1998).

A second set of authors adopt a political economy approach, finding that given preconditions of economic inequality, the mechanisms that mobilize rational actors to engage in rebel movements are largely materialist. This instrumental perspective finds that the presence of natural resources or a pre-existing condition of "relative deprivation" are some of the factors likely to activate an "investment logic" pushing actors to participate in an armed rebel movement. (Collier and Hoeffler 2002; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Gurr 1970) . The two sets, often understood through a broad "greed versus grievance" framing, both make important contributions to our understandings of the motivations and actions behind political violence. However, these analyses

often operate solely at the level of the collective and overlook the individual experiences of a female combatant.

A corrective body of literature, emerging from recent studies in Anthropology, Sociology, and Women's Studies, has produced theories specific to the mobilization of women. This scholarship tends to be somewhat polarized within a feminist debate on the agency of women. In their initial consideration as participants in political violence, women were often considered simply pawns in a larger patriarchal project (Coomeraswamy 1997; Bloom 2005). Scholars continue to emphasize forced recruitment over voluntary participation, a part of an feminist agenda to understand women's involvement in any form of violence as "anti-feminist" and is often conducted from a distance . This approach undermines, or overlooks entirely the agency of the individual female combatant. [3] On the other side of this debate are those that wholeheartedly endorse the participation of female combatants as 'empowering' and 'liberating' , analyses largely tied to an overt political agenda (Balasingham 2001). In attempting to understand the complexities of Tamil women as agentive actors, it is helpful to draw on existing theories of agency which move beyond simplistic definitions tied to "free will" and "resistance" understand agency as the "socioculturally mediated capacity to act" (Ahearn 2001, Mahmood 2005). Only an analysis based on in-depth interviews with female fighters themselves that utilizes objective qualitative methodologies will get us closer to a new understanding of the agency and political identities of these women.

---

[3] Agency here is understood as women taking action with purpose and meaning, though the meanings and contexts of these actions may be partially culturally pre-determined, and not entirely intrinsic. (Paul, 1990).

Scholars who take seriously the complexity of women's engagement in political violence identify biographical availability, emotional ties, and social networks as causal factors contributing to women's participation in rebel movements. (Cunningham 2003; Alison 2004; Kampwirth 2002). Jocelyn Viterna's recent thorough analysis provides us with recruitment-based categories of female fighters as well as a multi-causal pathway to participation, challenging the tendency to collapse participation of both men and women into a single category (2006). Elizabeth Wood also looks at the social processes[4] (including military socialization) that impact the role of women both inside and outside of rebel movements.(2008).

In most of these studies, the participation of female fighters in rebel movements is largely understood through the moment of recruitment that led to their initial movement activism. This narrow view of a larger phenomenon doesn't consider the broader context of recruitment. Looking holistically at the life histories of female combatants reveals that experiences with state repression often begin the formation of nascent political identities, and determine their eventual participation long before the moment of recruitment.[5] In studies where state repression is highlighted as a significant variable in explaining recruitment, its impact beyond that period is often overlooked (Viterna 2006, Kampwirth 2002). As with most analyses centered around the impact of a particular variable at the collective level, this literature has a tendency to treat state repression as a monolithic variable. However disaggregating multiple forms of state repression enables us to understand the motives of female combatants by gauging levels of agency, moral

---

[4] Wood describes the social processes of civil war as " the transformation of social actors, structures norms, and practices at the local level-that sometimes leave profound social changes in their wake" (Wood 2008, 540)

[5] The "moment of recruitment" is when the individual female combatant visits an LTTE office to volunteer, enrolls in a large recruitment gathering (often at schools), or is taken forcibly from a home or while walking to school. Personal Interviews, 2002-2009, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

commitment, and emotional engagement at the level of the individual. The individual experience of state repression, as it operates within a collective identity, provides us with a more precise insight on variations in participation outcomes for female combatants.

II. *The Main Questions*

This study aims to address a few main overarching questions around female participation in rebel movements.

1) How do we take seriously the politics of female participation in violent politics without resorting to a feminist debate on agency ? Assuming that female fighters are agentive actors, how to we understand their politics at an individual and collective level?

2) How do variations in state repression affect the eventual nature of political participation for Tamil women? How do we understand agency for women confronting multiple forms of repression?

Drawing upon existing theories of mobilization and participation, I argue that in order to understand the impact of state repression on female participation, we must adopt a new theoretical framework. This study highlights the interactive nature of the relationship between the individual and the collective, expands the timeline of analysis to incorporate entire life histories, and understands female combatants as exercising 'restricted agency'**.** Working within this framework, I find that given pre-existing conditions of inequality (both social and gender), the identity of Tamil women are mobilized by multiple mechanisms, among which experiences of direct and indirect state repression are more likely to shape the nature of political participation than the moment of recruitment.

In order to understand the relationship between state repression and female participation in rebel movements, it is important to situate this study, and the individual Tamil woman, within existing debates on participation in rebel movements. This section reviews both the traditional theories of structural pre-conditions and external factors leading to insurgency and existing socio-psychological understandings of the motives and actions of non-state actors who participate in these insurgencies.

III. Literature Review: From Mobilization to Participation

The story of most female combatants begins with a life as a civilian in a deeply divided society (Horowitz 2000), where clearly defined lines identify the particular group facing marginalization and oppression both socially and economically, within a society or nation state. Marginalized groups in general have been found to play a central role in creating contentious political spaces with the capacity to foster a broad spectrum of political activism (Mcadams, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Guidry and Sawyer 2003) "aimed at subverting the means, mechanisms, and ideologies of political exclusion in any kind of regime" (Guidry & Sawyer, 2003), often in the form of organized political violence (Gurr, 1970).

Separatist movements like the LTTE, require a broad base of popular support in order to ensure their success as the sole representatives of a particular grievance (Varshney 2003). How this support is obtained, or what factors in particular are conducive to mobilization in rebel movements is central to understanding both male and female participation in armed rebel movements. Scholars who have examined this "collective action problem" faced by most rebel movements have identified the factors that increase the likelihood that an individual or group

might choose to rebel, as well as the inter-related direct recruitment strategies adopted by various movements.

Within the first category, scholars have specifically looked at which structural conditions might create an environment conducive to violent forms of political activism, and for whom these factors might be particularly relevant (Olson 1965; Popkin 1978; Lichbach 1995). Macro level studies on mobilization leading to popular participation in rebel movements highlight structural factors such as relative deprivation, social inequality, rough terrain, rapid growth in economic sectors, and lack of access to education as determinants of the conditions most conducive to armed rebellion (Collier 1999; Gurr 1970; Midlarsky 1998; Fearon and Laitin 2003).Elite divisions within the society and weak states have also been identified as contributing factors (Paige 1995; Skopcol 1994; Scott 1976). Reinforcing the impact of structural conditions on rebel recruitment (Fearon and Laitin 2003) find that "recruiting young men to the life of a guerrilla is easier when the economic alternatives are worse". (Fearon and Laitin, 2003, 5). These conditions lead to expectations as to which set of individuals in a society might be most apt to engage in peaceful or violent resistance. These findings range from "young men between 15 to 24" (Collier 1999) to "landless peasants" (Paige 1975) as the segment of the population with the highest propensity to rebel.

Integrated with, or dependent upon a macro-level analysis of structural pre-conditions to mobilization is a subsequent discourse which extracts the motivations of the actors who might engage in rebellion. What can be classified as a "materialist" approach understands the collective action of a particular group largely through the rational or strategic choices made by

participants, directly linking insurgency to material incentives. With largely quantitative analyses which point to the statistical significance of the presence of "lootable resources" (Ross 2004), scholars such as Collier find that "the true cause of much civil war is not the loud discourse of grievance, but the silent force of greed"(Collier 2002). Other macro-level theories distinguish between "activist" and "opportunity" rebellions, based on the degree of risk an "investor" would be required to commit to (Weinstein 2006). In such calculations, the availability of "rewards" supersedes the subjective context of each individual as the primary determinant in their decision to engage in an insurgency.

A more grievance-based argument discredits the overly rationalist "material" perspective of the scholars above, and instead points to "grievance" as a driving force behind ethnic conflicts in particular.(Horowitz 2000, 2003; Clapham1998) Within the extensive literature supporting this argument, is a set of authors who focus on the socio-psychological aspects of ethnic conflict, based on a deeper understanding of historical processes contributing to identity formation. Identity-based mobilization theories have found that individuals within a marginalized group have multiple identities (gender, class, ethnicity) any one, or combination of which, can be made salient at the level of the collective (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994; Mcadam 2000; Stryker 2000). Similar studies also point to the tendency of people to form agency around multiple forms of identity rather than act upon relatively objective incentives, such as money or material goods (Hall 1996, 1970).

Understanding the formation of both individual and "collective" identities and how they are mobilized is essential to understanding the motivations of both male and female combatants.

Ethnic identity in particular is among those that play a large role in the case of Sri Lanka. Scholars have found that the formation and tensions of ethnic identity are inextricably linked to the legacies of colonialism and the inherent racial oppression associated with it (Mamdani 2002; Prunier 1995).Most of these scholars acknowledge that while there may be some "primordial" basis to ethnic identity it is in large part fluid in nature (Horowitz 2000).As a social construct, ethnic identity is vulnerable to a variety of forces which not only shape its nature, but its relevance (Laitin 2003; Horowitz 2002; Ndegwa 1997). The ethnic identity of marginalized groups are often found to have increasing salience at the national level as group insecurities increase (Ndegwa 1997).These identities can be socially constructed, often on the basis of "myth and memory" (Tambiah 1996; Kapferer 2001 ; Daniels 1996). The memory of distinct moments of political repression often define the boundaries of a particular identity even before the formation of an ethnic separatist movement.

While the culturalist approach identifies state repression as a "grievance" with the potential to both shape ethnic identity and lead to the formation of rebel movements, what is often missing in existing analyses is a mechanism to distinguish between how repression is experienced at the individual level and how it is experienced at the level of the collective. This very often creates the assumption that pre-conditions for mobilization and motivations that operate at the level of the collective are necessarily true for all individual actors who participate in rebel movements.

Stathis Kalyvas argues against existing binary understandings of "greed" or "grievance" created by a disjunction between the top and bottom, highlighting that the ambiguity and complexity of civil wars necessitates re-conceptualizing the interaction between actors (from both the center

and periphery) as one reliant upon understanding those involved as having "distinct identities, motivations, and interests".(Kalyvas 2003). Looking at the interaction between macro, micro, and meso level analyses of actions and identities in civil war, Kalyvas finds that purely macro-level studies are unable to adequately provide any consensus of "true" motivations and issues relevant in any on-the-ground reality (Brass 1991; Kalyvas 2003). Although looking specifically at ethnic riots, Tambiah also advocates for a more nuanced understanding of ethnic identity in particular, finding it to be both fluid and fixed. Ethnic violence can be viewed as an interactive process with individuals presenting their own identities within a collective goal. In Tambiah's analysis the individual reasons for joining a collective can be varied but can co-exist within the overarching frame of a collective movement (Tambiah 1996).

While scholars like Kalyvas and Tambiah move us towards an approach that incorporates and examines the relationship between the individual experience and a collective grievance, most of the existing theories of mobilization and participation in rebel movements rely on the underlying assumption of male combatants (Kalylvas 2003; Tambiah 1996). This oversight may limit the ability of such theories to adequately explain the increasing levels of participation among female combatants and the distinct identities which among them which interact with the collective (Alison 2004).

These analyses highlight the broader context, and social processes which may frame an individual's participation in a rebel movement. Several of the causal factors identified above, however, become increasingly salient when incorporated directly into the strategic recruitment practices of a specific rebel movement. Scholars have identified various forms of recruitment

ranging from voluntary to coerced or forced recruitment (Wood 2008; Viterna 2006) of adults and children (Blatman 2010) , as specific strategies of coercion—primarily the use of material incentives (Weinstein 2006) and physical violence (Weinstein 2005). The relative significance of these forms of recruitment in determining participation levels has recently begun to be challenged, particularly in the work of Elizabeth Wood, who finds that most rebel movements try and provide a similar socialization process (political education, military training, propaganda videos) while in the movement (Wood, 2008).

Social Actors & Agency

Running throughout the Political Science literature are two distinct approaches to understanding social actors engaged in transformative forms of politics, presenting what is called the "structure-agent" problem in the social sciences (Lichbach 1998).

> "The structure-agent problem in the social sciences is that human beings
> are the continually active subjects who make the eternally passive objects that
> limit their subjectivity. Individuals more or less purposefully make history, society,
> conditions, and rules, yet history, society, conditions, and rules make individuals.
> We are both autonomous creators and dependent creatures, innovators
> and prisoners." (Lichbach 1998 403)

As highlighted earlier, analyses that operate at the level of the collective ignore the individual social actor, but also focus on contextual factors in and around these actors as determinative in

the decision-making process of individuals (often rational actors). Individual actors, however, must necessarily be understood as acting because of and within social structures.

When focusing on individual agency, it is more helpful to borrow from a similar, but more nuanced, discourse within Anthropology. Among those scholars who understand the "social nature of agency and the pervasive influence on human intentions, beliefs, and actions" (Ahearn 2001, 29), there are those who specifically highlight multiple forms of agency (oppositional agency being one) (Mahmood 2005) and shifting contexts that determine the relevance of agency in any given moment (Desjarlais 1995). Perhaps most useful to the study of female combatants and their interaction with the broader social movement (gender and nationalism), is the division proposed by Sherry Otner of two inter-related concepts of agency : the agency of (unequal) power and the agency of projects. These concepts are used to frame much of the discussion of agency in this study.

The Gender Dynamic: Understanding Female Participation in Rebel Movements

This particular understanding of agency, becomes complicated further when deconstructed through a gendered lens. Within the literature that either specifically addresses female combatants, or is inclusive of their presence in the ranks of rebel recruits, there exists a macro-level perspective on both the reasons women have been excluded from existing analyses, as well as theories on the specific preconditions to women's mobilization.

Women have often been assumed to be more peaceful and less warlike than men, creating an expectation that women are primarily nurturing and nonviolent beings (Alison 2004). In her

analysis of the role of women in movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, Linda Laboa finds that the structurally subordinate position of women in Latin American society is responsible for the expectation that women would not participate in any form of armed struggle, particularly one occurring outside the realm of the state (Laboa 1998, 180). These societal norms create a public (political)/private (apolitical) distinction, casting women as "politically invisible beings"(Peterson 1995), which contributes to women's exclusion in general from various analyses of political processes.

As women began to be considered within broader debates on mobilization, recruitment and participation, some scholars viewed gender-based mobilization from the perspective of a patriarchal leadership, finding that when an individuals' gendered identity is mobilized, women become "disempowered cogs" who have been discovered as an as yet "unexploited constituency" (Coomeraswamy 1997; Victor 2004). Understanding female participants as a homogeneous collective, this approach to the agency of female combatants tends to "diminish women's credibility and influence both within and outside organizations" (Cunningham 2003).

Taking the role of female combatants more seriously, scholars have found that the categories of the "political" and social" are less clearly defined when faced with deconstruction at the hands of an identity such as gender, which necessarily requires an understanding of overlapping social processes (Bernal 2000). Like ethnicity, most scholars will agree that while certain biological distinctions exist, "gender" is also a fluid construct influenced by social and cultural norms. Some of the structural and universal factors often cited as linked to increased activism in women include urbanization, industrialization, capitalism, and modernism (Ray and Korteweg 1999).

Karen Kampwirth finds that larger scale structural changes in general combined with a rise in international feminism specifically generated new forms of women's activism (Kampwirth 2002). Periods of conflict and the absence of men have also been argued to open up spaces of agency for women to cross private/public barriers and assume new roles as heads of households, shifting cultural norms to allow for the mobilization of female fighters (Rajasingham 2001, 105).

As with the traditional theories on the role of "grievance" as a catalyst to participation, collective identity becomes central to any understanding of female participation in rebel movements. Women's ability to express their interests through collective identities has been found to be shaped by political processes, with considerable variation in outcome within these processes. (Ray and Kortweg 1999). When looking specifically at the individual woman, scholars like Ray and Kortweg urge a shift away from macro-level analyses where "larger political, cultural, and economic processes are played out", to a historically and locationally specific analysis with the ability to show how collective identities are constructed for women and how the ideological conditions under which mobilizations take place (Ray and Kortweg 1999, 52).

Among a variety of political processes, state repression in particular has been identified as playing a role in the formation of collective identities. The distinction between oppression and repression has been treated differently by different scholars, this study defines conditions or institutions as oppressive, while repression is a more active term relied on to understand the experiences of women with an oppressive state (Davenport 2007) While some studies completely overlook the role of an oppressive state (Bloom 2005), most scholars identify state repression (using varying definitions of repression) as a catalyst acting either independently or in

conjunction with existing activist networks pushing women towards violent forms of resistance (Kampwirth 2002; Viterna 2006). Karla Cunningham categorizes the impact of state repression on possible female recruits as the "contextual pressures" that enable women to be 'ideologues' and active revolutionaries in their own right (Cunningham 2003, 186). Elisabeth Wood identifies state repression as having played a central role in convincing both male and female civilians to run the risk of joining various forms of insurgent collective action, understanding this participation as best evidenced through a moral commitment and emotional engagement, attributed to newly formed perceptions of justice (Wood 2002).

Jocelyn Viterna's work has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the impact of various factors at the level of the individual female combatant, and the competing identities which contribute to and interact with the over-arching goals of the collective (2006). Acknowledging the agency of the individual female combatant, Viterna situates her study in El Salvador, attempting to capture variations in micro-mobilization through in-depth interviews with participants and non-participants in the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) (2006). Viterna finds that "activists are heterogeneous and often follow multiple paths to the same participation outcome" (2006) Using a data set which incorporates the "grassroots" perspective, Viterna finds that the involvement of women in existing social networks is not as critical as previous studies have found and that state repression was not necessarily the catalyst pushing already active women to participating in rebel movements, rather they were pulled by strong participation identities. (2006). A participation identity is defined as being formed at the moment when "being a participant must become so important to a person's sense of self that to not participate would cause psychological and emotional harm"(Viterna 2006, 5) Individual

participation identities are the focus of Viterna's analysis who finds that there is no singular factor activating these identities to engage in armed revolution, rather "the same mobilization factors can have different results in different combinations" (Viterna 2006, 30).

IV. Analytical Framework

The approach taken in this study combines those adopted in existing interdisciplinary studies, creating a unique theoretical framework within which the theories developed here can be assessed. This framework applies social psychological approaches to existing understandings of state repression within political science. I argue that the approach taken in this dissertation is best able to highlight the central role of state repression in understanding the formation of Tamil women's political identities and female participation in rebel movements. The theoretical framework is comprised of three distinct components, which draw on and build upon existing theoretical approaches put forward in various disciplines.

First, building on the work of Kalyvas (2003) and Tambiah (1996), this study moves away from static conceptions of female participation and conceptually situates the grievances of the individual female combatant in an interactive dialogue with the grievances of a collective group, expressed in the case of Sri Lanka through the goals of the LTTE. This approach highlights that there is a multi-causal pathway for each individual female combatant into rebel movements, and a continual interaction between varied individual grievances and the collective grievances framed by the rebel movement.

This study also draws on a "person-centered" approach more common in anthropology, where theories on specific behaviors of personal or cultural experience are understood through interviews which allow for reflection on past and current experiences of female combatants. (Hollan, 2005). This approach may only have been possible having developed high levels of trust and a comfortable rapport with Tamil women. Rather than focusing on particular events (moments of state repression or specific experiences in the movement), this approach extracts patterns in the behavior of female combatants from within the broader context of an individual combatants life story. Again, this approach situates the individual memory of the female combatant within the constructed narrative of collective memory (Prager 2001; Halbwachs 1992), and allows for an analysis of the relationship between the two.

Finally, this study shifts the site of agency away from being entirely embedded in the rebel leadership and its ability to influence and recruit possible female combatants to being a more nuanced relationship which allows the female combatant some agency, even in political and cultural contexts that restrict the freedom of women.[6] Drawing on the approach put forth by Miranda Alison and similar approaches in Anthropology, this dissertation views female combatants as exercising "restricted agency", acting as "agents making their own choices, though acting within multiple hierarchical structures and specific contexts" (Alison 2004; Ahearn 2001).

---

[6] **"**Agency" here is understood as women taking action with purpose and meaning, though the meanings and contexts of these actions may be partially culturally pre-determined, and not entirely intrinsic (Paul, 1990).)

Theories of Identity and Participation

In my dissertation I plan to build upon existing theories of mobilization and participation in rebel movements to develop a theory that examines how state repression becomes a significant pathway to political participation, and shapes the nature of that participation for individual female combatants.

Theory 1: **Among other causal factors, various forms of state repression are most likely to shape political identities as well as the nature of participation in rebel movements for individual Tamil women.**

While Viterna's work and others (Viterna 2006) highlight that more than one factor, or a combination of factors may be relevant to those in interviewed in the sample population, this study focuses on understanding the role of state repression both in respondents who identify direct forms of state repression as the primary motivating factor in their decision to participate in an armed rebel movement, those who do not explicitly frame their decision in those terms, and those who chose other forms of political participation.

This theory examines the role of both direct and indirect forms of state repression in determining the specific roles played by female combatants within the movement. Jeremy Weinstein finds that all participants in rebel movements are not the same, and can be categorized as either high commitment or low-commitment. (Weinstein, 2007) While my theory seeks to understand the relevance of a non-material incentive structure, the categories of high and low commitment

participants are useful for a broad categorization of variation in participation by female combatants.

Theory 2: **Tamil women, living within a context of repression by both state and non-state actors (militarization, displacement, violence), coupled with cultural repression, are able to exercise forms of agency that shape political identities and levels of participation.**

This theory challenges some of the conventional assumptions that particular types of recruitment are path dependent. The assumption is that the form of recruitment will determine the level of commitment to the movement. This theory tests the strength of expected links between the form of recruitment and levels of participation in the movement. It draws on categories of recruitment established by Jocelyn Viterna ("pushed", "pulled", "persuaded") in her work on El Salvador (2006), and builds on Elizabeth Wood's findings that despite the form of recruitment, cadres undergo similar processes of socialization once in the movement itself (2008). By expanding the timeline of analysis, this theory examines how lived experiences with multiple forms of state repression shape women's agency in restricted contextual and cultural contexts.

V. The Case of Sri Lanka: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

The case of thousands of female combatants participating in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a nationalist movement which fought for an independent state in Sri Lanka, is one of several where an analysis of the relationship between state repression and the nature of female participation is particularly relevant. In 1983, the dedication and passion of four female Jaffna University students protesting the marginalization of the minority Tamil community from

society, led to their inauguration into what was then a fledgling secessionist movement. Breaking free of conservative cultural gender roles, resisting state oppression, joining brothers and fathers, guaranteed, momentarily, safe shelter and food, these women eventually constituted the "Womens Military Wing" and "Birds of Paradise" Units, accounting for 30% of the participants in an ongoing struggle for an independent state of Tamil Eelam (Balasingham 2001).

The history of the conflict provides an important backdrop to understanding the emergence of the LTTE as a separatist resistance movement. During the colonial period (1796-1948), the British divided the Sri Lankan polity into three "races", Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims. According to the Department of Census and Statistics, the country's 19 million people are divided as: Sinhalese, 74%; Sri Lankan Tamils 12.7%, Muslims 7%, and Indian Tamils 5.5% (Winslow 2004, 3). The Tamils are situated in the Northeast of the island, while the Sinhalese dominate the Central areas, the capital, Colombo, and the South. The British favored the Tamil population in their bureaucratic positions due to their proficiency in English (which some scholars attribute to the higher presence of English missionaries in the Northeast) (Horowitz 2003). When the British occupation of the island ended, federalists recommended safeguarding the representation of minorities in any political system, but were largely ignored. The resulting political structure was a centralized, unitary system which bequeathed the executive branch of government with a disproportionate amount of power. The 1948 constitution left little room for power-sharing, and provided the backdrop for the ethnic majoritarian politics that continue to plague the island. (Perera, South Asian Journal). Over the next three decades consecutive Sinhalese administrations enacted a series of measures that systematically marginalized the Tamils from the mainstream of Sri Lanka's political and social life (Winslow 2004; Tambiah 1996; Mampilly 2010).

By 1976, the TULF, the major Tamil opposition party was calling for a constitutional change to enable the creation of a separate Tamil homeland in the North East region of the island. In 1978, a group of Tamil youth led by Vellupillai Prabaharan formed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) an ethnic separatist armed movement seeking the establishment of a Tamil homeland (Eelam) (Winslow 2004; Tambiah 1996). Their first major act, the killing of thirteen Sinhalese soldiers led to massive anti-Tamil riots in the capital city of Colombo—killing thousands of Tamil civilians and leaving nearly 275,000 Tamils displaced. This moment, often referred to as "Black July" in 183 increased the profile of (and support for) the LTTE, and marked the beginning of one of the longest running civil wars in the region (Daniels 1996; Tambiah 1996; Horowitz 2002; Winslow 2004).

In 1990, LTTE documents showed a budding awareness by the movement of the need and value of incorporating women into their ranks (Voices of Tigers Bulletin 1990). On National Women's Day in 1996 LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran declared "The ideal of women's liberation is the fervent child that had its genesis in the matrix of our national liberation movement" (Tcefund.org 2005). Women cadres often speak of earning the respect of men in the field they had never been able to achieve in Tamil society, of feeling like they were protecting their communities, and being grateful to have the option to be trained to survive against the 'enemy'.[7] Drawn from a conservative society, and occupying "non-traditional" political roles, these women have become the subject of much debate amongst feminist scholars. (Coomeraswamy 1997; De Mel 2001; Thirinigama 1990; Alison 2003; Balasingham 2001).

---

[7] Anonymous, Personal interview, 2005, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

The adoption of a militant medium of dialogue on both sides resulted in a roughly three-decade civil war (1980-2009), which left over 100,000 people dead. [8] In 2006 there was an intensification of an "undeclared war" (Uyangoda 2008), and in early 2008 the ceasefire was officially abandoned by the Government of Sri Lanka, with increased violations on both sides rendering it irrelevant. Abandoning any possibility of political reconciliation, the administration of Mahinda Rajapaksa adopted the language of the U.S. "War on Terror", along with a hard line military policy. With powerful backers such as India, China, and Israel the Government of Sri Lanka defeated the LTTE in May 2009, violating international human rights norms and killing as many as 40,000 civilians in the final months of fighting (UN Panel Report 2011) and leaving over 300,000 displaced in heavily guarded internment camps. (Crisis Group Report 2010).

Though international rights groups called for investigations into war crimes and increased access for the ICRC and United Nations—most ex-fighters, both men and women, in 2010 remained isolated in government run rehabilitation centers or in overcrowded refugee camps. One year after the defeat, one ICG report finds that "Most of the drivers of Sri Lanka's conflict have not been resolved and some new sources of resentment have emerged" (Crisis Group Report 2010).

As access to rehabilitation centers has been selectively opened up to journalists, the stories of female fighters in the LTTE have begun to emerge. In these stories, the women are automatically robbed of any agency, painted as passive victims subjected to the will of a patriarchal terrorist

---

[8] These numbers come from estimates conducted by the Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Relief, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction. The numbers are also routinely cited in numerous media sources, including the British Broadcasting Corporation at (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/country_profiles/1166237.stm).

organization[9]. This study aims to better understand the motivations of female fighters during various phases of the LTTE, contextualizing their individual stories within the broader context of the grievances of a minority community.

While women on both sides of the ethnic divide have been impacted by the conflict, this study focuses on Tamil women living within conflict-affected districts in the North and East. Amongst this subset of women there is a commonality in experiences of repression from the state, cultural repression from the community, and contextual exposure to displacement, militarization, and violence. They are not, however, homogenous, and this study attempts to highlight the variation in how common experiences might produce variations in forms of political participation.

VI. Methods

In determining the most effective methodology to answer the questions presented in this dissertation, it is important to highlight that the information required will be drawn from a very specific target group in a region that has often been difficult to access. This research presented unique challenges for an "inside-outsider" embedded in expected and unexpectedly violent situations (Geertz 1988), exposed to the continually shifting nature of conflict. (Trnka 2008). Existing work on the specific target group of female combatants has largely been done by those outside of the movement (or the region), with a tendency to produce over-generalized assumptions and interpretations on questions of gender and agency (De Mel 2001; Schalk 1994; Coomeraswamy 1997). Scholarship or documentation emerging from within the movement is often dismissed as overly politicized, or movement propaganda (Balasingham 2001). This study

---

[9] Access to this population is highly restricted, and all articles released are censored by the Government of Sri Lanka (ICG Report).

draws on in-depth interviews and time spent amongst combatants themselves in order to allow

for self-perceptions and individual understandings to guide an academic analysis.

Recent comparisons of qualitative and quantitative studies have found the two approaches to be

comparable in their ability to contribute to Political Science provided that the design of

qualitative studies enables them to provide valid causal inferences (Brady, Collier, Seawright

2006) In social theory in particular the "creation of clear concepts" (Weber 1988) and

incorporation of "causal process observations" (CPOs) create causal inferences with the ability to

explain complex causal processes (Brady, Collier, Seawright 2006), such as the relationship

between state repression and the nature of female participation.

The theory developed in this qualitative study relies on the insight and concepts generated by

using an ethnographic approach to gathering data that includes CPOs, person-centered

interviews, focus groups, and gathering testimonies. (Brady, Collier Seawright 2006; Hollan

2005; Pandey 2006; Kreuger 1994). Traditional methods of information gathering, such as

survey studies, are unable to provide adequate insight into the impact of state repression on the

individual female combatant. Administering a survey in this context would not only be extremely

challenging due to the sensitive nature of the questions, but would fail to capture the life histories

and experiences of the individual female combatant. Surveys are also unable to go into the depth

possible with interviews that allow for the flexibility to follow up on particular statements of

interest. The approach used in this study also provides the space to understand the

transformations of individuals over time, not remaining static as social actors based on a single

experience or set of experiences.

This study draws on six data sets, most collected through extensive field work. In Sri Lanka, my community work for the past eight years as well as personal and professional connections throughout the country has allowed me access to a unique sample of former, current, and non-fighter women. Existing studies have perhaps tended to rely on secondary sources, and public leadership representatives of the movement, due to a lack of access to and trust amongst female combatants. This limits the ability of prior scholarship to provide insights into the experiences, understandings, and politics of these women themselves.

As a Tamil Sri Lankan – American woman, my first exposure to young Tamil women in Sri Lanka was as a volunteer educator and trainer in the orphanages in the conflict-affected districts in the North and East in 2001. Living amongst these young women, the quiet moments often provided an opportunity for them to tell me their stories. It became immediately apparent how closely intertwined the lives of young women in these areas were with the LTTE, then at its strongest point, controlling vast swaths of territory. I returned to these orphanages every summer for three years while in graduate school, strengthening my language skills and my ties to these women and their communities. After the December 2004 Tsunami destroyed the lives and livelihoods of many in this region I returned as a humanitarian aid worker with Operation USA to support recovery efforts through several grassroots women's organizations. I continued this work as I completed by comprehensive exams, traveling to the region every three months for four years. Over this time I spent time amongst Tamil youth, men, and women fighters and former fighters, and community based organizations- building relationships and a high level of trust amongst communities in these areas.

The data is divided up into six categories: Tamil Youth; Female Fighters/Former Fighters; Tamil Civilian Women; Male Fighters/Former Fighters; Civil Society; Women affected by Gender-based violence.

Data Set 1: Tamil Youth

This data was obtained in preliminary research visits, primarily through the use of focus groups ((Kitzinger 1995, 299). The Tamil youth were drawn from local orphanages in two locations to participate in a leadership camp. As a part of these camps, I conducted gender sessions amongst the youth. The total sample size of youth who participated were twenty two in the eastern district of Batticaloa, fifteen in the northern Jaffna district. [10]

Data Set 2: Female Fighters/Former Fighters

The total sample size of this data set was ten women. These women were between 18-25 years old, Tamil-speaking, Hindu and Christian, who lived across the Northern and Eastern Districts of Sri Lanka (Batticaloa, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Ampara, Vavuniya). With each woman, I conducted a series of six in-depth open-ended interviews. These interviews adopted the person-centered approach pioneered by Robert Levy, a method that is only possible when meaningful relationships and high level of trust has already been established within a particular community. (Hollan 2005) This approach positions the subject as both an informant and respondent, allowing for a deeper understanding of how "an interviewees' subjective experiences relate to the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which they emerged" (Hollan 2005, 463). In the context of Sri Lanka in particular, each of these women has been subject to multiple traumatic events in the course of their (often very young) lives. The only ethical way to work with this

---

[10] Details of the process and participation in these groups can be found in Chapter 2.

population would be to adopt an approach that is able to see each individual woman through a much broader lens than her answers to one question, rather as a human being whose life has been impacted by various processes, often outside of her control. These individuals also lived in an environment where suspicion of some association with one of the warring parties dominated every new interaction, and people rarely spoke freely. The type of understanding necessary to have a holistic view of the participation of women in political violence, can only been done when a high degree of trust within the community has already been established. As such the ethical and empirical demands of the study overlap and my unique position having established long-term relationships within the community, (and as a Tamil Sri Lankan woman), have allowed me access to this type of data.

The specific measures used in the interview design were intended to gather information about whether the motivations of female fighters are shaped by the context and processes of state repression. The questions posed are partially reliant on existing frameworks established by authors working with a similar sample population. Viterna finds through her work in El Salvador that the most effective methodology incorporates structured questions around past events, rather than past attitudes towards events (Viterna 2006). My own interview design incorporates this "event-based understanding" of individual life experiences within the person-centered interview. This highlights incidents of state repression, often represented as a traumatic moment in the narrative (Prager 2001). This approach is particularly relevant in Tamil society, where discussing any difficulties faced in life, and the emotional impact of these experiences, is culturally discouraged. This is perhaps common in conflict zones as a means of survival, but generally people in these communities are hesitant to discuss moments of difficulty that we

might categorize as 'traumatic'.[11] The event-based understanding allows for these moments to be expressed within the broader narrative of life histories, allowing the respondent a greater level of comfort in the interview process. This data set is then able to shed light on both the relationship between experiences with state repression and the formation of collective identities which may lead to mobilization.

The six interviews with each respondent were conducted with a one to two day space in between each interview. Following the general parameters of a person-centered approach, the interviews were predominantly led by the direction the interviewee chose to go, which in itself highlighted the events and psychological concerns that were significant to each individual. (HOLLAN?)

- The first and second interviews were intended to provide general information and establish a relationship with the respondent.

  How old are you? How many brothers and sisters do you have? Where did you grow up?

- The third and fourth interviews are intended to provide more specific information on the respondents personal history and the social-political context of the time period prior to participation

  Where is your brother now? Were you able to finish school? Do both of your

  parents work?

---

[11] Anecdotal evidence: In one session with a social worker from Canada, conflict-affected orphans were asked to write down their most unforgettable moment. Several cited the loss of a parent, or witnessing an act of war. The children ended up in tears, overwhelming the social worker, until the older girls came down and strictly scolded them in Tamil (translation) *"What are you fussing for? Don't you have schoolwork to do?"*.

- The fifth interview provides the space to further examine responses provided in the first four interviews, as well as to obtain answers to more specific questions

  What happened when you decided to join the rebel movement? Was there a particular experience that made you want to join?

While the first set of questions were similar across respondents and cases, the second to fifth interviews varied based on the individual's responses in order to build an accurate context to each respondents life history. The questions in the sixth interview were identical across categories and cases, in order to create a basis for comparison. These questions were aimed at understanding the impact of state repression on each respondent.

Through the course of these interviews, or additionally, respondents were asked to identify the role they played in the movement, both their official title and the activities that might define their level of involvement. The answers provided here will help assess the relevance of previously developed categories of high and low-risk commitment, or highlight the need to develop new categories for understanding variation in female participation.

In providing a life history context to each woman's decision to participate in a rebel movement, this particular ethnographic approach is best able to capture and assess the impact of state repression on the individual, as well as variations in female participation. The information obtained from this data set (state repression, female participation) will then be analyzed in order to determine the strength of the correlation between forms of state repression and the nature of participation, as well as to identify alternative explanations.

Data Set 3: Female Non-Fighters

Scholars who look at broader causes for the indiscriminate violence used by repressive states and cycles of violence often critique those studies where "victim-turned-insurgent testimonials figure prominently" (Lyall 2009, 5). These studies are found to create a selection bias by ignoring those who had similar experiences with state repression, but chose not to join the rebel movement.

This data set, also based on a sample size of ten, specifically examines the experiences and life histories of women from a similar sample population who chose not to join the rebel movement, or given the opportunity to avoid forced recruitment. These interviews were primarily conducted amongst young women in the care of churches in Jaffna and Batticaloa, conducted over several years of repeat trips to these homes. Spending several weeks amongst these women every year working, also teaching small groups of youth teaching leadership-building skills and English [12], I had the opportunity to develop relationships with individual women and over the course of several conversations was able to document short life histories for each. Each of these women's lives was impacted by direct or indirect experiences of state repression, and most had crossed paths with the LTTE (through a family member, or directly)—yet they chose not to join.

The patterns identified amongst this data set highlight alternate paths taken by women who have had similar experiences with direct and indirect state repression. This data set also emphasizes that the motivations of female fighters cannot be entirely explained one single factor (state repression). There is most likely a multi-causal pathway to mobilization (Viterna), amongst

---

[12] VISIONS

which the combination of multiple factors best explains the participation of female fighters in the LTTE.

Data Set 4: Male Fighters/Former Fighters

Extensive research has been done on the motivations of male fighters both in the LTTE and similar cases (Collier, Hoeffler 2002; Gurr 1970). While it is not within the scope of this study to compare the motivations of male and female fighters, this study does incorporate data collected from male fighters in order to better understand the perceptions of female fighters and the role they played in the movement. This data set also provides some insight into the socialization processes that occurred within the movement itself. These interviews were conducted with six boys over the course of a three visits to a Vocational Training Center in Batticaloa with Tamil ex-combatant males between the ages of 18-25.

Data Set 5: Civil Society

The data collected from civil society includes both primary and secondary sources. Through the course of my humanitarian work during and after the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, I developed relationships with grassroots organizations throughout the North East of Sri Lanka, as well as with the larger organizations based in Colombo. I spent time at the International Center for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, which has an extensive collection of material only published and available regionally on the status of women throughout the conflict period. I also worked with the women's organization Viluthu, to get some of the their records of work with female fighters translated from Tamil to English. In addition to these materials, I was able to conduct interviews with some of the heads of both smaller and larger women's organizations on the island, some of whom participated in the 2002 Commission on Gender, during the third round of peace talks between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. (CITATION). For providing

32

more detailed depth to the context in particular time periods of humanitarian crisis and conflict, I also rely on situation reports from the United Nations and Humanitarian organizations.[13]

Data Set 6: Women Affected by Gender-based Violence

In 2010, with support from the International Crisis Group, I conducted a research study with victims of various forms of gender-based Violence with over fifty interviews in order to determine patterns in gender-based violence from 2005-2010. Interviews were conducted in England, the U.S., India, and Sri Lanka with women whose identity would overlap with earlier categories (former fighters, non fighters, civil society), but have been categorized together here on the basis of experiences with gender-based violence in order to better understand the impact of gender-based violence on women's agency and the formation of their political identities.

VII. Chapter Outline

Chapter 1: Theory Chapter (Women Who Fight: Overlooked and Misunderstood)

This chapter situates specific questions of gender and insurgency within existing debates on mobilization and participation in armed resistance movements. The subject of female fighters has been understudied and existing approaches to insurgency in general are unable to adequately capture the experiences of these women and their individual political identities. This chapter lays out a detailed methodology and unique iner-disciplinary approach that has the ability to produce new insights on the question of female fighters, specifically in the LTTE in Sri Lanka. This chapter also defines my own position as the researcher and my connection to these communities, often very difficult for outsiders to access or develop trust within.

Chapter 2: Tamil Women and the LTTE

This chapter looks at the historical context in which the LTTE emerged. This chapter sets forth the gender norms and expectations in traditional Tamil society, supplementing existing scholarship with the perceptions and values understood by youth through a series of focus groups. The conservative nature of Tamil society gives us an insight into both the position of women prior to the LTTE as well as into the formation of the LTTE as a social movement built on an entrenched cultural identity. Drawing on research conducted in the LTTE archives in Killinochi in 2004, as well as interviews with senior LTTE cadres this chapter takes a detailed look at the formation of the LTTE. This chapter relies on original LTTE documents and interviews with current and former fighters to outline the entrance of women into the LTTE. The roles played by the women interviewed are used to craft general parameters for the various roles played by women in the LTTE, as well as to determine the varying levels of ideological commitment to the movement. This chapter highlights the variation in women's experiences within the LTTE, and explores how women's self-perceptions shifted through their participation.

Chapter 3: State Repression: Militarization, Displacement, and Daily Life

This chapter attempts to contextualize the lives of Tamil women in the North and East of Sri Lanka, drawing on interviews with female fighters and non-fighters to understand life in a conflict zone, during periods of peace, violence, and overlapping humanitarian crises. While state repression is often only understood by measures of direct experiences, this chapter looks at the lived experience of women in warzones in Sri Lanka (though likely applicable to women in conflict zones elsewhere), and the impact that these experiences had on individual women. Harassment at checkpoints, feeling helpless in line for food rations in a displaced camp, pervasive fear are among the many moments that shape the formation of a unique political

identity, that was later expressed through various forms of political engagement. Among their choices, the context laid out here helps explore the connection between various forms of discriminate and indiscriminate forms of state-sponsored violence and subsequent female engagement in political violence. The analysis in this chapter also establishes loose measures of variations in state repression.

Chapter 4: Gender-Based Violence and Female Participation

This chapter draws on a unique data set of in-depth interviews with survivors of gender-based violence from 2005-2010. A review of existing approaches to gender-based violence in Sri Lanka finds a focus primarily on women's bodies as the site of violence, and how they are able (or unable) to process and claim their own experiences within a conservative Tamil society. Building on these analyses this chapter uses the testimonies of women (both civilian and ex-combatant) to approach gender-based violence as a form of political violence, which in turn has the capacity to impact and shape women's political identities. In nearly all the cases, an experience with gender-based violence represented a significant disjuncture from a "normal" social and political trajectory (even in the context of a fractured and constantly shifting society), and created the opportunity and willingness to engage in new forms of social action.

Chapter 5: Understanding Actions: Gender and Agency

This chapter first establishes a new approach to understanding the agency of female fighters, moving beyond binary feminist debates on agency ('victims versus perpetrators') to complicate the role of women in rebel movements. Beginning with a theoretical discussion of gender and nationalism, the chapter is then grounded in the specifics of the case study and the LTTE. Existing scholarship has a tendency to view female fighters from the outside creating frameworks that often undermine their agency, while scholars embedded in the movement are

accused of being apologists, spreading political propaganda. The approach of this study creates insights drawing on patterns that emerge from in-depth interviews with female fighters themselves. Drawing on interviews with male and female fighters this chapter highlights the constantly evolving nature of society as it operates at a collective level, the experiences of the individual Tamil woman with multiple forms of state repression, and how the interaction between the two re-frames our understanding of gender and nationalism.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the study begins with a look at the position of Tamil women in the last year, based on original research conducted in 2011 with civilian women who were displaced, living in a highly militarized conflict, ex-combatants and women engaged in mobilizing and development within their communities. Drawing on the theories established throughout the study this section looks forward at the possibilities and struggles for Tamil women in the post-conflict era. By adopting a unique methodology rooted in ethnographic methods and an interdisciplinary approach to the questions presented, this study is able to shed new light on the lives, motivations, and politics of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. This chapter summarizes the findings of this study. Through this study, I find that existing theories built on material incentives and existing movement activism are not able to fully explain the variation between high and low commitment female combatants. Tamil women exposed to both cultural and state repression can be seen as agentive actors, exercising both oppositional and non-oppositional agency in a highly restricted context. Looking at multiple pathways to joining, this study highlights the role state repression plays as a significant factor with the ability to shape both political identities and the nature of female participation.

Chapter 2: Tamil Women and the LTTE

In order to understand the role of Tamil women in the LTTE, it is important to first understand gender roles and individual experiences of women within Tamil society. This study looks at Tamil society as something distinct within the broader Sri Lankan society. Several factors, including the war, and the geographic placement of a large majority of Tamils in the Northern and Eastern districts, delineated Tamils from the rest of the Sri Lankan society. Over the course of the war, these districts passed hands between LTTE and government control[14], but remained sequestered socially (and often, economically), thus developing a unique character grounded in traditional Tamil values. Focusing on the historical and locational specifics, this study follows an approach which produces the most accurate insights into preconditions of women's mobilization.[15] This chapter looks at the broader contextual factors that provided the backdrop to female fighters' life stories and their roles in the movement, while later chapters look at specific forms of repression experienced by Tamil women.

This chapter first looks at how the role of Tamil women in Tamil society had been understood by scholars, and how these roles have been interpreted by children living within the society. It then defines the roles played by Tamil women within the LTTE, leaving further examination of the link between the two to later chapters on militarization and the complex relationship between gender and nationalism. Using multiple qualitative methods, this study draws on different tools available to qualitative researchers to obtain information. The broader study relies primarily on participant observation and in-depth one-on-one interviews (Marshall, Rossman 1995). However,

---

[14] The distinction of women's experiences between areas of government and LTTE control is further explored in Chapter 3.

[15] "The analysis of the specificities of oppression are vital if we are to understand the nature of the rebellion to which it gives rise" (Ray and Kortweg).

in preliminary research conducted among youth the information presented in this chapter draws

heavily on data obtained using the focus group technique. In the context of the youth leadership

camp, this technique allowed for a "group process to help people to explore and clarify their

views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview" (Kitzinger 1995,

299).

I. Gender Roles in Tamil Society: The "Good" Tamil Woman

In Tamil society, the birth of a female child is often seen as a burden rather than the blessing of a

male child (IAWID 1995, 33). Scholars have looked at the construction of the traditional Tamil

woman as "fertile nurturer, chaste woman, spiritual and dutiful housewife" (Chatterjee 1989,

238). Feminist scholars who have looked at women in the LTTE often link their role as nurturers

in Tamil society to their eventual role as martyrs willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater

good of the nation (De Mel 1998; Thirinigama 2001). Some of the key aspects underlying the

construction of the "traditional" Tamil woman are the space they occupy, acceptable codes of

behavior, the significance of marriage/dowry, and the symbolic values associated with them.

Gender roles in Tamil society are set against a more generally observed trend of clear

divisions between public and private space for women in South Asia. These divisions

have been understood at a theoretical level by scholars who look at the distinction in

terms of how it applies to our understandings of political actors, finding that the public

space becomes largely a political domain, and women, primarily operating in the private

space of the home, become apolitical or "politically invisible" (Beckman, D'Amico 1994, 7).

Looking at South Asia in particular Chatterjee finds that "The way gender operates in society,

the public is typically the domain of the male, and the home or inner space, which 'must remain

unaffected by the profane activities of the material world' is represented by women". (Chatterjee 1989, 239).

This division between public and private space in society is often one of the first, most visible, indications of gender relations within any society. In Tamil Sri Lankan society in the Northern and Eastern districts, particularly as the public space became more heavily militarized with increased army presence, the physical absence of women became even more pronounced[16]. Commenting on a similar phenomenon, Rajini Thiranagama finds that the private/public divide in Tamil society also allowed for a "Puratinism and repression in private life that seemed effectively to co-exist with materialism and integration in public, and economic life" (Thirinigama 1990, 330).In research conducted amongst the Tamil diaspora here in the United States, the legacy of this trend could often be seen in the divide between men in the living rooms and auditoriums where politics was easily discussed, and women (who were equally accomplished in their professional careers) felt more comfortable in the hidden space of kitchens and dens .[17] This divide is particularly complex in Tamil society, as a prioritization of education for both men and women has led to women entering the public domain as professionals. (ICG Report)Despite this feminist scholars found that "improved standards in practical life are a façade. The inferior status of women was exemplified by lower pay for women's work, dowry payment by women to men of similar status and profession, and by restrictive cultural, and social practices" (Thirinigama 1990, 322).

---

[16] This statement is supported by personal observation in October of 2010. The impact of militarization on women in Tamil society is further explored in Chapter 3.
[17] Groups of Tamil Diaspora, Personal Interviews, New Jersey and California, 2007.

The space these women occupied translates into and explains the expected codes of behavior for women. Women were expected to dress conservatively (with long skirts, hair tied, small gold earrings), behave in a demure manner, and never draw attention to themselves.[18] In a rare interview, then leader of the LTTE Women's Unit, Thamilini, described the position of young Tamil women, "Our girls grow up being tied down. 'Don't smile.' 'Put your head down.' 'Walk gently.' All these are unwritten codes of conduct. If any woman were to act differently; it is viewed as though the whole world has collapsed on our shoulders." (Sinnathurai 2005). The socialization of gender roles, and the distinction between young men and young women, starts at a young age, when girls and women often learn to put themselves second, and the men around them, their family, and community honor first (Rajanisingham-Senanayake 2001). These codes of behavior were later drawn on and formalized in a now infamous LTTE handbill which laid out what it meant to be a "Tamil" woman, and the responsibility of women to protect that identity. (Schalk 1994).

The roots of this come from the traditional hindu construct of the 'good woman' as one who is married and auspicious (sumangali). The construction of the Tamil wife is inextricably linked to a construction of the mother figure, which is often relied on as a symbolic representation of national and communal identity in South Asia. (Rajinisingham-Senanayake 2001, 215). Marriage, its practice and customs, in itself have been culturally repressive. The matrilineal system of property inheritance is often heralded as a source of financial and economic power for women, though in practice when these properties are "demanded as a precondition for marriage,

---

[18] As a Tamil Sri Lankan- American I was raised with similar expectations, and while this placed me on the outside of mainstream "American" society, when I returned to these areas, I found that these codes were far more rigid than I had expected. Young girls would be shocked at the size of my earrings, or chastise me for wearing a light colored skirt that had the possibility to be transparent.

then it deteriorates into the dowry system." (Kumarasamy 2006, 1).Arranged marriages based more on social status and economic criteria that women generally are allowed a say in, have continued to rely heavily on an antiquated dowry system, which place women in a demeaning and powerless position. The symbolic positioning of the Tamil woman through Hindu mythology, or cultural norms is particularly relevant for their eventual positioning within the nationalist discourse. (De Mel 2001; Rajinisingham-Senanyake 2001; Crisis Group Report 2011).

Youth Perspective: Gender Roles and Tamil Youth

These gender roles, defined by multiple scholastic interpretations of Tamil culture, should also be understood in how they are perceived within the society itself, and relevant to the interactions inherent in the lived experience of women. To this end, the work I conducted through the VISIONS leadership program[19], as preliminary research for this study, provides unique insights into perceptions and understandings of gender roles amongst Tamil youth.

As I was working with Tamil youth, and more specifically broaching the subject of gender roles (something not often openly discussed within the community), the strength of the focus group approach was in its ability to provide a 'safe' space for those children who felt more comfortable speaking amongst their peers than in a one-on-one interview and also revealed the dynamics between the male and female children. As they discussed attitudes in Tamil society as a whole, their understandings of gender roles were reflected in their interactions with each other (Morgan 1988).

---

[19] VISIONS is a global youth empowerment program, that I helped develop and participated in beginning in 2002, when I spent the summer working with war-affected youth in Batticaloa. I later participated in programs in the Trincomalee and Jaffna, and now remain an advisor to the NGO.

The information obtained in these groups is intended only to provide supporting evidence for existing research on gender roles in Sri Lanka, in order to account for some of the drawbacks of this type of research (i.e., more aggressive personalities answering a majority of questions, not relying on the focus group as a measure of consensus (Henderson 1995).

Participant Characteristics

Tamil youth participating in the Visions Leadership Program were a part of two focus groups at each location. The first took place in the town of Uranee, in the Eastern District of Batticaloa . The second took place in the Jaffna town, in the Northern District of Jaffna.[20] These locations were chosen in order to incorporate multiple perspectives, reflecting divisions within Tamil society itself. The Jaffna and Batticaloa districts where the focus groups were conducted were then under government control, predominantly Tamil & Muslim ethnically, and had previously been heavily influenced if not controlled by the LTTE. Most of the children had some connection to the LTTE, with siblings or parents in the movement, but were raised in rural villages which embodied the most traditional aspects of Tamil society.

The two focus groups conducted in Batticaloa were youth selected by wardens from within five district orphanages, having been identified as having leadership potential (n=22). [21]A slight majority of the youth were male (13 = 59%), with the remaining young women (9 = 41%), and a mean age of 14.6 years (range = 12-18 years). Similarly in Jaffna the two focus groups were comprised of Tamil youth selected from three district orphanages as having leadership potential

---

[20] Visions program youth selected as a part of a leadership program, Focus Group interviews, 2001/2002, Batticaloa and Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

[21] These children were selected on leadership qualities and academic merit to participate in the program. Data using these children is the most useful, as these children are also the most likely to discuss their opinions in a community where children are often very reserved.

(n = 15). The group had more male participants (9 = 60%) than female (6 = 40%) with a mean age of 14.13 (range = 12-18 years).

Procedure

For most of the program, participant observation of the youth during various training programs yielded obvious distinctions such as the physical space carefully maintained between the boys and girls participating in the program as well as the more subtle lines (the girls always jumped up to serve the tea to the boys). The focus groups created a more formal environment to explore some of the themes that emerged in these programs. The focus groups consisted of between 15-22 youth, and were conducted by myself and a second facilitator, who were also counselors in the training programs. The questions were pre-formatted and semi structured, and developed by myself and an education doctoral student, designed to inform an inter-disciplinary study of gender perceptions amongst Tamil youth. The first set of discussions revolved around the activities or specific roles men and women should play in Tamil society, while the second focused on perspectives or understandings of these roles, both from the perspective of Tamil youth. The data obtained here was also used to inform the interview guide used in other parts of this study.

The first set of questions on roles for women in Tamil society, looked for a youth understanding of the gender distinction between private and public spaces, as they manifested themselves in Tamil society. When discussing the activities appropriate for women within the home, both boys and girls answered that they should wash pots and pans, sweep, cook, serve food, wash clothes, and take care of the parents. Within the home boys felt that men should be responsible for shopping and gardening, while outside the home their options were limitless. *"Men should do*

everything since they are able to, they should help women since they can't do

everything."(Batticaloa, 2001) Men, they felt, were more suited for salaried work while women

more suited for work in the home. If they were to work outside the home, they could be a

teacher, nurse, or the president. Girls, they felt, should do only *"what is suitable for girls"*

(Jaffna, 2002). Work like fishing and agriculture was too difficult for a woman, and should be

left to men. The general consensus was that for those occupations that applied to both men and

women, men should be paid more because they will work harder.

Sitting across the room was the group of young women in question who would be relegated to

the public and private roles so firmly defined by their male peers. Girls felt that while men could

do anything, outside the home women could be a doctor, teacher, scientist, judge, scientist,

astronaut or clerk. The girls also agreed that men should help in fields women were not

(physically) able to participate in, for example masonry. They felt strongly, however, that where

men and women performed the same work they should receive the same salary.

The more complex understandings of the private/public spaces women and men occupied were

not necessarily the children's understanding of gender roles within the private space of the home,

however the underlying assumptions (that women should be married, and must take the role of

mother seriously) did have relevance in the daily lives of the children and were cultural norms

that they both prioritized and didn't question.

Probing beyond these understandings of women's role in the home, we tried to gauge how

gender inequality played out in the home. "Are husband and wife equal"? Here, the boys

overwhelmingly felt that they were, while the girls were quick to point out obvious inequalities. "If men can go out at night, and women can't then how can they be equal?" The dowry system[22] was also cited as a tradition that guaranteed a marriage would be unequal, the girls suggested a system where both sides were required to contribute a dowry to create a more equal interaction between the two.

The second set of discussions generally involved perceptions and understandings of women in Tamil society, largely drawn from the roles constructed for them. Both boys and girls felt that overall in Tamil society men and women were not equal. While the boys didn't go much further, the girls cited examples of women in their communities. Some women they knew were treated as slaves, Muslim women they knew couldn't pray with men, young boys were promoted more often than young girls, if girls come home late they get scolded whereas boys don't.[23]

Defensive of their privileged position, the boys tended to focus on biological distinctions, emphasizing that any inequality likely stemmed from the fact that men are stronger. Even in cases where a woman gives birth "the father is responsible for raising a strong man". Seemingly used to this fall-back argument on physical strength, one young woman stood up to recount a story of a 65-year-old grandmother who carried her children on her back to school when they couldn't get there. This woman, she said, has the strength of all the Tamil women soldiers that she sees (Jaffna, 2002).

---

[22] The dowry system as it operates in Tamil society dictates that when a marriage is arranged, the bride's family will provide some form of material compensation to the groom (usually in the form of cash, property, or gold). This system was later abolished in LTTE controlled territory, though it remains entrenched in Tamil society today. (Interviews, 2011).

[23] It is important to note here, that while there were significant numbers of Muslim youth in this area, they did not participate in this activity, and their views are not represented directly here.

One of the more interesting aspects that emerged from the discussions, was the relative similarity of answers to questions from the boys and girls, perhaps highlighting the entrenched nature of these traditional roles and perceptions. While the girls challenged assumptions of inherent strength and measures of equality, both boys and girls at a relatively young age knew the roles they were expected to play. This sense of pre-ordained destiny, particularly for women, became relevant in my discussions with female fighters, some of whom saw their participation in the LTTE as a means of creating their own future, and breaking out of traditional gender roles in Tamil society.

II. The Impact of Conflict: Shifting Gender Roles in Tamil Society

Along with an understanding of base Tamil values and societal roles for women, in the context of Sri Lanka, it is important to understand the impact of ongoing conflict and continuous political violence on women prior to their engagement with public political activism on a larger scale. This impact is disaggregated and analyzed in Chapter 5, in a broader discussion on gender and nationalism, but a summary is provided here in order to better understand the backdrop against which women began to join the LTTE.

The children interviewed, grew up in a time period where violence had become normalized, and had, perhaps without their knowledge, changed the possibilities for their own future. Widespread economic deprivation in the North and East, and limitations on educational opportunities, was reflected in the over-emphasis on biological distinctions in men and women's career options. Young men at this time were often sent to the middle east to do manual labor jobs (often in fields

like air conditioning repair or construction) . [24]The jobs that were available in these areas were prioritized for able bodied young men, while young women unable to complete their education, and often without access to viable vocational training, were meant to tend and care for the families at home (Thirinigama 1990).

The position of women in Tamil society, the roles they played, and their opportunities were all shifted through the years of protracted fighting. One internal study finds that women were disproportionately impacted in the early years of conflict, subject to sexual harassment and assault by armed forces, increased rates of maternal mortality in IDP camps, increased levels of unemployment, and increasing levels of suicide in Tamil women, ages 18-24. (IAWID 1995). These types of local studies have since been validated by international research and advocacy pointing to the disproportionate impact of conflict on women in general.(Crisis Group Report 2011). UN Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000, highlighting that "civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict including as refugee and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements" (UN Resolution 1325)[25].

Despite some women's participation in political activism, and eventually their larger scale participation in the LTTE, there still remained a significant shift in the gender demographics across the North East with a significant number of women-headed households emerging in the absence of young men (Reddy 2008). Scholars have debated whether this opened up new forms of agency for women, or placed further restrictions on women (Das 2000; Coomeraswamy 1988;

---

[24] St. Johns Vocational Center Boys, Personal Interviews, 2007, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
[25] The impact of displacement and militarization on women in Tamil society is explored in depth in Chapter 3.

Thirinigama 1990),[26] but the shift in societal context is highlighted here to reveal some of the gender-specific challenges that were a direct result of the ongoing conflict.

Gender-based violence is something that is generally difficult to document, but in Sri Lanka has been increasingly so, with successive administrations clamping down on local and international non-governmental organization's ability to address the issue[27]. However, anecdotal evidence and witness statements point to high levels of sexual assault, harassment and humiliation of women in conflict zones, particularly those in former LTTE-held territories later occupied by a heavy military presence. (Watchlist, 2008; Anderson, New Yorker; CHA, 2008).[28] The increased vulnerability of women is often coupled with a lack of access to service for women in conflict areas, particularly reproductive health services as well as resources for those who have been victims of sexual violence (CPA 2009; Somachandran 2010). Women also find themselves left to be the primary income-earner, without the necessary skills to sustain a livelihood to provide for children in their husband's absence (CHA 2008).

The impact of external forces on women in Tamil society shifts the dynamics within Tamil society itself. Often suffering from feelings of helplessness and defeat, civilian men in army-controlled territory often turn to alcohol, a habit encouraged by a state always on guard for a renewed resistance movement. This increase in alcoholism leads to an increase in domestic violence within Tamil homes (CHA 2008; Crisis Group 2011), and the marked increase in sexual violence both from within and outside the community has been found to lead to a return of

---

[26] This debate will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 5.
[27] Anonymous staff for Oxfam International, Personal Interview, 2009, New York, New York.
[28] A detailed study of the increased vulnerability of women to Gender-Based Violence is presented in Chapter 4.

narrow gender values, relegating women to the safety of their homes and under the careful eye of husbands and fathers (Thirinigama 1990; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001). These cycles of conservatism have been consistently repetitive throughout the course of the conflict in Sri Lanka.

The culturally entrenched gender roles in Tamil society, along with the impact of nearly thirty decades of conflict on women in particular, both provide the background context against which female participation in public, and violent, political activism took place. While later chapters in this study analyze in more detail the impact of these societal standards and contextual changes on individual women, this chapter first lays out the details of their participation in public politics, and eventually in a violent armed resistance movement.

III. Women in the LTTE: Variation in Experience

The early stages of the Tamil political movement against perceived discrimination from the Singhalese state began as a peaceful movement. Tamil politicians mobilized the Tamil community following the Gandhian Ahimsa principals for sit-ins and protests against the first signs of marginalization of the Tamil community from the mainstream of political, social, and economic life in Sri Lanka (Winslow 2004). While not assuming leadership roles initially, they were active participants in these mass rallies, equally vulnerable to the aggressive response of the Sri Lankan government (Balasingham 1993, 13)

The conflict also provided a temporary space for women across ethnic lines to share a "commonality in women's experience" (Rajanisingham-Senanayake 2001, 106). Several groups

formed (like the Mothers Front, Mothers and Daughters of Lanka, Mothers of the Disappeared, Women for Peace, and Women's Coalition for Peace (Rajanisingham-Senanayake 2001,106) which brought together women who lost male family members in the war in a united campaign for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Though most of this movement activism generated in the South or in the capital city of Colombo, Tamil women did participate and these groups often provided foundational experiences for women in the North East to form their own community-based organizations.[29] A few isolated cases of women's sacrifice through non-violent protest (namely, fasting until death) were later highlighted by the LTTE as a part of women's historic commitment to social justice.

This form of women's participation in politics is less debated, and more celebrated, as an extension of women fulfilling their natural roles, protecting their community interests while remaining, inherently, "more peaceful" beings. (Alison 2004). This assumption about the intrinsic nature of women, has not only led to women being overlooked as legitimate actors in political violence, but has often dismissed violent forms of participation as inherently anti-feminist (Alison 2004). These pre-conceptions of women and their connection to violence not only left them overlooked in studies of political violence, but was often the very reason women became valuable recruits to armed resistance movements. Women were less suspicious, in most cultures the types of bodily searches done for men could not be done for women, and women were generally perceived as victims of violence rather than direct perpetrators. (Cunningham 2003). This disjuncture between symbolic mental images of chaste, sari-clad, Tamil women and

---

[29] A few of these include the Women and Media Collective, and the Suriya Women's Center, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

female fighters with cropped haircuts wielding AK-47s (both problematic in their own right)[30],

becomes the central tension in most of the existing scholarship which seeks to understand the

motivations of female fighters.

Understandings of female participation in more violent political activism often center the

previously described social context from which the new recruits to the LTTE were drawn.

Rajini Thirinagama highlights the restrictions of women in Tamil society, "Our social setup, its

restriction on creative expressions for women and the evils of the dowry system, are

some of the social factors that led to their initial recruitment" (Thirinigama 1990, 325) Nearly

all the scholars who look at the impact of these social norms on women played in their

eventual decision to participate in a public political movement agree that they play a large

part in women's decisions to join the movement, though the degree of significance is

often debated (Balasingham 2001; Thirinagama 1990; Coomeraswamy 1997). This debate,

highlighting the tensions between the "gender question" and the "national question" and the

overlap between the two which formed the basis for female participation in political violence

will be examined in a later chapter on gender and nationalism.

Roles in the LTTE

The only extensive documentation on the roles played by women in the LTTE from within the

movement itself was done by the Australian wife of chief strategist Anton Balasingham, Adele

Balasingham. This particular book (Balasingham 1993) is difficult to access, and several of the

scholars who interpret the piece find it to be heavily laden with propaganda (Schalk 1994).

---

[30] See Chapter 5 for a more detailed description of the physical appearance of women and its connection to their
self-image and roles they played in Tamil society and the LTTE.

Despite whatever intrinsic biases may exist in the work, it does lay out the roles played by women in the LTTE from a perspective that few others have had. The picture painted covers the early phases of women's entrance into the movement. Additional scholars have visited and interviewed the LTTE, presenting their description as a view from the outside. (Alison 2003; Bloom 2005; Trawick 2007).

After the induction of women into the LTTE in late 1983, the women formed a separate fighting unit, the Women's Military Wing, where everything from leadership to military training was done by women themselves (Balasingham1993, 19). After initially informally engaging in battles in the Jaffna Peninsula, the male leadership felt the women should receive formal military training, and opened the first camp site in the Jaffna Peninsula on July 1st 1987. Later camps opened in Tamil Nadu, India (Balasingham 1993). There was often a significant gap between the initial three month training period and the second phase of more advanced training. This was done in order for cadres to have combat experience before receiving additional training. (Balasingham 1993, 19) The rigors of the initial training period are often cited by former fighters- even years after their induction into the movement. [31]

 Adele outlines these days as beginning at four am and including everything from crawling under barbed wires, theoretical understandings of weapons, political studies and sentry duties. (Balasingham1993, 19). Others have noted that the physical strain of running, lifting weights, can be exhausting (Trawick 2007, 11), often leading women to collapse in exhaustion . Some felt that the training for women was even harder than that of men. Women leaders in the movement

---

[31]Former fighters, Personal Interviews, 2006-2008, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

have said "Women don't tend to kill easily, to become stronger we need even more training".

(Anonymous 2012). At the end of this period, and usually before a second period of advanced

training (in weaponry and military vehicles), Balasingham describes the evaluation process, in

her perception slightly more mutually determined than may have been true in practice.[32] From

this evaluation process it is determined whose skills (according to Balasingham, taking into

account personal interests and desires) would qualify them for a particular role.

Throughout the existence of the LTTE, the total numbers of women varied, with estimations

ranging from 30% of the movement (Schalk 1994; Anonymous 2000), or 15,000 fighters to some

unconfirmed rumors in the early 1990's that the number of female fighters had reached 50%

(Schalk 1994; Balasingham 1993). The most reliable estimates generally appear to be between

15-30% consistent participation of female fighters across the lifespan of the movement (Alison

2004). Through a compilation of Balasingham's account, available information from other

sources (Alison 2004; Trawick 2007) and in-depth interviews, I have created five categories for

female participation in the LTTE. It should be noted, that women often played roles in multiple

categories, or moved between categories during their time in the movement. The women

involved reflected back on their time in the movement, revealing the aspects of their own

participation that shaped their own memory and understanding of their role and contribution to

the movement.

---

[32] In personal interviews conducted, women often wanted to be placed in different roles than those they were offered
by the movement, and often had little say in their placement.

1. Support

Generally younger women, sometimes children, fell into this category. This category includes administrative work, cooking, and other support roles. Civilian women not officially inducted into the LTTE also played support roles at various moments. "In the early days of the formation of LTTE women contributed to the freedom fight by performing socially defined women's work. Giving moral support, providing shelter, food and played a major role in securing the safety and survival of women" (Trawich 1990, 2) While some of the support roles were menial jobs, support for the movement also included the study and practice of first aid and more complex forms of field medicine, something that several women drawn from medical schools or pre-medical programs pursued. (Balasingham 1993) This work also included propaganda work, and was the type of work a majority of recruits were expected to do before they were given military training (Alison 2004).

"Yalini" [33]

Yalini was reluctant to join, but joined the movement in 2000 as a computer specialist at the age of twenty. She was in charge of documentation, and occasionally writing and printing flyers used as public awareness of LTTE policies and updates. She participated in the research arm of the LTTE. She never received formal combat training, though she did attend sessions on the goals of the LTTE and the Tamil struggle. *"I think my work was useful for them, and eventually I thought it was good also for me to be there".* [34]

---

[33] All names used in this dissertation have been changed to protect the identity of current and former combatants, who currently reside on the island and remain in a very vulnerable position.

[34] "Yalini", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

"Jeeva"

Jeeva joined to support the medical work of the LTTE, at the age of twenty nine. She had

completed two years of medical school and was often called on to treat combatants, as well as

train women to be nurses. *"I really wanted to continue my studies, but I started to learn while I*

was treating people as well". She worked in one of the LTTE hospitals set up in the Vanni,

treating both civilians and combatants. She spent some time studying under senior physicians as

well.[35]

2. Political/Social (Araciyal)

This type of work included political education, the formation and execution of

various social groups, and intelligence work. Political work required studying the

strategies of outside rebel movements--with materials from the Palestinian and Sudanese

struggles often drawn upon as models (Johnson)--and conducting classes for new recruits.

As others in the LTTE themselves described these women ""The armed cadres of our women

wing have been involved in the task of politicization and mobilization of Tamil Eelam women,

campaigning against social discrimination"(Voice of the Tigers, Feb 1990). The social work of

the LTTE took on a more organized form in the 1990's (Balasingham, Mampilly), as they were

able to replicate various forms of the state apparatus, such as a police force and court system that

dealt with small complaints (Trawick, 21, Mampilly).

As the LTTE gained control over larger swathes of territory their political work became more

institutionalized into various secretariats. The head of the Planning and Development Secretariat,

---

[35] "Jeeva", Personal Interview, July 2007, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

"Maran" interviewed in 2004 described their function as *"A body to direct activities to address immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs of the population"*. Though this was an arm of the LTTE, they had a primarily civilian staff, a practice of overlapping sectors not uncommon in the LTTE administration. (Mampilly, 2010). A more politicized branch, the LTTE Peace Secretariat, operated as the Foreign Ministry for the movement, and encompassed both a media and statistics division. *"This is where we, the Tamils will create our own constitution, our own laws – working closely with the standards and practices of the international community"*. Secretary-General Puleedevan said he was reliant on the work of both men and women working in his sector. (Interviews, 2004)

Women often figured prominently in these roles, and some reports say that the LTTE, through the political wing, used women primarily as judges in the local courthouses (Interview, Sylvester, Mampilly). In particular, the LTTE formed Women's Collectives across the North East, with 15-20 women in each village responsible for working with the central district level Women's Collective (Interviews, 2010). Intelligence work was often given to those who received high marks in school, and involved both military intelligence gathering and work on military and political strategies. (Balasingham, Interviews)

"Tharini"

Tharini was seventeen when she joined the political wing of the LTTE. She was given training on the political goals of the movement, and was assigned to the work in the LTTE's programming divison, working on women's welfare and savings programs in LTTE controlled territory. These programs were designed to strengthen women's networks and design sustainable

savings and microloan programs. She spent time in small villages understanding women's needs and the general concerns of communities. *"I feel that my interests have changed, I want to work for social change now".[36]*

3. Combat (Raanuvam)

At some point, all female recruits receive combat training. They learned about explosives, mining, weapons technology, electronics, and some use of heavy weaponry. They were also trained in jungle survival techniques, and various other forms of guerilla warfare. Military training includes: rural guerrilla warfare, urban guerilla warfare, semi-conventional, conventional warfare, commando raids and major assaults (Balasingham 1993). Within those trained in combat, some are promoted to higher ranks, this category is primarily foot soldier combatants or Sea Tigers (naval force), with the higher positions falling under a separate category of military leadership. (Alison 2004) The majority of fighters interviewed in this study, fell under this category.

"Rajathri"

Rajathri is twenty three years old, but was forcibly recruited to the LTTE at the age of fifteen. She understood quickly that the role you played in the LTTE largely had to do with one's intelligence level. Those who were intelligent didn't have to fight, and would be used either in teaching new batches, or in the intelligence unit. She had hoped that if she was intelligent enough she might be released into university. She was unable to pass the test to occupy that role, and joined the regular cadres. She spent six months in a training center in the Batticaloa district, in

---

[36] "Tharini", Personal Interview, July 2004, Killinochi, Sri Lanka.

unit comprised entirely of girls. The training she received included how to use small arms, how

to go without food for extended periods, and how to survive in the jungle. [37]

"Thava"

She is now thirty three, and was fifteen when she joined the movement in 1992. The LTTE

offered her food three times a week, and she was happy there. *"After a time, I was happy being*

there, I was comfortable and cared for." After a difficult training period she fought in several

battles, and broke her arm once. She enjoyed being in the movement, but didn't want to fight-

but always had to go if the command to fight came. In the movement they all worked together,

like a family, particularly the lower level cadres. [38]

"Prema"

She is twenty five now, and was in grade seven when female cadres recruited her at school in

1997. She has wounds all over her entire body from the fighting. When she was in the

movement, they (the fighters) were like children beneath the commanders- they were not given

any information on what was happening politically. However, she thought if she didn't fight-

there would be no Tamils left in Sri Lanka. [39]

"Lavanya"

She joined the movement at the age of eighteen, in 2000, and was able to handle the physical

regimen of training well. She was particularly skilled at being a marksman, shooting targets and

---

[37] *"*Rajathri", Personal Interview, December 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
[38] "Thava", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
[39] "Prema", Personal Interview, November 2008, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

was often relied on for missions that required targeted killings. She enjoyed learning a physical skill as she had often been told in school that she had a mental illness that would keep her from doing anything with her life.[40]

"Sri"

Sri was abducted into the movement at the age of fifteen in 1999, and though she wasn't particularly interested in the political goals, did enjoy the training that placed her on equal footing with boys. She liked the friends she made during the training process, who became like her family.

4. Military Leadership

Under this category are women who became Captains, Lieutenants, or Special Commandos after their basic training and participation as foot soldiers. In this category, there were those who gained notoriety both within and outside the movement, like Captain Sorthia- one of the first female captains (Balasingham 1993) These women were in charge of individual units, and often in charge of military strategy for their district (Trawick 2007) Most women district heads had multiple responsibilities of managing a base, while being involved in higher-level military decision making. During periods of peace, these women were often involved in meeting with women's groups from the South as a part of Gender Commissions.[41] Those that made it to this realm were often highlighted, figured prominently in the LTTE narrative on women fighters. One such woman was a second commander, Swarna, who led her troops to take over a major checkpoint (Omanthai) in 1997, later meeting Prabharakan himself who *"sought her out so he*

---

[40] "Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.
[41] Shanthi S., Viluthu Women's Organization,Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo, Sri Lanka

could shake her hand and praise her for being the kind of woman Tamil Eelam needed." (Anonymous 2012).

"Sujanthi"

She was twenty two when she joined the movement, and was committed to the belief that the LTTE would change life for the Tamil people. Her dedication and motivation in early training sessions led to her being promoted to a leadership role within her unit in Trincomalee within a few years.*"I know that this is what we all have to do, men and women have to fight so we have equal rights".* She enjoyed the ability to work with new recruits and lead important missions against the Sri Lankan Army. She felt it was her role to push girls to train harder, and be prepared for the challenges of the battlefield.

Seetha

Seetha is twenty two years old, and the leader of 1,500 women fighters. She is five feet tall, has cut off her long locks, and dresses in camouflage fatigues toting a machine gun. The interviewer notes she has "the cool confidence of a battle-hardened commander" "Its difficult to say how many people I've killed", says Seetha, "Sometimes after a battle, there might be 50 or 70 bodies lying around. It's hard to say how many of them were mine" (Anonymous 2000).

Sorthia

Captain Sorthia is one of the figures who has become one of the women in the LTTE whose story is told often as a example of women's accomplishments. She joined the LTTE in 1984. Her military talent led to her quick accession to group leader and was widely known for treating

cadres with respect. She was most notably commended for participating in the defense of Jaffna town in the North and leading her troops against the Indian Army. She used her leadership to promote self-sufficiency within the women's military wing-advocating for all issues and strategy to be decided from within the women's wing itself (Balasingham 1993).

Gaya

Gaya was the head of the women's wing in Batticaloa. During the peace talks of 2001, she was a part of the LTTE Gender committee that met with female activists from the south of the country, exchanging ideas on the best ways to incorporate gender issues into the national peace agreement. Gaya was also a key player in one of the central moments in LTTE history that highlights the tensions between gender and nationalism. The incident is discussed in greater detail in later chapters, but the LTTE issued strict rules for women's dress codes that Gaya herself was responsible for executing. In our conversations, her reasoning was that she was fighting to defend Tamil culture, and women should act in accordance with traditional Tamil values. *"This, after all, is why we fight. To defend our culture."* [42]

5. Black Tiger

The most infamous, an almost mythical figure in the LTTE, was Dhanu, the female suicide bomber who killed Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi in 1991, blowing herself up while garlanding him in India. (Cutter 2002; Sarvan 2006). Whether they were, as they are often (in)famously credited as, the 'pioneers' of suicide bombing, military analyses find the LTTE to be one of the only organizations to adopt "suicide terrorism as a legitimate and permanent strategy"

---

[42] "Gaya", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

(Sprinzak 2000) Within the movement these female cadres were referred to as "Birds of Paradise" and their training and participation was unique - often from the outset. Black Tigers were never interviewed in this study, so this section draws on existing research and journalistic encounters.

Women were often turned down from a desire to join, such as "Swarna". "For Swarna, `being a suicide bomber was not about ambition. It was, to her, like a coveted white collar job in the insurgency. One woman would be sent alone on a mission. Her death would mean that her people would be a step closer to Eelam." (Anonymous 2010). A majority of early recruits volunteered for these positions, while later recruits were sometimes coerced or forced into the role (Schalk 1994 ; Mia Bloom 2005). "Black Tigers are also used regularly on the battlefield, particularly against targets that can't be hit by mortars. A suicide bomber typically will crawl hundreds of yards and then hurl herself into a bunker" (Anonymous 2000). While some were used in general battle to take over small towns, most were given assignments of targeted political assassinations.

"Yadusha"

Yadusha watched her uncle, Pushpara, be killed by the Sri Lankan army in 1988. Yet another uncle, Thiyagarajay, joined the LTTE, and died in the fighting at the young age of 19. Her older brother then joined the movement and became an LTTE commando. When Dayaparan died in 1997 Yadusha decided to join, and fight in her brother's name-choosing to sign herself up as a part of the Black Tiger squad. "Experts say it is people such as Yadusha (14 year old with close

cropped hair), young and with a grievance, who sign up to become the rebels' ultimate martyrs:

Black Tiger Suicide Bombers" (Anonymous 2000).

Changing Self-Perceptions

This section highlights the variety of experiences women have had within the LTTE. Later

chapters will look at the broader context around their life histories, and the ties between their life

experiences and political participation. However, as a part of the discussions defining their roles

in the movement, nearly all the women spoke of the ways in which their self-perception had

shifted. The most consistently noted shift was a sense of control over their own destiny, rather

than follow a societally pre-ordained path.

"Whether women joined on their own or were recruited, they understood that there were more

options available than they originally thought", "Sujanthy".[43] While this is often characterized

as "ambivalent empowerment" (De Mel 2001), localized and individual understandings of power

are very hard to view through such an all encompassing lens. The complexities of multiple forms

and spheres of power for women in the LTTE are explored in a later discussion on gender and

nationalism, but the commonality revealed in the variety of experiences is that the participation

of Tamil women in the LTTE represented a significant departure from the cultural norm, even

twenty years after their initial induction into the movement. "Empowerment" is a lens through

which western feminism often tries to judge the actions of female combatants. Individual, family,

communal, and political power dynamics often intersect in different configurations for each

---

[43] "Sujanthi", Personal Interview, November 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

woman, making it difficult, and ultimately unproductive to assign labels of empowerment or

disempowerment to the general concept of female participation in rebel movements.

Their immediate, lived experience in the movement was seen as improving the lives of Tamils,

and a distinct shift from their previous lives and expectations. Only those in the leadership

position, senior women in the movement, interpreted what this might mean for the position of

Tamil women in Tamil society[44]. There was also an enormous sense of pride in themselves, in

their abilities. *"I never thought that I would be able to do such difficult training, in school we

never even participated in the same sports as boys"*, Lavanya . [45]The significance of this shift in

self-perception provides some foundation to the broader analysis, which advocates for a new

approach to women's agency within the nationalist project of the LTTE.

Nature of Participation

Outside of the defined roles played in the movement, the methodology used in the interviews

with former fighters (both male and female), allowed for a deeper understanding of *the nature of

participation* for individual female fighters. While the paths to participation (recruitment) have

been looked at from various standpoints (Weinstein 2007; Viterna 2006), variations within

participation itself have received less scholastic attention. Each of the individual women in the

movement entered the movement with a unique life history, which shaped their experiences in

the movement at different levels in the LTTE in a non-determinative way. This study does not

purport to establish expected and unexpected trajectories for women (an act which in itself

---

[44] These statements are reviewed in Chapter 5.
[45] "Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

diminishes individual agency), rather attempts to categorize levels of commitment as a means to understand how individual experiences shape both agency and political identities amongst these women.

The categories here are informed by the in-depth interviews conducted, and are an attempt to classify the nature of participation in the movement, as understood by the combatants themselves. This approach doesn't impose understandings from the outside, nor mask concerns within political propaganda, while remaining close to the views of women themselves. There are two main categories, sufficiently broad so as to capture the variation within each. The two major divides are between those women who seemed very committed to the movement (high), who were very distinct and clear in their beliefs. The others (low) had either ambivalent or outwardly negative feelings about the movement.

High

Those that I would categorize as having a high level of commitment to the LTTE, if given the opportunity to leave, chose to stay. These fighters had a strong belief in the goals of the LTTE, and rarely questioned the decisions made by higher leadership. These women often had an ideological commitment to nationalism and a separate state for the Tamil people on the island. These women never attempted to leave the movement, and fought against parents and family members who may have asked them to leave. These women often had both an emotional engagement with their participation and a moral commitment to the goals of the LTTE.

Low

This category includes those who had ambivalent feelings towards their participation as well as those who were unhappy with their situation. These women would leave if given the opportunity, or actively tried to leave and/or happily left when injured. These women were unclear on the goals of the LTTE or the purpose of fighting, or didn't agree on the means to achieve these goals. These women often had no ideological commitment to nationalism, and some felt strongly that women should be filling more traditional roles in Tamil society, longing to become wives and mothers. Raised in a society where moral values were sacrosanct, particularly amongst women, these women often displayed a moral commitment to the LTTE, while remaining emotionally detached from their own participation in the movement.

These categories will later be used to understand the link between direct and indirect forms of state repression and the level of commitment of individual female cadres. While not attempting to provide conclusive statements on causal links between the two, understanding that each individual case is distinct, this study understands how experiences with state repression form distinct political identities, that impact the levels of participation in the rebel movement. Drawing on existing scholarship, focus groups, and in-depth one on one interviews create a picture of the roles played by Tamil women in both Tamil society and the LTTE. This background is necessary to understand the relationship between gender and nationalism, and in understandings of both direct and indirect forms of state repression in Sri Lanka. The next chapter moves away from individual stories of female combatants in order to develop a deeper understanding of the social processes that resulted from decades of conflict and defined the daily, lived experience for Tamil women.

<center>**Chapter 3**</center>

<center>**Repression: Militarization, Displacement, and Daily Life**</center>

The lives of Tamil women in the North and East of Sri Lanka have for the past three decades

been defined by conflict, and the resulting militarization and displacement. This chapter

contextualizes the lives of Tamil women in these regions, drawing on interviews with female

fighters and non-fighters to understand life in this conflict zone, during periods of peace,

violence, and overlapping humanitarian crises. This context helps to define various forms of

direct and indirect of state-sponsored repression, and the intersection with social repression

within Tamil society. These overlapping external pressures are understood in their collective

impact on Tamil women, and subsequent relevance in individual women's engagement in

political violence.

State Repression

While a few scholars debate the causal link between state repression (usually understood through

indiscriminate violence, or systematic marginalization) and insurgent violence (Lacquer 1999;

Lyall 2009) – most agree that state repression in various forms plays a role in the emergence and

continued violence of armed insurgencies (Humphreys, Weinstein 2006; Kalyvas 2003). State

repression can be understood in multiple ways, but within the existing literature, there is a

generally accepted standard. "Repression involves the actual or threatened use of physical

sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for

the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs

perceived to be challenging to government personnel, practices or institutions." (Goldstein 1978,

<center>67</center>

xxvii). The actual activities involved in state repression includes "harassment, surveillance/spying, bans, arrests, torture, and mass killings by government agents and/or affiliates within their territorial jurisdiction." (Davenport 2007,1).

When applying this logic to female insurgents, scholars almost always cite state repression (sometimes referred to as "external pressures" (Alison 2004) as acting independently or in conjunction with other factors such as existing movement activism (Viterna 2006), as playing a role in the choice to participate in an armed rebel movement for women. While some of the more obvious forms of state repression (exclusion from government jobs, targeted violence against ethnic Tamils) existed throughout the conflict in Sri Lanka (McConnell 2008), other less direct, less overtly violent, forms of repression, persisted in ways that have been ignored, but can be shown to have had a disproportionate impact on Tamil women. Scholars have highlighted the need to cast a wide net when looking at forms of state repression, as states often choose from within a diverse repertoire of repression (Davenport 2007). Multiple social processes that emerged from the policies of an oppressive state created a context which increased the vulnerability of women. This chapter explores some of these processes, both created and prolonged by an intractable political conflict, and the specific challenges faced by women within this context.

I. Methods

In an effort to identify and track these vulnerabilities, I draw from both in-depth interviews with former fighters and civilians as well as background literature and information from secondary sources. While pursuing my doctorate, I directed humanitarian operations for disaster relief

INGO Operation USA[46] in Sri Lanka, India, and Pakistan - also representing the organization at the United Nations and directing the Sri Lanka Working Group of INGOS. In this capacity I had access to periodic assessments and humanitarian reports that provide a detailed picture of the broader physical spaces and policy debates which defined life for all Tamil civilians. Human rights and humanitarian reports highlight issues of specific concern to women and challenges faced by women impacted by overlapping processes of conflict, militarization, and displacement. I analyze these reports by reviewing documents published by multiple international and local groups looking at humanitarian crises occurring between 2000-2010.

In order to present a relatively objective understanding of conditions on the ground, reports from a variety of operational and advocacy organizations are organized based on references to major issues that emerge both in the reports and in direct interviews. This analysis is supplemented by individual women's experiences within this context. Interspersed in this analysis are notes from humanitarian collective meetings, which highlight issues on the ground that the United Nations should be aware of, without using organization names directly. My own analysis is also supported by existing scholarship, relying heavily on the work of scholars in Sri Lanka, particularly working through the International Center for Ethnic Studies based in the capital, Colombo.

---

[46] Operation USA is an international disaster relief organization, founded in 1979 and based in Los Angeles, California. www.opusa.org.

II. Militarization

When I first returned to Sri Lanka, during the fragile peace talks in 2002, the army and LTTE jointly policed their respective territories, and every hour or so on the long drives across the country, one would encounter a check point of either the army or the LTTE. These were usually cursory glances in vehicles, with most being waved through. On a trip in October 2010, the number of checkpoints had easily tripled, and each one required disembarking from the vehicle (far more challenging for those traveling by bus than by private vehicle), long questioning, and search waits. The number of sentry points was just one of the physical manifestations of an increasingly militarized (and polarized) society. The conflict in Sri Lanka has always seen relatively high levels of militarization, predominantly in contested territories in the North and East. However, after the administration's decision to abandon a political solution in 2005 by the administration, the levels of militarization increased to levels never before seen in these districts.

Militarization has been described as "the process by which people or things begin to be controlled by the military or dependency on military ideas" (Enloe 2000, 3). Though its social impact is often not evaluated in the ongoing context of war, some scholars find that the human cost of militarization can be higher than the toll taken by war itself (Chenoy 2002). Militarization "connotes the process whereby military values, ideology and patterns for behavior result in the militarization of the structural, ideological, and behavioral patterns of state with a powerful impact on civil society" (Chenoy 2002, 2) Each of these aspects of militarization in Sri Lanka served to erode democratic norms in the country as a whole, but led to heightened insecurity and vulnerabilities for those populations living directly under the heavy hand of militarized power. Using the measures of militarization laid out above, this chapter aims to

highlight both the increasing levels of militarization from 2000-2010 as well as its pervasiveness into every level of society and its particular impact on the lives of women in the North and East.

Structural Patterns of State

Though Sri Lanka is considered a functioning democracy, its institutional structure easily lends itself to mutually reinforcing forces of corruption and militarization. In 1977, Junius Jayawardana established the executive presidency, centralizing power in the executive and bestowing on the presidency the position of commander-in-chief of the armed forces (De Silva, K. M., & Wriggins, W. H. 1988). A weak parliament, lacking in oversight capacity reinforces structural weaknesses in the Sri Lankan state contributed to the "degradation of independent institutions and the weakening of the rule of law" (UN Panel 2011) [47]-- a trend that several scholars have argued created and perpetuated a militarized political crisis on the island. (Mampilly 2011).

Since its independence Sri Lanka has regularly integrated the military into its political regime, in a manner some scholars call the politico-military machinery (Gunaratna 2005). Previous scholarship has shown that the measure of militarization is not simply the percentage of the state budget devoted to military expenditures, but also "when civilian leaderships puts military power to civil use 'to save the nation' or to solve political problems", something which defines a historical pattern of a heavily militarized state and society in Sri Lanka. (Chenoy 2002, De Mel

---

[47] On June 22, 2010 The Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon appointed a three member Panel of Experts to advise him on addressing human rights and humanitarian violations that occurred in the final stages of the war between the GOSL and the LTTE. The panel received over 4,000 submissions and met with experts and witnesses outside of the country before producing its assessment which carefully details both the abuses and humanitarian context for civilians in the conflict zone from 2008-2011.

2007). From "Operation Jayasikuru" in the 90's to "Operation Humanitarian Rescue" in 2009 (Jakobsen, De Soysa 2009; Anderson 2011) the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) has embarked on various military campaigns to regain or prevent the loss of territory to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. In the conflict zones in the North and East this translated into the complete collapse of civilian administration, resulting in paramilitary security regimes and a political economy driven by violence (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001).

A shift occurred in 2005, when the central government administration of Mahinda Rajapaksa took power, dramatically altering previous approaches to the ethnic conflict by disregarding efforts towards a political solution in favor of a more systematic and thorough military campaign. The president obtained parliamentary approval for a significantly increased military budget which reached USD 1.8 billion in 2008, almost twenty percent of the national budget (UN Panel 2011). While earlier incarnations of the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and broader armed forces had seen political appointments in leadership positions, high levels of desertion, and low morale – the Rajapaksa administration re-vamped the military by making appointments based on skill level, enlisting outside support for training, and substantially increasing the overall defense budget (Jakobsen, Soysa 2009).

Working within state structures that increased the likelihood of militarization and corruption (Mampilly 2011), the policies of the Rajapaksa regime led to levels of militarization that far exceed earlier incarnations of a partially militarized state apparatus. Under the leadership of Lieutenant General Sarath Fonseka (who was later detained by the administration), the SLA forces were tripled (ranging around 300,000) and were trained in the use of new weaponry

obtained from foreign supporters (Multi-Barrel Rocket Launchers, mortars and howitzers, MIG-29, Kfirs and helicopter gunships). (UN Panel 2011). "Strong leadership, new training and a strong sense of purpose bolstered by numerous victories decreased desertion rates and improved morale among SL troops"(UN Panel 2011, 17).

The LTTE: Reproductions of Militarization in a State Within a State

As Neloufer De Mel points out in her recent work on militarism in Sri Lanka, militarization must be understood as a dynamic process, with actions and re-actions (2007, 16) – which helps to analyze the relationship between a militarized Sri Lankan state and the subsequent counter-militarization of Tamil society. This interactive dynamic produced similar levels of militarization on both sides of the ethnic divide. The formation of the LTTE and other armed Tamil resistance groups (Whitaker 2007) came after a sustained period of peaceful resistance as a means of expressing political grievances (Balasingham 2001). As the medium of discourse became increasingly militarized, activists felt that taking up arms was the only avenue open to them. (Whitaker 2007). Political power had been articulated by the Sri Lankan State through a military medium, and thus came to define a response that sought to exert and obtain power. Starting out as an armed guerilla group, clear signs of replicating heavily militarized state structures began as the group began to control large swathes of territory that had to be administered (Mampilly 2011). The LTTE, as well as competing Tamil resistance movements very often had distinct "political" and "military" branches, however decisions, policies, and patterns of behavior were exclusively determined by military strategy and objectives.

Physical Signs of Militarization

As mentioned earlier, the most obvious sign of militarization in Sri Lankan society, is the physical presence of military personnel and the associated infrastructure. This includes the physical presence of sentry points, bases, military memorials (De Mel 2007, 19). Though this aspect provides superficial evidence of deep seated societal shifts, it is significant to highlight the presence of individuals and structures that become central in understanding the dual insecurity of minority women. A 2011 report by local politicians finds that of out of a total landmass of 25,332 sq. mi. in the North and East, Tamil people inhabited 7,289 sq mi. of land. From 2007-2011, they estimate that of this inhabited land, the defense forces have occupied more than 2,702 square miles, or over one third of the land. The report goes on to highlight, among other concerns, the impact this presence has had on women. [48] To highlight such vulnerabilities, I draw on existing literature, direct interviews and field surveys done by a local expert at my request.

The first, most often noted, physical sign of militarization and military surveillance is the military checkpoint. De Mel finds that the "overt visual markers of militarization in Sri Lanka" are signs that militarization has taken on a life of its own, first through its visibility. (2007, 23) Most military checkpoints in Sri Lanka consisted of a roadblock, or small hut at the side of a road, usually manned by two to four military personnel or police officials. These were sites throughout the country, but most heavily in the capital city of Colombo, and the Northern and Eastern districts "where civilians were scrutinized through the regime of national identity cards where women became especially vulnerable to abuse" (Tambiah 2005, 247).

---

[48] At the time of submission for this dissertation, this report had not yet been publicly released. It is a study conducted by research associates of oppositional politicians in January of 2012.

To understand the impact of this physical presence on the daily lives as well as perceived and

real insecurities amongst Tamil women, I extracted

from interviews with civilian women and former

fighters discussions related to the physical presence

of militarization. In order to better understand the

environment of the conflict zone during a particular

period discussions with both groups centered around their experiences as civilians, in the time

period from 2000-2010.

In the course of open-ended interviews, out of the sample size of twenty women, sixteen

mentioned the presence of checkpoints in the course of their own description of everyday life in

civilian areas.[49] *"The checkpoints are everywhere now, these are a part of everything"*.[50]These

were referred to in the context of various concerns (fear of losing an identification card, fear of

walking through without companions, taking new routes to avoid the military), all of which

emphasized a sense of fear and insecurity associated with them. In these interviews, often times,

it became important for women to provide a visual description of the proximity of the nearest

checkpoint or army base to their home or school- they would sketch these in my notebook, or

gesture with items in the room of the distance between an outdoor bath and checkpoint, or the

relative position of the base next to the school. Those referencing 2000 or 2001, when less

resources and funds had been devoted to military expenditure, often expressed a confusion at the

---

[49] See photo. "Heavily armed soldiers man a roadside check point in Colombo, Sri Lanka," Photo by Gemunu Amarasinghe*, in "Tamil Tigers unlikely to Claw Back Ground", January 1, 2009. http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/tamil-tigers-unlikely-to-claw-back-ground/2009/01/23/1232471590683.html

[50] Anonymous civilian, Personal Interview, November 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

ability to identify which small hut was a checkpoint and which was a small shop, though their fear made them stop at anything resembling a checkpoint. [51]

The insecurity felt by the women interviewed is supported and reinforced by direct experiences or tales of women's experiences at various military sites. De Mel highlights the ways in which prevailing security conditions placed the female body at the center of both suspicion and surveillance at these locations. (De Mel 2004). These experiences range from the public stripping of a sex worker in Colombo (De Mel 2004) to the gang rape of a mother of three at a checkpoint in Batticaloa. [52] Though the exposure of Tamil and Muslim women to checkpoints was significantly higher, women of all ethnicities faced similar challenges in places like the capital city of Colombo .

An unpublished study done by a researcher in 2011, reveals the physical manifestations of a policy decision to further militarize high security zones after the culmination of the war in 2009. This assessment was conducted along the A9 Road, the main road connecting the Northern Jaffna peninsula to the main island, but also running through the North in some of the districts that had previously been under LTTE control. Below is a map depicting a closer view at the Northern Province, as well as a chart of the data compiled.

---

[51] Anonymous civilians, Personal Interviews, November 2008, Batticlaoa, Sri Lanka.
[52] "Basil", Civil Society worker, Personal Interview, November 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

Based on UN map No. 4172 Rev. 3 (March 2008) and OCHA map of Sri Lanka's Northern Districts Administrative Map (2006).
The boundaries, names and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations or Crisis Group.

Militarization Along the A9 Road

Location on the A9	`Sentry points	`No of soldiers *	Bases **	+++
Chavakachcheri to Kodikamam	43	172	14	
Kodikamam to Palai	18	72	10	
Palai to Elephant Pass HSZ***	9	36	5	
After Elephant Pass HSZ to Paranthan Junction	35	140	10	
Paranthan Junct to Kilinochchi HSZ ***	16	64	13	
After Kili HSZ to Murugandy	23	92	27	
Murugandy to Mankulam HSZ ***	129	516	18	
After Mankulam HSZ to Kanakarayankulam	59	236	7	
TOTAL	**332**	**1328**	**194**	
Average Sentry Points and Bases per mile on a 60 mile stretch on A9 – Not counting those on secondary and tertiary roads on the jungles.	**5**	**22**	**3**	

(Assuming 4 for each Sentry points to man them 24 hours a day. Soldier auxiliary and support staff not included.)

** In addition to bases next to the road it also includes Division and Brigade and Div board signs leading

   inside

*** The HSZ are huge and could not make an estimate of the strength of the HSZ.

+++ Foot soldiers and soldiers on bicycle, motorcycle and trucks are not counted. On a week day there are

   more than on Sundays.

Analyzing this data, the researcher notes that compared to a trip just four years earlier (2007), he

noted fewer than half this number of checkpoints in areas under government control on an

identical route. While this assessment gives only a small sample of the number of checkpoints on a particular route in the Northern district, it gives us an idea of the marked increase in the physical presence of the military, with checkpoints dotted across a map of newly government controlled territory.

Patterns of Behavior

Militarism as an ideology has influenced policy decisions in Sri Lanka since its independence. Patterns of behavior resulting from high levels of militarization were visible from 1983 onwards, however the state reached new levels of militarization from 2005-2011 (Crisis Group Report 2012). Outside of the structural decisions made at the state level, the patterns of behavior often varied by region, or military unit, remaining connected by an overall culture of interaction and intervention into civilian life. These patterns manifested themselves primarily in the practice of intimidation, the silencing of journalists and civil society, and the pervasive fear that affected every citizen living in the conflict zone, but most acutely the women living in militarized territories.

Militarization has been both sustained and entrenched through the enactment of measures such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1979) and the State of Emergency Regulations , including the Indemnity Act of 1982 which set a dangerous precedent by "formalizing impunity" (UN Panel Report 2011) for the state and associated actors (most often paramilitary forces), both severely limiting civil liberties and establishing patterns of behavior by both sides that persist today – primarily promoted through state policies and actions in the absence of the (CPA 2011; Crisis Group Report 2012).

The use of intimidation and censorship to limit press freedom in Sri Lanka has been a trend noted by journalism watchdogs since 1998, one that grew increasingly alarming post 2005 (Dietz 2012; UN Panel 2011). These reports highlight the use of threats and intimidation by the state to prevent the dissemination of relevant information, though allegations have been made that similar tactics were used by the LTTE towards Tamil media sources. In 2009 this culture became entrenched in a way that was perhaps best captured by assassinated editor Lasantha Wickeramatunga, in a self-written obituary published three days after his as yet unexamined assisination (Wickeramatunga, 2009).

"No other profession calls on its practitioners to lay down their lives for their art save the armed forces - and, in Sri Lanka, journalism. In the course of the last few years, the independent media have increasingly come under attack. Electronic and print institutions have been burned, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honour to belong to all those categories, and now especially the last.

I have been in the business of journalism a good long time. Indeed, 2009 will be the Sunday Leader's 15th year. Many things have changed in Sri Lanka during that time, and it does not need me to tell you that the greater part of that change has been for the worse. We find ourselves in the midst of a civil war ruthlessly prosecuted by protagonists whose bloodlust knows no bounds. Terror, whether perpetrated by terrorists or the state, has become the order of the day. Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of

liberty. Today it is the journalists, tomorrow it will be the judges. For neither group have the

risks ever been higher or the stakes lower" (Wickeramatunga, 2009).

While an assault on the media became a broader pattern born of militarization, at the local level this translated into a war on information, and informants. As the military was fighting an unconventional war against a guerilla insurgency heavily integrated into the civilian population, Tamil women came to be both used and suspected as informants for the LTTE. Several scholars have noted the particular attention on women and women's bodies as the state became increasingly paranoid about the presence of suicide bombers and the LTTE increasingly suspicious of members of their own community (De Mel 2007, Tambiah 2005).

While these particular patterns of behavior impacted the lives of individual women, it also had a broader impact on women by limiting the freedom and capacity of civil society. The fear of information escaping the island through the eyes and ears of western rights groups and humanitarian organizations spurred the slow, but deliberate, process of clamping down on civil society (Welikala 2009). This affected women in both the abilities of these organizations to provide services for this population as well as severely limiting the non-governmental spaces women had previously participated in[53]. Even in areas where women's organizations were able to continue their work in some form (mostly in the capital city of Colombo and the south), the impact the organizations had on the behavior of the state has been minimal, if at all. A 2008 study of 17 women's groups found that "while women have been keeping the dialogue alive on

---

[53] In areas under LTTE control, women's participation in women's organizations were largely limited to those organizations working with the movement. There has been some history of Tamil women's participation outside of the movement in local civil society (Suriya, UTHR), but the dangers of this work limited the autonomy and strength of such examples. (Mampilly, 2011)

key issues like 'peace, democracy, justice and militarization', these discussions have not been consolidated and effectively employed at strategic levels of intervention within the policy and political spheres". (Emmanuel 2008)

In the absence of the LTTE (post-2009), state militarization is most often understood in its intrusion into the daily lives of men and women in the North and East. At a macro level this involves the encroachment of the military on available economic opportunities by opening local shops, taking on contracts for local labor. (Crisis Group 2012).Under the edict of national security, surveillance of communities spans from the registering of visitors to a home to cultural functions. "Any family gathering to celebrate the birth or naming of a child, attainment of puberty of a girl, a wedding, or even a death, requires prior permission from the nearest military post" .[54] This intrusion into the home life of civilians further minimizes the available private space even beyond the public scrutiny of checkpoints.

Gender and Militarization

There is little debate within existing scholarship that militarism itself is inherently gendered, based on a power differential necessarily skewed against women. At an ideological level, this has been found to be due to its common overlap with other ideologies oppressive to women, such as patriarchy (De Mel 2007; Chenoy 2002, 7). Embedded in the institution and practice of the military is a male superiority established and reinforced "in a myriad of ways, beginning with recruitment, training, organization, and ideology" (Chenoy 2002, 7). Policies by both the state and the LTTE, of militarization and counter-militarization, manifested in physical and behavioral

---

[54] As of May 2012, the report from local politicians highlighting local concerns has not been released.

shifts in society that also produced noticeable shifts in cultural norms. This placed both gender and sexuality at the center of a militarized nationalism on both sides (Tambiah 2005). "State power is legitimized through concepts like 'sovereignty' and 'national interest' which rely on masculanized notions of political control " (Chenoy 2002, 8).

The debate begins in understandings of women's position in relation to militarization, either as an ideology or in practice. This tension is one of the themes that runs throughout this dissertation, centered around the interaction between multiple feminist discourses that intersect with women's participation in political violence. The root of this contention goes back to biological distinctions and assumptions of the inherent "nature" of women versus men. Most scholars of this subject feel that women should be predisposed "by nature" to oppose militarism, criticizing those women who embrace a "warrior mentality" in the name of sexual equality. (Chenoy 2002; De Mel 2007). Those who have done more extensive ethnographic work amongst female combatants find this assumption problematic, as it applies a generalized standard to all women, and doesn't account for individual female agency(Balasingham 2001; Trawick 2005). The women interviewed in this study often surprised themselves at their own commitment or ability in militarized interactions, and began to individually re-think the assumption of their own nature that were imposed upon them. (Interviews, 2008).

State Militarization in Sri Lanka

Chenoy finds that "Sri Lanka sees militarism as a given, and the state and society have accepted violence as a legitimate mode of political behavior" (2002,117). Building on the premise that militarization at the state level in Sri Lanka is inherently 'masculine', and finding that its reach is

continually expanding. Again the visible presence of military symbols extends the impact of

militarization beyond the barbed wire of army barracks. Across the capital, life sized images of

the president with the troops are intermixed with recruitment ads, with large men in camouflage

with AK-47's slung over their soldiers.[55] These overtly military related images reinforce and

overall value for aggressive/macho characteristics in Sri Lankan society, which seeps into

popular youth culture and even product advertisements (De Mel, 24).

Photo taken by Sumedha Senanayake, published in Dissent Magazine

(May 13 2009). The caption reads, "You are heroes in this country. To

the saviors of our nation we salute you." (2009)

---

[55] Observations from my own trip to the capital in 2010.

LTTE female cadre at LTTE Checkpoint, next to photo of LTTE leader

(Photo, Associate Press, 2007-Outlook India)

Similarly, across the ethnic divide, "counter-nationalism relied heavily on violence using ad images that linked valour with violence." (Chenoy 2002, 104). The imagery extended to the inclusion of women, as images of women bearing arms became romanticized. Some felt that the "LTTE transformed victims into militants and pain into militarism" (Chenoy 2002, 104) . Several scholars have cited the loss of "femininity" as women were integrated into a masculinized militia, cutting their hair short and trading saris for fatigues and boots (Coomeraswamy 1997; Tambiah 2005). Similar to state centered forms of militarism, the message in military training was often to "kill the woman in you" (Chenoy 2002). The debate surrounding the inherent gendered nature of LTTE militarization often centers more around the question of gender and nationalism, the tension between the two and the precedence of one over the other at various moments in LTTE history. This will be explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters, while this chapter focuses on the intersection between gender and militarization.

Gender & Militarization: State vs. Non-State Actors

In situating this study within these debates, there are two clear points of departure from existing scholarship. The first is the assumption that women by "nature" are opposed to militarization. The second is the assumption that militarization has an identical impact in its manifestation through both state and non-state actors, impacting women across the island in a generalized manner. As Daiva Stasiulis (1999) highlights, in feminist politics it is essential to understand "the multiple relations of power that intersect in complex ways to position individuals and collectivities in shifting and often contradictory locations within geopolitical spaces, historical narratives, and movement politics" (194). Following this approach, this study uses a more nuanced understanding of the impact of militarization on individual women in Sri Lanka.

This analysis works within the theoretical framework of this study, which sees women in the North and East, and particularly women who participated in the LTTE, as having restricted agency (Alison 2004). This approach challenges not only those studies that disallow for female agency among female combatants, but also extends to the tendency of some feminist scholarship to assign characteristics to the "nature" of women (Coomeraswamy 1997, Chenoy 2002). This overly simplistic assumption tends to homogenize women as well as overlook locationally and historically specific contexts (Ray &Kortweg 1999). While militarization more broadly can be understood to have a negative impact on women, the shape that resistance to militarization takes can have multiple forms. While some women do follow the expected path of nonviolent resistance based on an underlying assumption of their pacifist nature, others have chosen more violent forms of political activism.

In interviews with women's groups based in Colombo, militarization was a theme often discussed as impacting women across the island. These organizations, and the activists associated with them, highlight militarization as a trend that has become entrenched across the island, to the detriment of women in general. [56]A series of interviews done with civil society activists who were invited to participate in the 2002 Commission on Gender, whose findings were meant to be incorporated into the peace process at the time (Suthanthiraraj 2010), also highlighted the disconnect in agendas and experiences around gender between women in the North East and the rest of the island. While there was an attempt to create solidarity around issues of common concern (domestic violence, women's participation in the political process), the experiences of women in the North East and those from the rest of the country were fundamentally distinct. In a more recent attempt to bring women from both parts of the island together around UN Resolution 1325, one Tamil woman activist found *"We were in agreement on general issues that are affecting women (alcoholism), but when the Tamil women wanted to emphasize the need for protection against the military, the conversation broke down"[57]*

 In attempting to situate these experiences theoretically within the discourse on militarization, I have divided the experiences of Tamil women into areas that were under government control, those under mixed control, and those under LTTE control. Women in areas that were under government control between 2000-2010 were largely in Batticaloa town (Eastern district) and Jaffna (Northern district) and were primarily impacted by state militarization. The civilian

---

[56] Shanthi Satchithanandam, Kumidini Samuels, Personal Interviews, Colombo December 2009.
[57] Saroja Siva, Women's Development, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

women living under mixed control, or purely under LTTE control (rural areas in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vanni) felt their lives to be characterized by what I would call here a system of "dual militarization". This would be defined by a territory that has been militarized by both state and non-state actors, in areas which have been partially or completely controlled by both forces. As discussed earlier in this section, while the levels of militarization were perhaps comparable, the forms of militarization employed by state and non-state actors are necessarily distinct, and therefore their impact on women (and their reactions) must be understood as distinct as well.

Map No. 4172 Rev. 3 UNITED NATIONS

March 2008

In each of the three areas, the variation in women's responses to militarization, challenging

assumptions of a homogenized gendered response to militarization, can begin to be seen in the

small sample size of subjects interviewed in this study. Drawn from the interviews with ten non-

fighter women in primarily government controlled territories, are those who adopted a pacifist

response to state and non-state militarization, while conversations with former fighters describe

the appeal of a more violent response to multiple forms of militarization. These women's lives

were intimately affected by the macro-level ideologies and micro-level presence of entrenched

militarization.

Amongst the women interviewed, more than half cited a fear at walking through checkpoint

(based on real or perceived harassment), an inability to walk alone at night or to school due to

increased military presence, a lack of health and sanitation (less available lavatories) due to

military occupation of these facilities in the region, fear of being associated with a rebel

movement, fear of being searched at screening centers. [58]In 2010, women also cited the presence

of military officers using school playgrounds for training sessions and become direct

implementers of social services, increasing their feelings of insecurity.[59]"Women's first priority

after the war has been getting a house for their safety, security officers presence makes them

afraid", a report from a community meeting reveals.[60] These experiences with state militarization

begin to form the basis of both direct and indirect forms of state repression, categories that will

be further refined later in this study.

Those living in regions of "dual militarization" had similar experiences with state militarization,

but additionally felt the impact of non-state counter-militarization by various Tamil rebel

movements. The LTTE, along with several other competing movements (TMVP, EPDP,

---

[58] Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, 2002-2010, Batticaloa, Trincomalee.
[59] Civil society worker, Personal Interview, 2011, New York.
[60] Focus Meeting on UN Resolution 1325 January 2011.

TELO)[61] engaged in practices of intelligence gathering (often questioning women), forced

recruitment (often of civilians younger than 18), propaganda sessions in schools highlighting the

valor of armed resistance, and training camps taking over public spaces.[62] Unable to achieve the

levels of institutionalized militarization of the state, non-state counter-militarization functioned

through personal networks, family ties, and community organizations. *"We don't know who is*

who, sister – even a family member could be an informant", one young mother told me.[63] In

these areas women felt a sense of physical insecurity that also differed under state and non-state

militarization. Under state militarization, the whispered fear was primarily that of sexual assault

or rape[64] (De Mel 2007; Tambiah 2009; Balasingham 2001). Under non-state counter-

militarization, the fear centered around forcible recruitment, or safety of a family member.

 The response to both forms of repression were varied, but fell into two large categories of non-

violent and violent responses to militarization. Amongst the women interviewed, the

predominant reaction was a desire to be unseen, cautious, and keep a low profile while pursuing

their own interests, primarily completing their educational trajectory. [65] As a militarized society

became increasingly normalized they found ways to minimize their direct exposure to those

aspects most threatening to women, while continuing on in their studies. [66] Some women

traveled in groups for safety, others developed new routes to get to school that avoided

checkpoints, some avoided eye contact with any military officers. While these behaviors fell in

---

[61]Description of other groups here
[62] Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, 2002-2010, Batticaloa, Trincomalee.
[63] Anonymous Civilian, Personal Interview, 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
[64]GBV research description
[65] Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
[66] Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, 2010, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

line with conservative expectations of Tamil women, women saw them as having a very tangible utility in their own lives and safety.[67]

Within the same government controlled territories, the sentiments of one soldier captured in Rajini Thirinigama's work, reflect a broader pattern in the interviews I conducted with current and former female fighters. "Instead of dying screaming, being raped by an aggressor army it is a relief to face the army with your own weapon" (Thirinigama 1990, 310). For these women, facing the same challenges borne of state militarization, they felt that their resistance to militarization could only be in the form of taking up arms themselves. Even those who were less engaged ideologically in the nationalist cause through armed violence, felt safer with arms training, than they did as unarmed civilians. While not all of these women were overtly violent, they were drawn to the power and protection provided by training in violent forms of resistance *"At least with the training, we knew that we had the ability to protect ourselves, without waiting for a man to come when it was too late."*[68]

The variation in response to this particular form of state repression is analyzed in Chapter 5, alongside responses to other forms of state repression, in order to better understand the position of Tamil women in the debate around gender and agency.

---

[67] A longer discussion of non-oppositional forms of agency that overlapped with conservative cultural norms is provided in Chapter 5.

[68] "Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

III: Constant Motion: Displacement

While displacement due to a crisis or disaster is not often included in a meaningful way in studies of female participation in political violence, in the case of Sri Lanka its frequency as well as impact on the lives of Tamil women necessitates that displacement, as a process and a lived experience, be taken seriously. Existing scholarship around displacement has highlighted the need for "culturally specific knowledge informed by the experiences of people themselves" (Schrijvers 1999, 307). While some studies rely solely on humanitarian data due to challenges obtaining direct interviews (Wood 2009), this study combines both an analysis of humanitarian reports and field interviews/research to understand the impact of displacement on individual women's lives.

The reports were drawn from ten advocacy and operational humanitarian groups that have consistently worked in Sri Lanka from 2000-2010. Using these reports, I developed a chart which tracked the reporting of conditions in displaced camps/affecting displaced populations. The categories created were developed to follow the issues that arose in direct interviews. These were: Food, Shelter, Security, Health, and Trauma. In addition, while all of these conditions affected women, those concerns that were highlighted by the organizations as gender-specific to women were categorized under Women.

Before providing a brief analysis of each category using both direct interviews and an analysis of humanitarian reports, it is important to situate the discussion in the overall numbers of displaced in the region in both direct numbers and percentage of the total population in the North and East of the island. Over the course of the war, the number of internally displaced people has

fluctuated between half a million and 1.2 million for a total population estimate at around 20 million, with 80% of that number being ethnically Tamil. (Schrijver 1999, 309) Over the time period looked at in this study, various humanitarian and rights groups report the numbers of displaced civilians in the conflict affected districts as between 300,000 and 550,000 from 2000-2010, with a spike in numbers in 2005 after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (HRW 2008; NRC 2007; GTF 2009). Amongst this population a significant amount were displaced multiple times due to the conflict and recurring national disasters (NRC 2007). Causes of displacement were recorded as real or perceived conflict-related violence, with some IDPs only traveling into safer territories for the night (NRC 2007).

Food

While citations of severe shortages of food for displaced populations came largely after 2005 (also due to the increased presence of INGOs after the tsunami), food shortages or long lines for basic items has been an ongoing concern from 2000-2010. (HRW 2008; NRC 2007) This issue reached a critical point in September 2008, when the GOSL kicked all INGOs out of the conflict zone, a policy which "drastically worsened the plight of the civilian population, significantly reducing prospects that essential food, water, sanitation and health care would reach the population" (NRC 2007). The following year, in 2009, UNICEF, the World Food Program and others warned of severe food shortages for children and other vulnerable populations in displaced camps. (Elder 2009). Though the entire displaced population was impacted by these shortages, women often felt it most acutely as they gave their own rations to their children, and often were the ones to wait for hours in the sun to receive their food packets, often fainting or

being trampled in the crowd. [69]*"We were given one packet of food every few days. The UN left a few utensils, and some clothes that were one size that didn't fit me. By evening most of the children went hungry"* .[70]In some camps, water was allocated (roughly 10 liters/family), for all uses, but with large numbers of female-headed households, women were left with the task of collecting water. The wells were often dry, pumps were too difficult for women to work, and long walks left women vulnerable to sexual assault[71] Food convoys were often interrupted, or re-routed for fear that they would reach the rebel movement, or food trucks were used to feed soldiers in the region (Gowrinathan 2007). Even once they were out of the camps, food prices had risen to a point where young mothers could often only afford to give their children a cup of tea at night *"For their hunger, this (tea) was all I could offer my twins before bedtime"* [72]

Shelter

Whether erected due to escalating conflict, or the tsunami, the fundamental structure of temporary shelters has remained relatively constant. Intended for the short term, tarp cloths held up by a few flimsy poles, often end up lasting for few years (Gowrinathan 2005). In some areas after the tsunami, depending on the operating INGO in the area, metal sheets were erected that were made from corrugated iron that often led to increased rates of chicken pox and other infectious diseases (Gowrinathan 2005). The primary concerns cited consistently in the camps was the flimsy nature of tent material, overcrowding, hygiene, and lack of privacy. (HRW 2008; NRC 2007). Women often left camps, wandering in the meadows in the absence of proper latrines, increasing their vulnerability to sexual assault. Local newspapers reported a fourteen

---

[69] "Inthu", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK
[70] Ibid.
[71] "Father J", Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.
[72] "Prema", Personal Interview, November 2008, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

year old girl raped as she searched for a more remote, and shaded, location to relieve

herself.[73]"Temporary shelters are being built, but no doors. The toilets are built far away from

the houses and doors are not properly fitted" (Focus 2011). Several women disappeared while

bathing, and two women asked if they could draw an image depicting how close the women's

bathing area was to the adjacent army camp, to highlight the lack of privacy. Several, unrelated

families, were often in the same tent, thereby exposing women to men living in the same

temporary structure.[74]

Security

Security amongst displaced populations has always ranked high on the priorities for both

advocacy and operational INGOS operating in these areas. The list of serious concerns includes

detention without a charge, abductions, land mines, forced recruitment, sexual assault,

intimidation, and lack of freedom of movement (NRC 2007; GTF 2009; HRW 2008)--again,

with most protection and security issues being the most dire from 2008-2010 in the final phases

of the conflict, and the immediate aftermath. As mentioned earlier, levels of militarization rose

exponentially after 2005, which, combined with the above, mention factors places women and

their bodies exposed as highly vulnerable, particularly in the context of displacement. In the

earlier mentioned session conducted by women activists in Sri Lanka, to commemorate UN

Resolution 1325, protection issues ranked highest amongst women who were in camps or

resettlement villages in the North-East (Focus 2011). Within the camps, women felt vulnerable

to sexual assault, among other forms of abuse and also feared the backlash of reporting such

---

[73] Dr. P, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka; Anonymous Civilians, Personal Interviews, Batticaloa
   July 2008.
[74] "Lochana", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK.

incidents. [75] UNHCR established a desk in refugee camps for women to report abuses, however the hovering military personnel around the desk deterred most women from approaching or reporting any abuses. [76]Those that did report any issues faced by women, or searched for missing young women, found themselves the subject of harassment or accusations of collaboration with the rebel movement. [77]

Health & Trauma

During moments of intensified conflict, or even immediately following the tsunami, health care becomes the most immediate need of the population with the existing healthcare infrastructure overwhelmed and medical supplies in short supply. In the last phases of the war, this access became even more sparse while the need increased, as civilian casualties numbered over 40,000 in 2009 (UN Panel Report 2011). The few doctors that continued to practice under such adverse conditions had also become the only available professionals to try and assess and deal with mental health concerns. *"I saw people who could have been saved, the injured, lying beside the dead – and I knew they would die"* [78] Physicians have also at various points been limited in their ability to deal with reproductive health, for fear of the release of information about sexual assault.[79] Large scale psychosocial trauma due to continued displacement (HRW 2008), and various forms of stress, anxiety, ranging from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder to an increase in young women at risk for suicide. Reports of high rates of domestic violence and

---

[75] Interviews conducted on behalf of the International Crisis Group 2010-2011 (see footnote #   )
[76] Ibid.
[77] "Sharmila", Civil Society Worker, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka
[78] "Dr. S", Physician, Personal Interview, October 2010, Vavuniya: Sri Lanka.
[79] Anonymous, Aid Worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

suicide amongst young women is often blamed on displacement, framed as *"an outcome of*

suppressed trauma and a disintegrated social structure". [80]

IV. Militarization & Displacement: A Gendered Perspective

Militarization and displacement have had negative effects on every member of society impacted

by these processes. By focusing on women's experiences of vulnerability through displacement

and in a militarized context, this study does not mean to imply that the impact on them is more

significant or noteworthy than that on other demographic groups. The emphasis on women's

experiences of displacement is crucial, however, to understanding their eventual participation in

the politics of resistance.

The lived experience of displacement by women in Sri Lanka has included all of the concerns

sited above, with some having a more acute impact along gender lines. Some scholars highlight

the flaws in the "gender-sensitive" and "gender-mainstreaming" trends in the INGO sectors work

with displaced populations, as partially responsible for persistent issues affecting women (e.g.,

minimal access to health care, lack of privacy in camps, lack of protection against sexual assault

and other forms of abuse among others) (Di Alwis, Hyndman 2003). However the general

consensus is that the impact of the displacement process itself has an impact on women in ways

ranging from physical illness to severe mental trauma (Schrijvers 1999; Di Alwis, Hyndman

2003). These women find themselves robbed of whatever agency the patriarchal society may

have left them when they enter these spaces, becoming "victims" to be pitied" rather than

"survivors of adversity who often demonstrate unimaginable strength and dignity in the most

---

[80] Dr. Ethirveerasignam, Personal Interview, June 2011: Colombo: Sri Lanka.

adverse circumstances". (Barbara Harrell-Bond 2002). The process of militarization, and its varied impact on women depending on exposure to state, non-state actors, or both further highlights the vulnerabilities of women, compounding the broader narrative that "victimizes" women.

The purpose of detailing the daily life struggles faced by women when impacted by multiple processes of militarization and displacement is not to further cast women into the role of victim, rather to highlight that state repression impacts women in ways that are less obvious than the measures previously used to understand its significance (Davenport 2007). Combined, both processes make it difficult to identify any agency amongst this population of women, and even more challenging to understand the variation within these forms of agency. This section highlights the experiences with multiple forms of repression by Tamil women, and begins to provide a means to understand a both pacifist and more violent responses to these challenges. Beyond providing a contextual backdrop, this chapter outlines the moments that would later emerge in the memories of female activists and fighters as contributing towards nascent political identities.

The earlier inter-disciplinary literature review discusses the scholars who have looked at the development of political identities, highlighting the role of both the myth and memory of moments of political repression in framing political identities. (Tambiah 1996; Kapferer 2001; Daniels 1996). Applying this specifically to women, Jocelyn Viterna creates the concept of women's "participation identities", where multiple identities are competing for salience. She finds state repression to be less relevant in the case of women's participation in the Salvadoran

guerilla army, but does offer an important insight into variations in both the nature of state

repression and constantly shifting significance (Viterna 2006).

While the role of "myth" does play a significant role in LTTE propaganda, the interviews in this

chapter point to the superseding significance of actual memories of state repression for women,

that may have resonated with the recruitment language of the movement, but remained grounded

in real experiences. Among these, experiences with militarization and displacement were

significant enough to raise the fundamental questions of justice, power, and inequality that would

later inform their political activism. Unlike the Salvadoran case, this study will show that state

repression (in varying forms) did have a higher relevance in the formation of political identities

for Tamil women than other mobilization factors (such as existing movement activism).

This chapter takes a closer look at more indirect forms of state repression whose impact can be

seen more in a longer continuum of experiences. The following chapter looks at gender-based

violence, a more direct form of state repression, more likely to revel itself in a bracketed and

finite period of time, or moment – yet leaving an indelible mark on Tamil women's emotional,

social , and political, beings.

Chapter 4:

The Impact of Gender-Based Violence: The Individual, The Collective, and

Political Identity

In any heavily militarized society that has undergone extended periods of conflict, gender-based violence can become normalized in a way that it shapes everything from individual personalities to cultural norms. Gender-based violence is defined as acts of sexual humiliation, rape, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, and sexual assault[81]. Gender-based violence is both a product of a broken social order as well as being a systematic political tool deployed by both state and non-state actors.[82]

In Sri Lanka, gender-based violence is interwoven into the story of conflict and the experiences of women in the North East. Violence for women in Sri Lanka exists "along a continuum with women often experiencing the domestic and political violence that stretched from the home, to the street, to the battlefield"(Page, Whitman, Anderson 2009). In the first section, this chapter looks at documentation and understandings of gender- based violence in Sri Lanka historically. The subsequent analysis uses a unique data set which documents incidents, reactions, and policies around gender-based violence affecting Tamil women in Sri Lanka from 2005-2010, exploring the impact of this aspect of women's experiences on their political identities and the likelihood for political activism.

---

[81] Article 8 (2) (e) (vi)-1 – (vi)-6, Elements of Crimes, Rome Statute.

[82] *"The threat and the act of rape is often used as a weapon against community identity, especially where ethnic and religious purity is at stake"* Panos Institute, 1995, p.8.

In academic circles questions of gender-based violence are often relegated to Women's Studies and Sociology, receiving less attention in Political Science and International Studies. Correspondingly, in foreign policy women's issues are most often addressed through development projects without complementary or parallel political interventions. This is evidenced in the recent allocation of 14 million USD to make clean water easily available in conflict zones (addressing the high incidence of violence against women as they seek to meet basic daily needs) [83]The development apparatus symbolizes a range of approaches that provide an emergency support system for affected civilians in moments of crisis, but can only address superficial manifestations of deeper issues. It underestimates the agency of women as political actors and ignores critical links between women's vulnerability in conflict zones and their eventual participation in political violence.

In the period from 2005-2010, gender-based violence against Tamil women in the North East has been widespread and comes at the hands of a variety of perpetrators (ICG report). As one activist warned *"Across the conflict zones, violence against women has increased exponentially".* [84] While this chapter does address the inter-community violence that steadily increased in this period (Crisis Group Report 2011), the focus will be on the subset of women who found themselves the victim of gender-based violence at the hands of armed state forces or their allies (peacekeepers, military, police, paramilitary).

---

[83] Remarks at the 10th Anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Secretary of State. (United Nations Headquarters, NY, October 26, 2010)

[84] Anonymous, civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.

Looking at this particular subset of women, anthropologists and sociologists have focused on the position of the female body as a site for violence, and subsequent representations of this in literature and the media (De Mel 2007; Chenoy 2002; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001; Tambiah 2005). The focus amongst this group of female scholars has also been on the subsequent position of these women within Tamil society. Where this literature provides a deeper glimpse into the symbolism and social fabric that absorbs the act of gender-based violence, the literature coming out of Political Science and Security Studies gives a more technical analysis of this phenomenon. Scholars such as Elisabeth Wood find that, accounting for reporting challenges, a majority of gender-based violence in the conflict zones in Sri Lanka occurred by state forces either in detention centers or in the combat zones. (Wood 2009, 145) These scholars analyze the state structures, levels of military control, and insurgent decisions that allow for gender based violence to occur (or to explain its absence), while also helpfully distinguishing between forms and patterns of gender-based violence (Wood 2009; Bloom 2005).

This chapter builds on contributions made by both sets of scholars, but importantly extends their analysis by further seeking to understands gender-based violence as a form of political violence. Looking specifically at the issue of rape and memory, scholars have found that the current discourse around trauma from gender-based violence "leaves little room for individual subjectivity and agency" (Henry 2011,106). This section presents individual accounts of violence, while avoiding the "victim" narrative, and also established patterns that highlight multiple forms of state and cultural repression women impacting these women. allows for an understanding of how these acts impact Tamil women and shape their political identities. A direct link between victims of gender-based violence and those that participated in Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam is difficult to establish without consistent access to one set of subjects for research, and this study cannot make direct causal links between the two. This data set uses a sample of women impacted by gender-based violence, who had varying levels of connection to the LTTE. These interviews are able to establish patterns of gender-based violence as political violence, and its ability to shape perceptions and understandings that contribute to women's political identities.

I. Methods & Definitions

In earlier research and throughout my interviews the subject of gender based violence came up (in hushed tones) amongst civil society, civilian women and former fighters. Because of cultural sensitivities, discussed in greater detail below, I was hesitant to pursue the subject in any great detail. In 2010 however, I received support from the International Crisis Group to spend one year researching this subject for a policy report. Though I had never previously done exclusively human rights work, I had the community connections and language skills to possibly obtain the information that several rights organizations were working to obtain. Select interviews and background research were used to produce a policy report, with the full data set analyzed here (Crisis Group Report 2011).

The methodology used in this study combined ways of using direct and indirect information gathering on gender based violence. The interviews followed a similar open-ended format of the broader research project, but were conducted with increased security concerns, often in remote locations – even for those who were not direct victims of gender-based violence.[85] The chart

_____

[85] Between 2010-2011 Government restrictions and monitoring on civil society remained high following the

developed is divided into three distinct spreadsheets: (1) Cases of Gender Based Violence

(Security Forces), (2) Gender Based Violence (Community Violence), and (3) Source

Interviews. Interviews were conducted in London and Sri Lanka from 2010-2011, amongst 5

categories: Victims (Chart 1 & 2), Civil Society, Activists, , Lawyers, Politicians (Chart 3) . A

total of fifty-five individuals were interviewed, producing information on thirty seven cases of

incidents of gender based violence.

Of these, individual stories from direct interviews are drawn upon to highlight broader patterns

amongst cases that are verified through other sources. This research does not aim to make claims

of the pervasiveness of sexual violence, nor make any determinative allegations on the

perpetrators of violence, rather seeks to understand the impact of these acts themselves on Tamil

women. As such, there is a bias in the sample population, as only those who were impacted, or

had some connection to those impacted by gender-based violence were interviewed. For security

reasons, names have been changed, and location details are not provided, though the recounting

of incidents of gender-based violence accurately reflects the original testimony of victims.

It is important to clarify the terminology used in existing scholarship and how these terms will be

used in this analysis. As mentioned earlier, the term gender-based violence is a broader category

that encompasses all forms of violence against women , particularly to "highlight the gender

inequality in which much violence is rooted" (IGWG of USAID, 2006). Sexual violence as a

category includes rape, sexual torture and mutilation, sexual harassment, voyeurism, sexual

slavery, enforced prostitution, enforced sterilization, and forced pregnancy. (ICC definition in

---

cessation of hostilities. The fear of information being given through these sources that might be used as evidence
of war crimes led to a general clampdown on most actors in civil society.

Wood 2009, 133). This broad form of violence can, and has, impacted both men and women. This particularly study focuses on the women affected by gender based violence and sexual violence, though still recognizing that the problem itself has had a significant impact on both genders. [86]

Challenges of Reporting

The challenges of reporting and data collection on the subject of sexual violence has been well-documented by both academics and human rights organizations. The reasons range from cultural sensitivities and fear of retribution to inflated numbers aimed at securing funding from international donors (HRW2008; Wood 2009). While the challenges are widely understood, the absence of data can often lead to the false, and dangerous, assumption that widespread sexual violence did NOT occur in a given conflict. [87]

For Tamil women in Sri Lanka, a victim of sexual violence is often treated as an outcast, bringing shame upon her family. As one victim of sexual violence articulates her experience with Tamil society *"Why can they not treat it as a wound sister and let it heal? The soldiers destroy once. But the village destroys us a thousand times"* (Thirinigama 1990, 313). The secrecy around sexual violence for Tamil women, begins from the moment of the act itself. Women are hesitant

---

[86] Research conducted in 2004-2005 reveals the use of sexualized torture as a relatively common form of torture for young males in detention on charges of terrorism. (Anonymous, Human Rights Investigator)

[87] In 2009 U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton included Sri Lanka in a statement claiming, "We've seen rape used as a tactic of war before in Bosnia, Burma, Sri Lanka and elsewhere." (Opening Remarks by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on the Adoption of a UNSC Resolution 1888 to Combat Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict , 30 September 2009). Challenged by the Government of Sri Lanka to produce data, the State Department later made the statement "in the most recent phase of the conflict, from 2006-2009..we have not received reports that rape and sexual abuse were used as tools of war, as they clearly have in other conflict areas around the world" (Letter from U.S> Ambassador Verveer to Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama, 3 October 2009)

to seek medical attention for fear of community members finding out. Rarely will a woman report the incident to the proper authorities for fear of retribution on herself or her family.

Younger victims are likely to tell only their mothers, and those with unintended pregnancies are often said to be taking "sewing classes" while waiting out their pregnancy in a church home for unwed mothers. [88]It is difficult for these women to get married, a cultural value that is a high priority for communities across the island. During the war restrictions on access for local civil society, limited freedom of movement for civilians, and no visible monitoring and reporting by journalists and INGO workers further exacerbated these cultural barriers to getting information on gender-based violence. In 2008 local and international NGOs were also warned by the administration not to discuss gender based violence, reproductive health services were limited, and psychosocial interventions for traumatized women were banned.[89] (CPA 2009)

II. A History of Gender-Based Violence

Vulnerabilities of Tamil Women in Sri Lanka

The contextual factors affecting Tamil women during the conflict analyzed in earlier chapters sets the backdrop against which women become particularly vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence. Even before the official start of the conflict in 1983, rape, sexual assault and harassment began to be noted across the North and East, and to a lesser extent in Colombo (Balasingham 2001; Jeyaraj 2009). Living in a militarized society (often under a system of 'dual militarization'), and facing continued displacement, shaped the position and perception of Tamil women. The common thread running through varied experiences and responses, was that this

---

[88] Anonymous, Personal Interviews, Vavuniya, 2010.
[89] Oxfam Worker, Anonymous, Personal Interview, New York, 2009.

position was nearly always defined by an increased physical insecurity, and vulnerability to gender-based violence.

Anthropologists have looked at this phenomenon in Sri Lanka, primarily through the ways in which the female body becomes a site for both violence from within the community and from state forces (Chenoy 2002; De Mel 2007; Rajasingham-Senanyake 2001). These analyses are useful in contributing to the broader discourse on gender and agency, which will be addressed in a later chapter of this study. However, to better understand the impact of gender based violence on women as political beings and its connection to their own engagement in violence, this chapter looks at both the stories of individual women and their lived experiences, and the patterns that have emerged throughout the conflict.

Gender-based violence has often been lumped into the challenges faced by women living in heavily militarized or conflict zones in Sri Lanka. This section aims to extract the history of gender-based violence in particular from within the broader category of women's issues in conflict zones. The section is broken down into categories similar to those used to analyze the broader data set to establish a basis for comparison and a framework for analysis.

Spaces of Gender-Based Violence

There are several spaces which have, over time, become infamous as sites of gender based violence in Sri Lanka. Though some of these are situated in Colombo, the majority referenced here are referring to locations in the North and East of the island. The primary spaces where

108

gender-based violence has been reported are in camps, checkpoints, custody or in detention,

homes and lodges. [90]

The two most restrained and controlled spaces - camps and detention centers - can be understood

as connected and unique in the theoretical space they occupy in the discourse around political

agency and the potential for individual or collective action. Both spaces fall within the

theoretical category defined by Giorgio Agamben as a state of exception, where an individual or

government is afforded extreme amounts of power well outside the limits of previous laws.[91] In

Sri Lanka, activists and scholars have long decried the Emergency Regulations and

corresponding Prevention of Terrorism Act which institutionalize the "state of exception" (CPA

2009), removing most of the legal safeguards prescribed under the International Covenants on

Human Rights. Following Agamben's logic, scholars have argued that those within spaces

vulnerable to this state, are left only a biological "bare life", bereft of political identity or

citizenship rights. Grounding an often abstract theory in an applicable space like the

displacement camp, the state of permanent exception has been found to create a "zone of

indistinction where the possibility of the political disappears" (Edkins in Branch 2011, 110).

Others cautions that this line of thought contributes to a situation where "people are normalized

toward victimhood", overlooking "the surplus of thought, organization, and action that results

from people trying to make meaning and live their lives in the camp, exercising their agency

individually and collectively " (Branch 2011, 111).

---

[90] Acts of gender-based violence can occur anywhere, this section looks at those spaces where women are particularly vulnerable or where gender-based violence has been repeatedly reported to occur and or/looked at by academics and activists.
[91] "In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without logos claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference" (Agamben, pg 40).

Both sides of the debate concerning the positioning of individuals within theoretical states of exception are relevant in the case of Sri Lanka in order to understand the particular vulnerabilities of women, without victimizing them in a way that limits the possibilities for political identity and action. This section takes an in-depth look at the insecurities and experiences of women in multiple locations, while later chapters examine the complex question of how women, already culturally positioned as apolitical beings, find a political voice in a context defined by the state of exception.

The camp[92], as discussed in earlier chapters, is a chaotic space, where male dominance was often asserted in new ways outside of traditional social spaces (Chenoy 2002), and where both circumstance and context left women vulnerable to all forms of gender-based violence (Schrijvers 1999). Though the reasons for displacement, and the context, shifted throughout the war – the vulnerability for women was perhaps at its highest levels in the final phases of the conflict (between 2008-2011), where mass roundups, increased militarization, and the large numbers of civilian deaths allowed for an environment of both opportunity and impunity. (Crisis Group Report 2011;Focus 2011).

Even more removed from the public eye, and deeper into a state of exception, are the acts that occur under police custody or in detention. While in some cases the victims are released and able to tell their story, the state has historically gone to great lengths to ensure that this doesn't happen. The cases that have historically occurred in custody or detention have ranged from sexual abuse of suspects without a motive (Wood 2009; De Mel 2007), to the use of sexual

---

[92] This refers to camps created for internally displaced people as opposed to either LTTE or Sri Lankan Army training camps.

torture as a means to retrieve information from suspected terrorists or informants (Wood 2009)[93].

In most conflict/post-conflict countries International Humanitarian Law requires that groups like

the ICRC at a minimum have access to this population, which did not occur in Sri Lanka post-

2008(Crisis Group Report 2011).

Checkpoints, called "sites of masculanized power" (De Mel 2007, 215), are physical

representations of a militarized state, and symbolic representations of a surveillance state. (De

Mel 2007; Wood 2009). Suspicion and localized power combine at the checkpoint to place a

woman's body at the center of security measures in these spaces. One of the most famous cases

of sexual violence, that of Krishanthy Kumaraswamy in 1996 at the Chemmani check point in

Jaffna, highlighted the violations against women that occurred at checkpoints. (De Mel 2007,

215). As the state became increasingly militarized, the number of these checkpoints

correspondingly increasing the vulnerability of women in the North and East in the last few

years.

 While gender-based violence in Sri Lanka is rarely reported in general, the chances of reporting

increases with the presence of outside observers or witnesses- a possibility more likely in camps

or checkpoints. This likelihood decreases for incidents of gender-based violence that occur in a

home, temporary shelter, or in lodges. From 2005 onwards, as the army took over large swaths

of formerly rebel-controlled territory, the military presence in remote villages, schools, and other

civilian spaces led to increases in home intruders committing acts of gender-based violence or

---

[93] Anonymous (Asylum Seeker from Detention Facility), Personal Interview, London, UK 2011.

young girls being taken under auspices of job training to seedy lodges to be drugged and raped.
[94]

III. Individual Memory & Collective Narratives: Key Moments

Throughout the conflict there have been several cases of gender-based violence that have been highlighted, and become central to the narrative on both sides of the ethnic divide. These cases serve as the few cases that, through a coincidence of circumstances, were addressed legally or were revealed in a public medium. Where possible, the cases presented here are supplemented by scholarship, policy reports, and direct interviews.

Krishanthy

The first, and perhaps most prominent among these, is the case of Krishanthy Kumarasamy. According to the Women's Development and Information Unit of the LTTE (WDIU 1998), Krishanthy, an 18-year-old Tamil girl was arrested when passing through the Kaithady army check post on the afternoon of September 7, 1996. According to eye witnesses, and the local newspaper report, Krishanthy was gang-raped and killed along with her younger brother, mother, and a neighbor who came to inquire as to her whereabouts (WDIU 1998). The public outcry as well as the testimony of a witness police constable did lead to the arrest and prosecution of perpetrators, a move lauded by rights groups (Amnesty 1997) despite repeated concerns put forth by UN Working Group on Enforce or Involuntary Disappearances who found the country as a whole to be "the country with the highest number of disappearances report to have occurred in 1997" (WDIU 1998). De Mel couples this particular case with that of a female sex worker publicly stripped in Colombo under suspicion of terrorism to find that "the pattern of violence

---

[94] Anonymous, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, 2011.

against women under militarization and war…folds neatly into the agendas of the state and patriarchy in a manner that permits the surveillance of all Sri Lankan women" (De Mel 2007, 215). In conversations with women activists on the island, this case remains central in the collective memory of Tamils as a symbol of the treatment of Tamil women by the state. [95]

Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF)

Soon after the Krishanthy Kumaraswamy incident, Rajiv Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, signed the Indo- Sri Lanka accord which sent the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) deep into the conflict zones in the North East. (Mampilly 2011, 105). They soon left a deep imprint on the daily lives and political realities on the island, generating resentment from both sides. (Bose 1994)

Among the misguided interventions made by this peacekeeping force was their heavy handed approach to the civilian population, including the harassment and rape of Tamil women. During this period, perhaps because the perpetrator was an external force the state itself was suspicious of, there was an increase in documentation and discussion of acts of gender-based violence. (Chenoy 2002, 115). As recorded by political strategist and scholar, Adele Balasingham "The Indian army was brutal and male and chauvinist. The rapes, and molesting, made a bitter impact" (Balasingham 1990,). The "hundreds" of cases of gender based violence has been widely noted by scholars and rights groups (Bose 1994, De Mel 2007, Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001). This time period sticks out in the memory of diaspora women, who recall harassment and assaults in

---

Jaffna along with nights spent with neighbors or friends for safety.[96] Rajini Thirinigama recounts one powerful story of a 38 year old woman who was gang raped by the IPKF as they searched her home in Jaffna, one example of women's bodies being brutalized and placed visibly in the glaring spotlight of surveillance.

During this time period the perceived (myth) and real experiences of individual women (memory) with gender-based violence at the hands of the IPKF became incorporated into the broader collective narrative of the LTTE, demanding a national outcry against the defiling of "our" women. (WDIU 1998)

Dhanu

Among the hundreds of cases that emerged from this period, one became a fixture in political history and popular memory – an almost mythically exalted figure. This was the case of "Dhanu", and LTTE "Black Tiger" (suicide bomber) who assassinated former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at an election rally in Sriperambadur, India on May 21, 1991. (Chenoy 2002). Her story was partially fictionalized to provide the basis for the popular film "The Terrorist".[97] Various versions of the tale claim that Dhanu herself and/or her mother were raped by the occupying Indian forces. The film draws out the impact of this moment on Dhanu by examining her cold, and almost mechanical commitment to revenge, with very little concern or value for her own life. While the LTTE later acknowledged the faulty political strategy behind it, this act came to define a new relationship with India. Dhanu remains a constant presence in the

---

[96] Anonymous, Asylum Lawyer, Personal Interview, London, UK, 2011.
[97] *"The Terrorist"*, Santosh Sivan, Phaedra Films (India :1997)

collective memory and political narrative, a symbol of a woman who was at once victimized and valiant.

Visuamadu

The most recent legal case, involves the gang-rape of a young women in the absence of her husband in a recently re-settled village in the North in 2010. The local police actually reported the case (a rare occurrence) and began a legal proceeding which led the arrest of several soldiers and has been referred to the Jaffna High Court (Crisis Groupr Report 2011, 27). When interviewing civil society members on the island, the case was referred to as one that highlights the vulnerability of women in spaces that are little more than an extended displacement camp, though few were hopeful that the case would be completed or successful in establishing a precedent for similar violations. [98]

These cases are often cited, and analyzed, as they remain the few cases of Tamil women who have had experiences with gender-based violence willing to expose themselves to societal scorn and heightened security risks. While these incidents shaped the political discourse around women's grievances, the majority of women's experiences have continued to occur in an environment shrouded by silence and shame. This prevents us from fully grasping the variation in experiences of gender-based violence, the cultural realities these women are forced to grapple with, and the impact it has on their political identities (as they perceive it, rather than interpreted by the LTTE). While these incidents become somewhat exceptionalized, gender-based violence itself became increasingly normalized in the North and East, often a part of everyday interactions. Interviews with activists and women affected by gender-based violence provide

---

[98] Anonymous Interviews, IDP's, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

unique insights into both the strength of cultural ramifications as well as the individual experience with violence.

IV. Patterns of Gender-Based Violence: 2000-2010

When I refer to gender-based violence, the definition used generally refers to the formal legal language put forth at the International Criminal Court, outlined earlier in the chapter. The forms that will be referred to in this chapter highlight the prevalent forms that emerge in the data set. These categories are Rape, Sexual Assault/Harassment, Sexual Humiliation, Prostitution, Forced Abortion. While some of these categories can be problematic, they are useful in getting a sense of the scope and variation within violations against women from 2005-2010. In order to situate this analysis within similar research and analyses, the data is supplemented by relevant media reports and the United Nations Secretary General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka (UN Panel Report 2011).

Protection Issues: Militarization

As the influence and presence of the LTTE began to wane in areas of the North and East after 2005, life for Tamil women became increasingly re-defined by state militarization[99]. This included a heavy army or paramilitary presence in LTTE "cleared" areas, as well as life under ongoing military assaults by the state. (UN Panel Report 2011). As noted in the earlier chapter on militarization, the levels of militarization between 2005-2010 were higher than at any point in history. Most of the women interviewed lived under a system of "dual militarization" by both state and non-state actors.

---

[99] Please see discussion on militarization in Chapter 3.

The context of militarization was established earlier, but this section aims to understand the direct links between this context and the increased likelihood of gender-based violence due to heightened insecurity for Tamil women (both civilian and cadres/ex-cadres). Women's groups interviewed in 2010 categorized their sole and urgent mission as *"Advocating against the increased militarization causing an increased vulnerability to all forms of sexual violence"*.[100] Local NGO workers, Tamil politicians, and human rights lawyers all operating in Sri Lanka also highlighted militarization as the primary issue facing women in the North East.[101]

Interviews conducted around this presumed link between militarization and women's vulnerability in regards to gender-based violence focused largely on the lived daily experience of women in the highly militarized zones (North and East). As they took over territory from the LTTE beginning in 2005, the military became responsible for all aspects of the society – everything from permission to travel to purchasing food rations and allocation of shelter.[102] All families had to be registered with the army in order to receive any support after being displaced. In this process, photos of all members of the family were taken ostensibly for security purposes but which also served to capture the identities of young women who were attractive, or widowed.[103]

---

[100] Anonymous, Women's Organization Worker, Personal Interview, Colombo, January 2009.

[101] Anonymous, Human Rights Lawyer, Personal Interview, Colombo, June 2011.
   Anonymous, Tamil National Alliance Party Member, Personal Interview, New York, NY February 2010.

[102] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

[103] NGOs estimate the post-conflict number of war widows at nearly 90,000 across the North and East. Viluthu Organization.

The significant interaction between military personnel (including police, paramilitaries, army cadres) and civilian women emerged as the most important causal factor directly linking high levels of militarization to all forms of gender-based violence. These interactions have become predominately defined by a form of exchange, that can be either benevolent or abusive, but exist on the fundamental premise of a power deferential between even the lowest level army cadre and the civilian woman. The military was also blamed for a spate of strange sexual assaults by "grease devils" or "yakas" where individuals covered in black marks and grease would attack women within a contested political territory and reportedly take cover in military encampments. (Crisis Group Report 2011).

Husbands and Soldiers: Patterns of Sexual Violence (2005-2010)

When the Suspect is the State: Civilian Women

The three cases presented below are all civilian women who may have had some interaction with the LTTE, but never participated in the movement in any form. These women more often fall into the narratives of a victim, and acts of violence against them are seen as less overtly political than those against former fighters. These stories reveal both the variation in experience as well as the political nature of violence.

"Theva"

Theva is 54 years old married, and now living outside of Sri Lanka. She had always been poor, but worked hard to put her girls through school, believing that they could leave the country and make something of their lives. She supported the LTTE in principle, but didn't want her children involved. In the February of 2009, the final phases of the war, she came across from areas of LTTE control, surrendering to the army. She lost her husband in the war, and was with her thirty

year-old daughter, granddaughter, and her husband. Along with hundreds of other civilians they were taken into the jungle and forced into circles of 20 people. Within these circles, the men were tied up, and she and her daughter were raped. The men were too weak from days without food to protect them. Her daughter now remains on the island in a resettlement camp, her husband was taken away. She has received asylum abroad, and is trying to get her family to join her. She has excessive bleeding that she assumed was menopause, but doesn't have health insurance in her host country. [104]

She felt very acutely that the violence she faced was due to her ethnicity as a Tamil and nothing else. She blames the LTTE for the situation she was in, they should have settled with the government much earlier, but also felt that if she was younger she would have fought back. Against the Singhalese, which, when asked to clarify, she said *"Against the soldiers, against the state."*

"Jeyanthi"

Jeyanthi, 24, had just been resettled in her village in May of 2010 . She had done well in school, and was an example to her younger siblings, who she helped care for. She wanted to be a teacher. She stopped her teaching course in the last phase of the war, when the whole family was displaced. She had met a soldier during her time in the IDP camps that was friendly, in a way she described as non-romantic. After she was resettled, he would come by the house to chat, eventually asking her parents for her hand in marriage, telling them how pretty their daughter was. They were from a lower caste and lost what meager possessions they might have offered as

---

[104] "Theva", Personal Interview, March 2011, London, UK.

a dowry – so despite a deep distrust for the military and concerns about her future in the Tamil community, they agreed.

He came to pick her up , and told her parents he would like to take her home to his family in the South. Traveling by bus, he said they would lodge overnight in a small town before departing for his home village. That evening, he gave her something to eat, and she fainted. In the morning, he was gone, and she knew she had been raped. She struggled to find a way back to her family, and three months later discovered she was pregnant. Without telling her father, her mother took her to find the soldier, and when they reached his home town his parents told them he was married, with children. Her mother then brought her to a church home to give birth and recover before she could return home. We met 9 days after her daughter "Dhanya" was born, a child whom she had no interest in and would give up for adoption.

Slightly dejected, she had believed this was who she would marry. Days after the birth of her daughter, she wanted very much to move past what had happened, and get back to her studies. *"I am concerned that nobody finds out what has happened."* She thinks that the inequality and treatment she has seen, means that the LTTE, or some form of the LTTE, will return to the island. [105]

---

[105] *"Jeyanthi"*, Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

"Chanthrika"

Chanthrika is 27 years old and comes from a Hindu family of 6. Her father is a coolie (day laborer). The family has been living in a small house made of mud and cadjuns. She studied only up to grade 5, and has lost her virginity by force.

"On March 12, 2005 around 830 pm, the persons who were armed and in their uniform entered the house saying that they wanted to search the house. They spoke in Sinhala language. At that time I was all alone at home as my parents had gone to one of our relative's house. While talking with me, one of the men, who had come, forcefully dragged me and the incident happened to me by force. Out of fear and fear of my life neither could I shout nor could I escape from the hands of those villains"[106]

She was arranged to marry a young man, who heard the story from members of the community and later deserted her. She feels very helpless about the future, and conscious of the burden she places on her parents.[107]

Patterns

These three cases, in different contexts, are representative of broader patterns that have emerged across twenty two cases of alleged rape and sexual assault. These three are drawn out as the more "credible" amongst the set of cases based on direct interviews, medical evidence, and witnesses to corroborate the testimony.

---

[106] While all the interviews were conducted by me, with a translator, this particular case was also documented by a local NGO, where she was able to write her own story.

[107] "Chanthrika", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

One pattern that has emerged across the cases are variations in the level and type of force that is used. While the act itself is always forced, the means to obtain access to the victim vary , with a spectrum ranging from more coercive techniques (promise of marriage) to mass violence in the context of war (gang rape), with various forms of normalized every-day violence that span the range between the two. Despite this variation, the majority of the women interviewed (18 out of 22) had the same reaction – fear, exhaustion, or resignation prevented them from any form of resistance, even crying out for help.

Across all of the interviews, the act of rape was difficult to discuss, women were uncomfortable, shy, or reticent to talk about the details. Some expressed their ability to discuss these issues with me, because I was "like them" (Tambiah 2005). The language used to describe these incidents was also notable, though perhaps outside the scope of this study to fully analyze, though important to mention as a part of understanding the impact of traumatic events (Das 2007). The words used to describe events that are traumatic or difficult to discuss often provide some distance from the events they describe, euphemizing them in a way. In the same way that "conflict" or "war" is often referred to as "the problems" or "the time period with the problems" ('pirichinai'), rape was often discussed as being " hit" ("adi") or "the incident" ("sambavam") . Though these are small disconnects in language, it does provide some insight into how these events are processed and understood by both women and the larger Tamil society, and is discussed in greater detail below.

In all of the twenty two cases of both rape and sexual assault that I examined during this time period, where the Sri Lankan Armed forces or their affiliates were the alleged perpetrators of violence, the political power dynamic was clearly skewed. Partly due to the time period and the corresponding phase of the conflict, all of the cases involved populations in territories recently taken over by government forces away from the LTTE. A general sense of triumphalism was pervasive in the extensive military apparatus now governing these areas (Crisis Group Report 2011). This dynamic points to acts of gender-based violence as political in nature, though less obviously so than acts of gender-based violence amongst the population of ex-cadres. Amongst the reasons for the prevalence of gender-based violence in warzones (loss of control over cadres, opportunity), most members of the community and local civil society felt there were political undertones to most acts of gender based violence, and that opportunities where they existed, were created by a specific political context. [108]

The open-ended style of interviewing, with specific follow up questions, also revealed that the women chose to tell those aspects of their life history that were most disrupted by the act of gender-based violence. A life of poverty was highlighted where she lamented the inability to get married and relieve the financial burden of elders, academic achievements where the ability to excel was interrupted, the number of younger siblings where there was a need to protect a family from shame and suspicion. In almost all of the cases, the act itself marked a significant departure from their expected life path's, and they began to think about, if not act upon, questions of injustice, inequality, and revenge.

---

[108] Discussing the rape of a 55 year old woman in his district, one pastor said "She was older, and very unattractive, which, you know, must mean this is an act of political violence. An act of war". (CS 6, 2010)

When the State is the Suspect: LTTE Cadres

"Selvi"

As the civilians crossed over to army controlled territory in May of 2009, announcements were made over loudspeakers that all civilians who had even been affiliated with the LTTE for one day must self-identify (threatening severe punishments for those who were later discovered to have an affiliation). Selvi, 20 years old, had been recruited in the last phases of the war, had not received any formal training, and had only fought for a few weeks before the defeat. She felt if she went voluntarily she would be able to quickly return to her family once they found she was not a "hard core" cadre. She was detained for more than 3 months in difficult conditions with no access to family. During the course of one interview with a soldier, she was forced to perform oral sex on the officer in charge.[109]

"Asha"

Asha was taken in the battle to take the Eastern Province of Batticaloa in 2007. She is 21, and was taken to a detention center when she was captured. She was released to a UNICEF team who was handling ex-combatants. She remained in contact with her friends in the movement, who were taken to detained in 2008 and 2009. They have told her that they would rather stay in detention, as ex-cadre who left face sexual assault in the resettled villages. The girls tell stories of being forced into sexual acts with these men. She worries everyday that she will be more of a target for rape if the military finds out she is an ex-cadre.[110]

---

[109] "Selvi", Personal Interview, March 2010, London, UK.
[110] Asha", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

"Kanapathipillai"

 At the time of our interview "Kanapathipillai" was 31 and an orphan . She did join the LTTE for a short time, after studying up to grade 10. After she was raped by a police officer, she narrates her own experience:

"After this incident the perception of the community over me is very negative and this hurts me beyond words. I am an orphan. Without both my parents my life is very miserable. The ones who come to marry me refuse to do so owing to the scars of the injuries caused by this incident. Having interrupted her studies early on, she felt unqualified to re-enter school and was unsure if anyone would marry her. She wanted to have a "normal" life and to have a family.[111]

Due to difficulty accessing this population after the cessation of hostilities, the sample size of suspected or former LTTE interviews is smaller, eight total who reported experiences of rape and sexual assault, including Selvi. While Selvi was a direct interview, her story also highlights the impact of perceived or suspicion of political affiliation on the occurrence of gender-based violence. While the general population of civilian women faced increased vulnerability during this time period, the label of ex-cadres or suspicion of affiliation greatly increased the vulnerability of this population to gender-based violence, both in the physical and social space they occupied.

Six of the eight cases reported acts of sexual violence or sexual assault that occurred while in detention or rehabilitation centers, in the process of interviews or during their time there. The others were monitored in their home villages after their release and had encounters with gender-

---

[111] "Kanapathipillai", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

based violence in those spaces. The experiences of this particular population falls within the concerns of scholars of the position of the female body within the "surveillance state", in spaces characterized by a state of exception to normal legal codes. While under the watchful eye of the military, very few outside civil society, INGO, or UN personnel were initially allowed any access to this population, further increasing their vulnerability.

One nun reported that from the early detention centers truck drivers with supplies were told they could take a girl for a few hours and return her to the center. *"I hid supplies for these girls, basic sanitary supplies, under my robes and spoke with them about what was happening"*[112]. In these cases, there was a distinct feeling amongst the women that the act of gender-based violence was a form of retribution for their participation in the rebel movement. It is hard to determine whether these acts were in fact distinct from acts of gender-based violence that affected the general population due to a combination of triumphalism/militarization, but these acts are seen more clearly by the women themselves as acts of political violence, given the political identity assigned to the victims (real or perceived). There was however, amongst this population, a greater tendency to resist either physically or pleading with the commanding officers.

Violence from Within: Domestic Abuse

In order to understand the significance of the prevalence of gender-based violence *within* the Tamil community, it is first important to look at the legal codes this population had previously been living under – particularly involving the protection of women. The LTTE created a link

---

[112] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

between morality and the Tamil nation (Tambiah 2007), and aimed to eliminate social ailments such as alcoholism, pornography, domestic violence, sexual violence (often correlated with the "impure" Singhalese occupiers), from their territories. As a result severe punishments were meted out for any case of domestic abuse or sexual violence (Schalk 2005; Tambiah 2007; Wood 2009).

After the end of hostilities, the *"militarization destroyed the social fabric of Tamil society"*[113]. As the military took over areas, the only legal codes were martial law and all prior values and norms (that had been tightly wrapped around Tamil culture) became irrelevant over night. At the same time, high levels of trauma affected every Tamil family in the conflict zones and camps[114]. Untreated depression, PTSD, and other mental disorders gave rise to coping mechanisms like alcoholism amongst unemployed despondent men.

While the context of the camp, with lack of privacy, and overcrowded tents led to some forms of sexual abuse , within a year after the conflict, alarming numbers started to come out of the conflict zones in the northern districts of marked increases in domestic violence and inter-community gbv (Crisis Group Report, 2011). One aid worker commented *"Maybe after the army started raping Tamil women, it became ok for anyone to do it?".* [115]The seven total cases of gender-based violence within the Tamil community reported a variety of forms of violence within it. Some sexual abuse involved young children within the family, others were assaulted when searching for loved ones, or wandering in the night (often termed as "abnormal" or

---

[113] Anonymous, civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.
[114] See Chapter 2 for an in-depth description of these experiences.
[115] Anonymous, Civil Society worker, Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa.

mentally disturbed), while still others faced sexual abuse by husbands or lovers. In these cases, the general response was muted – with women often feeling resigned to their position in their own homes, and culturally bound to not break apart their family.

Prostitution: The Line Between Coercion and Rape

Interviews that touch on the increase and prevalence of prostitution amongst the Tamil population of women were entirely from members of civil society or caretakers of young women, as nobody in the society would admit to engaging in that sort of behavior directly. Prostitution, again, represents a marked departure from norms under the LTTE. One priest remarked (perhaps overly euphemizing about life under the LTTE) *"The LTTE is gone, now our girls have to sell themselves".* [116]

Prostitution has consistently represented a gray area in our understandings of sexual violence. This study follows the ICC established guidelines, that includes prostitution as a form of coercion in a post-conflict or highly militarized zone. *"Prostitution in the Sri Lankan context is a form of sexual violence".* [117]Observers and local residents reported that after 6pm the former conflict zones became a different territory. Prostitution, among other things, began in the evenings. Some noticed the same soldier hover outside a widows home. Others worked with prostitutes who may have contracted infectious diseases. Others noticed certain

---

[116] Father J, Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

[117] Anonymous, civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka. (Multiple CS 1-10). This section draws on anonymous interviews with Civil Society workers, done in October 2010, and June 2011. They are referred to here by number, C.S. indicating Civil Society.

women having an easier time obtaining rations and basic supplies. Prostitution is both well known and invisible on the streets and faces in these districts.

Those interviewed found the act of prostitution between Tamil women and members of the military to be a necessary act of survival, occupation, or exchange for protection purposes (CS 23, CS 4). Several interviewees had difficulty with the labels available to understand this new phenomenon *"It is hard to say whether it is rape or prostitution, as women may give in to advances in exchange for something".* (CS 4, 13, 16).

It became easier to see coercion at work amongst the younger population of women. Several teachers and social workers report soldiers giving cell phones to young girls, and entering into coercive relationships in this way. These activities were exposed in one incident at a Jaffna high school, where one girl fainted and a few were then found to be pregnant. (CS 19) (CS 3). This same population was also often promised work in garment factories, or visits to big towns, and brought to seedy lodges and motels to act as prostitutes. (CS 15).

While the practice of prostitution/sexual exchange is largely informal, some reports indicate that local "middlemen" and police officers have begun to take advantage of an emerging underground market in sex work. (CS 11). Despite the murky definitional space that sexual exchange exists within, what is clear in Sri Lanka is that between 2005-2010 there was a significant increase in all forms of prostitution and coercive sexual violence. Fundamentally a context of militarization and surveillance coupled with a lack of access to resources for women

have led to an increase in this form of gender-based violence and will permanently alter the lives of the women involved.

V. Testimonies: The Failure of Words to Capture Experience

Each of these women expressed in the language available to them, a pain whose meaning and truth eluded the culturally acceptable words they spoke. The depth of pain was visible in their demeanor, their eyes, their general mental state – more than it was detectable in their words. While all forms of state repression create various forms of trauma, rape or gender-based violence often creates a distinct traumatic memory that remains sequestered in one's memory. While an extensive literature exists around the trauma and our understanding of it (Prager 2001), it is important for this study to simply highlight that " the language of testimony cannot come close to articulating the force of experience" (Agamben in Henry 2011,107). Nicola Henry poses a useful question when faced with the inadequacies of language. "..if communicating pain is impossible in the sense that language cannot adequately capture pain, victims cannot fully know their own experiences of trauma and others cannot understand or know this pain, what the consequences of this crisis of representation?". (Henry 2011, 106)

Among the consequences, Henry finds that ambiguity in the study of trauma often leads to women's testimonies being seen as false, or exaggerated, a useful political tool. Among the women interviewed, two who openly discussed their experiences were said to be lying. Even a female activist unsympathetically remarked *" Some of these women, they are saying these things to get attention.* This crisis will also affect the research done around these women, ostensibly for them. In the research done for this section, locating and speaking with victims of gender-based

violence seemed in some sense an unethical pursuit to claim what is by its very nature "unclaimed" by either the subject or surrounding community (Caruth 1996).

The crisis of representation is a key element that allows the individual tale to be woven into the collective narrative, creating meaning in trauma for both political goals and in individual women's own understandings. Nearly all the women felt insecure on the basis of their gender and their ethnicity (Tamil) – and could process their own pain as a targeted political act when it was absorbed as such, and claimed by the LTTE. In the absence of psychosocial support by either the state or non-state actors, the movement and other forms of political engagement provided an inadequate, but available, form of psychological relief (Interviews, 2011). *"Akka (Sister), at least in the LTTE I was with those who had a similar experience. I felt it was important to share my story, rather than hide it."* [118]

VI. Cycles of Conservatism: The Aftermath of Violence

A large segment of the literature that looks at the impact of gender-based violence on women in Tamil society tends to adopt a culturalist perspective, highlighting the perceptions and positionality of victims in the aftermath of these events. This becomes a particularly useful and necessary analysis, as even cases that are not reported to local authorities or rights groups are known within the community and also provide an important pathway through which gender-based violence can be linked to female participation in the LTTE.

---

[118] "Yalini", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

The actual moments of an encounter with gender based violence will permanently alter the identity and life of a Tamil woman. In the immediate aftermath, she is now a victim, who is perceived, judged, and identified in an entirely different way. Scholars often refer to the "duality" or "double" nature of a victim of sexual violence . This refers to either the co-existence of both the internalized pain as well as the mark on the honor of a woman, or "social stigma" (Chenoy 2002, 115) or the intersection of two forms of societal misfortune (rape/widowhood) (Rajasingham-Senanyake 2001, 111). As Tamil society re-absorbs them, they become the subject of "sympathetic gossip" which provides a flimsy façade for the underlying blame often placed on the woman herself. (Alison 2004; Thirinigama 1990)

In such a context, the desire to keep these acts hidden is natural despite "individualizing the burden in a way that creates far reaching damage to the inner life of a woman" (Thirinigama 1990, 309). In the private sphere, the acts of gender-based violence experienced by Tamil women become highly individualized and protected within the inner sanctum of the family. In the public and political sphere, the acts become a critical part of the political narrative and argument for a distinct Tamil nation (where, presumably, such acts would not occur) (WURF) . As LTTE advisor Balasingham puts it "At an individual level, rape is experienced by the woman as a despicable and gross violation of her person and an act of mental and physical torture perpetrated against her. But at the collective level, rape aims to violate and humiliate the norms of society". (Balasingham 2001, 284).

The reaction to multiple forms of gender-based violence will vary dependent on the individual, but these reactions can be generally understood within two broader categories. The first, and

more common, is to assimilate quietly into society as best as possible. The marker for normalcy in this case is the ability to get married, or stay married following an experience with gender-based violence outside of their own home. As referenced in the interviews conducted, young girls are often seen as "spoilt goods" (Chenoy 2002,115), and either unable to get married or become disinterested in marriage leading to high levels of suicide amongst this particular demographic (WDIU 1998)[119].

For those willing to take the risks of public shame, the avenues of protest have been minimal, where they existed at all. The lack of strong women's leadership in Tamil social movements, and the absences of a strong grassroots activist network coupled with the "anemic character" of the Tamil middle class in whom "the community reposed its power but continually failed the people" (Thirinigama 1990, 319). Under the LTTE, while women often felt more secure against gender-based violence, LTTE "structures did little to provide women an autonomous voice within the organization.". [120]

As levels of gender-based violence remained high relatively consistently from 2005-2010, this phenomenon began to translate into more deep-seated shifts within Tamil society itself. These can be viewed both at the macro level of broader cultural shifts in society away from or disconnected from traditional value systems, as well as the directly implications of women's position within Tamil society.

---

[119] Anonymous, Women's Organization Worker, Personal Interview, Colombo, January 2009.
[120] Both the protections of and restrictions on Tamil women living within the LTTE or in areas under LTTE control are further examined in sections of Chapter 5.

Shifting Values: Cultural Erosion

In addition to the rise in prostitution, there have been other shifts that have begun a slow process of eroding some of the core values of Tamil society. In understanding the new position of women in Tamil society, as well as the likelihood of further political participation it is important to understand the ways in which the society itself has shifted as a result of the last phase of conflict. As discussed in earlier chapters, the institution of marriage is central not only to the identity of the Tamil women, but acts as a lynchpin around which the entire society revolves. While the process of displacement, detention, and resettlement in itself began to wear down these types of social norms, gender-based violence in particular led to new shifts in Tamil society, in particular regarding marriage.

Primarily, this time period saw a marked increase in family separation as men were often taken to different camps/detention centers, and a sharp increase in early marriages. Though the definition of an early marriage varies, the average age referred to across interviews pertaining to this time period are between 12-16. Often referred to as "marriages of compulsion" (CS 8), these came about as a response to two major pressures on families. The first was the fear of late-stage recruitment in the LTTE, who parents believed were more likely to take single youth than those that were married. The second came in response to increased levels of sexual violence from multiple sources, again believing that the marriage itself might provide some measure of protection for young girls.

These marriages were often hastily arranged with improper paperwork, forcing together two young people who were essentially strangers, placing the young woman in a sexually vulnerable

position. (Interview, Elanko). As these types of arrangements came to be more common, the social taboo on extramarital love amongst youth began to fade and the society saw a large number of love affairs amongst youth and young adults(CS 19). This, combined with higher levels of "sexual mobility" amongst this population (CS 8), created a cyclical pattern -where early marriage became a more acceptable option to parents than allowing for casual relationships. As families and couples were separated, the particular demographic who were forced into early marriages becomes particularly relevant as they have created a new generation of "young widows" who may not have even been legally married, but if their husbands are missing or separated are labeled as such.

The increase in child marriages is among one of the many factors cited in interviews as leading to a second key fissure in the fabric of Tamil society. High levels of trauma amongst children in particular have led to uncontrollable behavior and disruptions in the education system.[121] As discussed in earlier chapters, discipline and education particularly amongst Tamil youth- are central aspects of Tamil culture. During this time period, activists, NGOs and teachers saw startling shifts in the behavior of children and the corresponding response of care-takers and teachers.

One nun reported that young girls brought to her home out of poverty or missing parents often came with remnants of shells still in their heads, waking up in the nights and banging their heads against the floor (CS 18). There was an anger in them, a desire for revenge, that she had not previously seen in young Tamil women. Those that remain at home have lost the sense of

---

[121] Anonymous, Former Education Minister of North and East, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo.

discipline that comes from parents. Traumatized women spend time watching television, often neglecting their children- allowing children free time to engage in activities such as vandalism or stealing (CS 19).

The final major shift in Tamil society primarily applies to adult men, but affects the entire population. This has been a rise in alcoholism, referenced earlier in its relation to domestic violence. "In Jaffna, the army is encouraging production of the local liquor, cassipu. They encourage drinking. It both subdues and destroys the Tamil community." [122] The increased trend towards alcoholism was referenced in several interviews with civil society as well as women victims of community violence (Crisis Group Report, 2011).

VII. Treatment of Tamil Women: Imposed Categories

The situation of women within these new paradigms of Tamil society is relatively new, though in some cases a more intensified version of historical observations on women's position in Tamil society. Certainly, the position and perceptions noted by scholars has crystallized in ways that find women over exposed with minimal amounts of agency or control over their own lives. Partially due to the instrumental use in the delivering of rehabilitation and development aid, labels have become particularly relevant in the language and perception of women in the North East. This section looks at two particular categories which I later argue can be key demographics amongst which new forms of women's political activism may emerge -- "widows" and "ex-cadres".

---

[122] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

Widows

Towards the end of the conflict (2008), a number started to circulate amongst humanitarian policy and policy circles of 89,000 recent (from 2005-2011) widows were living in the conflict-affected areas of the North and East (CS20). This number was divided roughly equally between the Northern (49,000) and Eastern (40,000) districts. (TNA MP, 2011). Women are "widowed" (or labeled as such) primarily through the "desertion, divorce, death, detention" of or by a spouse .[123] In many cases, the women themselves are unsure of their own status, as they are unable to obtain death certificates or information on missing husbands (CS16). A large number of those included in this category are young widows (one nun estimates over 50% are likely to be 'young widows), who were forced into early marriages and are now alone. (CS 23). The Hindu cultural stigma which is pervasive in Tamil society, particularly frowns upon young widows. In addition to the 2-3 weeks they are shunned, young widows are not invited to cultural celebrations (marriage, birth ceremonies) for fear of bad luck. Despite being ostracized, societal shifts like increases in alcoholism and domestic violence amongst men have changed the perspective of some women, who now "prefer to be alone than with an alcoholic or an abusive man".

These widows are a highly vulnerable population (within a generally vulnerable civilian population), monitored by the army, further identified by INGOs, and living in flimsy shelters they are more vulnerable to sexual violence/harassment (Crisis Group Report 2011; CS 15). Within Tamil society "The increase of women-headed households has left men feeling more

---

[123] Dr. Selvi, Womens Research and Education Center, Personal Interview, Colombo, Sri Lanka 2011.

threatened by women, and often restrict their mobility – society is changing there are more women than men" (CS 23)

Ex-cadres

The treatment of ex-cadres is a subject of some debate amongst those entrenched in the community, and the actual perceptions and feelings of the community may not be discernible until well into the future. However, in the period from 2005-2010, ex-LTTE female cadres began re-entering society to a mixed reaction (in large numbers from 2008-2010).

Perhaps tellingly, those who came out closer to the end of the conflict (2009) were seen as being "stupid" (CS 6), as opposed to earlier when they may have been heroes. Though they were pitied to some degree, they brought shame, and suspicion on their families and entire villages, so were often afraid to go home after they were released (if they were released) from detention. (Crisis Group Report 2011). However, in more recent interviews (2011) as nostalgia for the LTTE supersedes the abuses of the final days of war, some local community workers feel that the ex-cadres are beginning to be looked upon as having some dignity, for *"at least having fought for the rights the Tamils are still being denied"* (CS 6). While the stigma may be negative or positive dependent on the context, it remains a stigma and female ex-cadre remained outside the mainstream of Tamil society. It continues to be difficult for them to marry, and re-integrate into post-war society and re-entrenched conservative gender norms (Trawick 2007).

Rape Victims

The earlier source noted that ex-cadres in 2010 and 2011 are beginning to be treated with some dignity, with one important caveat. *"Except, of course, if they were raped"* he says. This attitude is reflective of established conservative norms in Tamil society discussed earlier, perhaps resurfacing in an even more extreme form. The expectation that a larger segment of the population being victimized by gender-based violence might shift perceptions and soften the social cushion is thwarted by signs that point instead towards a re-entrenchment of conservative values in the face of massive social upheaval.

VIII. Gender-Based Violence and Political Identity

Because of access issues, the disruptive nature of conflict, and the complexity of the subject itself, it would be very difficult to conclusively prove that experiences with gender-based violence lead directly to participation in armed rebel movements. However the dimensions to gender-based violence discussed here (how they are experienced by individual woman, and treated by the community as a collective), allows us to better understand the role of gender-based violence in women's participation in new forms of activism. Outside of the emotional pain and physical trauma, the act of gender-based violence has an indelible impact on the political identity of Tamil women.

Historically, scholars have noted that the LTTE was seen by some women as a form of protection against gender-based violence primarily from the state, but also from within their own families (Alison 2004; Trawick 2007). As this became a clear motivating factor for some women cadre, the LTTE also incorporated gender-based violence as a new angle in its

recruitment methods, highlighting gender based forms of state repression, and offering avenues

for revenge (Bloom 2005; Crisis Group Report 2011). Some feminist scholarship criticizes this

strategy, labeling Prabaharan the "midwife of women's agency", and decrying the LTTE practice

of turning the pain of a victim into militancy. (Chenoy 2002).

Understandings of Gender-based Violence

In my own conversations with former fighters (from 2000-2005), the subject of gender-based

violence at the hands of state forces would come up occasionally (not pointedly the purpose of

the interview as with later data sets), and it became clear that both the perceived and real threat

of gender-based violence, if not direct experiences with it, played a role in the decision to join, or

rationale for remaining in the movement once recruited. (Interviews 2000-2005, ICG). *"I knew*

of women who had these 'incidents', and I thought in the LTTE I would be safe from these types

of things" , said "Thava". "Yalini" chose not to discuss her experience with sexual assault with

the IPKF, but didn't feel it was revenge she sought in her decision to join the movement. *"I*

would like for that other women would not have to have the same experience as me."

In more in-depth conversations on the subject with women who had experienced various forms

of gender-based violence, largely non-fighters, their perceptions of the act delved further into the

pervasive fear and interpretation of these acts. *"Since the war, sexual violence was always a fear,*

but towards the end it became something that you almost knew would happen. I think by the time

it happened to me, I expected it", one respondent said. Follow-up questions to those who didn't

resist the act revealed that several of the women referenced the physical strength of men over

women, in an explanation of why they couldn't resist while others felt that even if they had

140

shouted, nobody would be willing to take the risks necessary to help them. "Asha"'s remark was powerful in its reflection of the lived experience of the individual and the aftermath of the act. *"The incident itself was a short amount of time. Maybe not more than 10 minutes. But it changes everything, for the rest of your life."*

While the overwhelming response from women was a desire to return to a "normal" life, and forget the incident happened, what "normal" meant had already been slightly altered. Several of the women expressed an anger and a deep sense of injustice in both the impunity offered to perpetrators and the reception from their own communities. As a part of this anger, they began to discuss their opinion of the state, and the LTTE more often than not expressing a new support for the cause, even in cases where they had no interest in joining. Two women inquired about work in a woman's organization where they might be able to help other survivors of these incidents. One, "Jeyanthi" was interested in my own work, curious as to how she might pursue an education in political science to better understand the politics that had ravaged the island and her body. *"I would like to know what happens in other countries. How women are treated, and how we can change things here."*

My research along with existing scholarship highlight three key aspects of these women's experiences with gender-based violence that made violent political participation possible and can be found thematically across the data set from 2005-2010. The contextual vulnerability of high militarization (including triumphalist sentiments), low levels of protection, and lack of resources for women significantly increased the likelihood of gender-based violence from state forces. The second aspect is the manner in which the act is processed, understood by the woman herself, and

the broader community. The third is the impact of complete loss of agency or control in the experience and subsequent labels. A combination of these three factors both increase the likelihood of the occurrence of gender-based violence, as well as shape the political identity of women in such a way as to make reciprocal political violence a viable option.

Contextual Vulnerability

All of the women in this data set had experiences of gender-based violence within a particular context. High levels of militarization increased the daily interaction between the population of civilian women and the military as well as led to high levels of surveillance and monitoring – increasing the opportunity for acts of gender-based violence to occur.

Triumphalism, and male chauvinism in the ideology of the Sinhala state increased the opportunity for gender-based violence to occur with relative impunity. Acts of gender-based violence that occurred in displacement camps, checkpoints, detention centers, and resettled villages , from 2005-2010 fall under the direct purview and authority of the state. The state failed to provide the protection necessary to vulnerable populations (women-headed households) or allow outside groups (UN, INGOs) to get involved in this type of protection (Crisis Group Report 2012). This allowed acts of gender-based violence to occur from both state forces as well as within the Tamil community itself.

Tamil women living under areas of militarization and dual militarization had very little power over their own lives at both a micro and macro level. This created a context in which acts of gender-based violence met very little resistance from the woman herself, or her community

(Thirinigama 1990) – even in the few cases where she is willing to report such incidents. The ruling administration from 2005-2010 is unconcerned with "gender-sensitive" development programming, and has not provided avenues for women to report such acts, not to even get the appropriate medical attention. As such, there is very little incentive for a Tamil woman to report the act of gender-based violence, and several reasons to keep it hidden to avoid the inevitable harsh social stigma.

Social Stigma

Once the act of gender-based violence occurs, regardless of the form it takes, or the perpetrator, it is hidden as quickly as possible. Young girls may often only tell their mothers, who hide it from their own fathers for fear of censure within the family itself (Theva, Vavuniya, 2011). Those that are pregnant are tucked away in church homes or relatives houses until the child is born, and they are able to lose the weight.[124]

For those whom the act is made public, willingly or otherwise, they are labeled. The power of labels in Tamil society cannot be understated, as they will dictate everything from the way a woman is treated at temple to her chances for marriage in the future. Among the labels operating in this time period ('widow', 'ex-cadres', 'rape victim'), the treatment of rape victims is the worst –and perhaps in recent times, worse than earlier noted by feminist scholars.

These scholars highlight the dual or "double" nature of vulnerability – pointing to the existence of multiple identities that have negative associations in Tamil society, or a pain experiences in

---

[124] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

two social realms. The reality for the women interviewed in this study was that their identities were shaped by the intersection of several events and processes which they had only partial control of, if at all. (Crenshaw 1991). Socially, several of the young women interviewed were 'young widows', 'ex cadres' and 'rape victims' – though all felt the social stigma associated with the latter was by far the hardest to overcome. *"This one, this label, will last with me forever"*, says one woman of being raped.[125] The impact of the label must be understood in the treatment by all of social actors they engaged with. Their husbands, their families, their village, NGOs, religious institutions, the state. Each of these actors or institutions would create a unique experience for a woman in Tamil society, which would contribute to multiple, overlapping, forms of trauma intersecting with their own inner struggle to process their pain without adequate resources. A closer look at their experiences and position in relation to their communities and the state exposes, reveals that Tamil women are processing traumatic events in an environment in an environment of continual, and constantly shifting, forms of repression.

Those who do not attempt to claim their own stories to themselves, their families, or their communities, are often consumed by the internalized trauma. Trauma being itself defined as some "by the subjects inability to respond adequately to it" (Henry 2011, 102). The devastating impact on the mental health of women victims of gender-based violence further ostracizes those who are not provided even minimal resources, and cannot cope within the boundaries established social behavioral codes. These women earn the added title of being 'unfit' 'unstable' or 'unwell'.[126]

---

[125] "Jeya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.
[126] Please see Chapter 2 for a discussion of women's mental health concerns.

Restricted Agency

Given both the context in which gender-based violence occurs, as well as the social space these women must then enter into, the act of gender-based violence becomes a definitive moment in women's lives. It will permanently place them outside the mainstream of society and leave physical and mental scars not likely to heal in the absence of a strong women's movement or resources provided by the state (Thirinigama 1990).

.

This break from the normal trajectory or their expected or desired life path, is where we see the possibility for women's engagement in new forms of activism, violent or otherwise (Darshan). Whereas the "good Tamil woman" would not consider becoming an activist, challenging social norms or a repressive state, victims of gender-based violence already living on the margins of society have much less to lose. As one civil society member put it, *" This act (gender-based violence) has damaged them for life. Her dignity is gone. If there is another movement she will be at the forefront to sign up"* (CS 6).

This same logic emerging in 2011, is something scholars have pointed to in the past. That is, the position these women are placed in will directly impact the initial recruitment of women into violent political movements like the LTTE, creating willing, and likely, recruits. (Thirinigama1990) In the LTTE, women experienced a form of restricted agency. While not given an autonomous space for mobilization, most women report feeling a sense of security and some commitment to engagement on women's issues, even if only in a manner supported the overall nationalist project.[127]

---

[127] There is a longer discussion of women's restricted agency in the LTTE in Chapter 5.

Though often seen primarily through the lens of its impact on the emotional state of a woman, historically, it has clearly had some tie to the formation and understanding of their political identities. Past scholarship and documentation, as well as interviews with former and current fighters, has shown that the perceived fear of (if not actual experience with) gender-based violence is a form of state repression which is culturally disrupting enough to push women towards different activities. While some feel that these women are simply traumatized and irrational when making the decision to join a political movement, the reality is often much more complicated. Unable to adequately process these acts, the challenge for most becomes a desire to maintain functionality. The departure from an acceptable cultural being, instigates the search for new forms of functionality, activity, and purpose.

This new lifestyle has not been easily accessible within the boundaries of "normal society", despite nominal positions and targeted INGO programming. With higher numbers of women in Tamil society, post conflict, women are being placed in central roles, defined for them by other actors. While INGOs are focusing on the needs of women, the government Presidential Task Force places no importance on this aspect of programming in providing approval to work in conflict zones (CS 6). Government bureaucrats have also hand-picked women candidates to hold small political offices (14 women in Jaffna), primarily for the reason that they are easier to control. Even women's superficial elevation has created a threat for Tamil men, that they are "coming up" and finishing higher education at a higher rate than men , which as then been linked to increased domestic violence to *"keep them in their place"* (CS 23). The "midwife of agency"

(De Mel 2007) for women may no longer be the LTTE, but has easily transitioned into the hands of international and government actors.

Despite the minimal space afforded by donor dollars and political titles, these women continue to operate in spaces of highly restricted agency, unable to fully formulate autonomous movements, or engage in issues affecting women. In the absence of a genuine women's movement operating at either a grassroots or national level, the impact of gender-based violence on the political identities of women then becomes increasingly available to be engaged in other forms of political engagement militancy being central among them. The women interviewed have expressed interest in new forms of social and political engagement, intellectually in the study of politics, and professionally in the pursuit of work in social work or women's organizations. There remains a sense of mental unease however, of despondency, and ostracization for women who have experienced forms of gender-based violence making mainstream options seem less viable. As with those who joined the LTTE over a decade ago, these women may now be likely recruits to more violent, less mainstream forms of political activism.

Chapter 5: Gender and Agency

As mentioned earlier in this study, definitions of agency have been contested by a number of scholars in the social sciences and philosophy. This study relies on an understanding of agency put forth by Laura Ahearn, proposes that "Agency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act", a definition applicable to all humans which avoids "over-generalizing notions that are actually culturally or linguistically specific". Applying this definition specifically to women (though acknowledging it seeks to understand all forms of human action), this study aims to understand the multiple meanings *of* agency in a particular context and *to* an individual rather than a static understanding of agency often studied only in its representation as an oppositional force. (Mahmood 2005 in Ahearn 2001). This approach allows for the analysis to include the interaction between social structures and influences on the "free will" of human beings.

I. Gender and Nationalism

Much of the discussion of gender and agency in the context of resistance struggles initially emerges within discussions on the role of gender in anti-colonial struggles, again viewing agency as relevant when it emerges in an oppositional context. Partha Chatterjee's work is often the reference point for this scholarship, in his examination of the Bengali nationalist project. Chatterjee finds that the nationalist project actually reversed earlier advances in women's liberation, and posited them in the "inner domain of national culture", re-discovering tradition to stave off western modernization. (Chatterjee 1997, 117).

In less elitist forms of movement-building against institutions of colonialism, girls and women were often recruited for support, an act that in itself often mistakenly viewed as "liberatory". Women's direct involvement in these struggles was minimal, in some cases their "presence was tolerated only in so far as they were confined to feminine tasks" (Schneider 2003, 3). These studies highlight the need for a formal recognition for informal participation (Schneider 2003, Djebar 1992), but also begin to provide a theoretical backdrop for situating gender within the construction of the nation in a post-colonial setting. Nationalism itself was then seen as being inherently anti-feminist, "from a feminist perspective nationalism- to be precise, the nation- cannot be seen as providing enabling community". (Ismail 1992, 218).

A second set of literature looks at the place of gender within reformist or ethnic nationalist movements. These two distinct forms of social movements do share some commonalities, such as the difficulty some scholars see in envisioning the nationalism of state-making or the militarism of revolutionary struggles as conceivable "in the absence of masculinist ideologies and their commitment to gender hierarchy" (Peterson 1996, 877). Among these "masculinist ideologies" is militarization, discussed earlier in this study as impacting both state and non-state military campaigns. The first set also establishes a starting point for the process versus outcome debate, which questions whether women's interests must always be subsumed under the broader national interest (whether through state or anti-systemic guerilla movements) (Tambiah 1996, Ray & Kortweg 1999). However in most anti-colonial struggles the minimal direct involvement of women often left this dichotomy unchallenged.

The more complex interaction between gender and nationalism came in the form of women's integration into ethnic nationalist separatist movements like the LTTE, which sought to protect a national identity entrenched in cultural gender norms, while at the same time drawing on feminist "liberation" ideologies to attract female cadres. (ICG Report). Gender has been understood in this scholarship as among the "least likely to produce collective mobilization" – only relevant to collective action when tied to other cleavages- such as class or ethnicity (Racioppi and O Sullivan, Smith 1997, 23).

The Gendered Tamil Nation

The agency of women within the nationalist context in Sri Lanka can be centered around two major debates in gender and nationalism studies. The first is a version of the "process vs. outcome" debate, which when applied to the context of the LTTE is complicated by the high levels of female participation in all levels of the movement. The second is how the roles and symbols assigned to women in the LTTE situate them within an overarching "Victim" vs "Agent" paradigm (De Mel 2001).

The "process" of any nationalist project includes the recruitment practices, the overarching ideology and symbolism, and the lived experience of individual female fighters within the movement. The gendered tensions begin at the broadest level of analysis, where scholars find that the nationalist project of the LTTE was always masculine, while the defended nation was symbolically feminine (Tambiah 2005; De Mel 2001,212; Ismail 1992; Anthias & Yural-Davis 1989). This was not something unique to the LTTE, but rather paralleled other nationalist struggles in India, Algeria, and South Africa (Ray Kortweg 1999; Das 2007). This analysis on

the "gendering of the nationalist discourse" (De Mel 2001, 215), provides the theoretical backdrop against which the female cadre is considered. While various scholars attribute different levels of consciousness to the LTTE in doing so, most feel that Tamil cultural norms casting the woman as a nurturer made "the collapsing of mother-warrior an easy elision" (De Mel 2001, 215). In this role it is "natural" for women to be seen symbolically as "giving birth" to a new (masculine) nation (De Mel 2001; Thirinigama 1990, Ismail 1992). Nationalism, among other ideologies, also lends itself to the entrenchment of conservative gender norms in its bid to protect a static notion of cultural identity – overlapping women's position often caste as protectors of the "inner and sovereign cultural space of the emerging nation" (Chatterjee 1996). Similar to struggles in Bengal, the LTTE also "used women as cultural representatives and constructed them in relation to western domination" (Jayawardena and Di Alwis 1996).

Most scholars who explore the ties between gendered cultural roles and the inherent gendering of the nationalist discourse, felt that the LTTE consciously exploited these ties. The most visible and accessible evidence of this were photographs of women armed with both a gun and a baby – used in revolutionary movements across the world (De Mel 2001, 215). The LTTE public discourse and recruitment strategy also reinforced the belief that women were drawn into the movement for instrumental purposes, rather than a genuine commitment to a holistic social revolution including the re-examination of gender roles. Young women, like "Swarna", an ex-cadre recently interviewed by a journalist, recall receiving a hastily published leaflet "Women and the Revolution" in 1983. "A woman should learn to defend herself, it said. A woman is the embodiment of Tamil culture, it insisted" (Caravan 2012). In public speeches, traditionally given on International Women's Day, the leader of the LTTE Vellupillai Prabaharan would often speak

of the need to eliminate male chauvinism evident in the dowry system, caste system, and concerns of domestic violence. " A fundamental change in the ideological, or rather, the mental world of men about their perception of women" is necessary, he has stated. (Schalk 1994, 167). How genuinely these sentiments informed the vision for a separate homeland, rather than act purely as a recruitment device, has often come into question when these statements are placed against other public LTTE documents.

One contradictory public statement in particular, that has received significant attention is the LTTE handbill *"Let Us Preserve the Cultural Identity of Tamil Women"*. Through this document, which was posted on walls across the North and East (often by female cadres), the LTTE outlines appropriate means of dress and behavior for Tamil women. This document conveyed the LTTE's strategy of associating modernization with the west and the oppressive Singhalese state, attempting to destroy traditional Tamil culture. LTTE cadres posting these signs, once questioned, would often answer *"What else are we fighting for if not to defend Tamil culture – you should be sure to wear long skirts!"*.[128] This obvious tension has piqued the scholastic interest of feminists around the world, most of whom critique the LTTE stance mentioned earlier, that ""The ideal of women's liberation is the fervent child that had its genesis in the matrix of our national liberation movement". (V.Prabaharan March 8, 1996). While not officially co-opting the struggle of women, these statements indicate that , indeed, the "women's question" will be answered through or within the nationalist project (De Mel 2001; Tambiah 2005; Ismail 1992; Laboa, 1998; Dejebar, 1992; Coomeraswamy, 1988; Schalk, 1994).

---

[128] "Gaya", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

While acknowledging that female cadres may have had "agentive moments" within a patriarchal movement and a male nationalist project (De Mel), most scholarship from the outside finds that women had little autonomy within a movement that lacked a genuine commitment to "women's rights". More recent scholarship has questioned the value of a binary (agent vs. victim) which can oversimplify the "multiple locations of women in the context of war" (De Alwis & Hydman 2003, 222).

Scholarship and analyses based on closer ties to women within the movement, challenges the feminist critique of the LTTE by highlighting the progressive steps towards addressing women's issues taken by the movement itself. Political advisors to the LTTE, like Adele Ann Balasingham find that the outside criticisms "aim to deny women, as an integral part of the oppressed, the right to defend themselves against the threat to their survival" (Balasingham 2001, 279). Balasingham, along with others, through embedded experiences or extensive field research within the LTTE, find that women found new forms of empowerment, equality, and security by the roles and responsibilities they were given[129] and the social policies of the LTTE (Trawick 2007; Balasingham 2001).

In the case of the LTTE, the "outcome" of recruitment strategies and commitments to gender equality is harder to discern than in cases such as Eritrea (Bernal 2000), as the end of the war saw the complete destruction of the movement. However, during the period where the LTTE did in fact control territory – some visible shifts and contradictions provide a basis for analysis as to how well the movement lived up to their proposed societal shifts, particularly regarding the daily

---

[129] See Chapter 2 on the roles of women in the LTTE.

lives of women. Within Tiger-controlled areas, rape and other sexual violence, prostitution,

pornography, domestic violence and abuse of alcohol were prohibited, as were all sexual

relations outside marriage (Tambiah 2005, 248). The LTTE was also credited with eliminating

both the caste and the dowry system (Mampilly 2011). These changes, while creating positive

shifts in the lived experiences of women living under LTTE control and within the movement,

were temporary and criticized as having been accomplished through the patriarchal "midwife"

(De Mel 2001) of women's agency rather than by an autonomous women's movement

(Mampilly 2011, 228).

II. Re-Examining Agency in the LTTE

As discussed earlier in the methodology, the arguments put forth in this study attempt to avoid

major concerns in the existing scholarship around female fighters, and their agency within a

nationalist movement. Existing studies are useful in situating Tamil women within broader

tensions in our perception of third world women, and providing an analysis of gendered

interactions and politics within the LTTE. The approach in this study allows for the female

fighter herself to define understandings of her role, shifting self-perceptions, and identity

formation coupled with an academic analysis that does not insert a politicized agenda.

The objects of analyses within existing studies are often the female fighter herself and the

surrounding society. With regard to the former, feminist analyses of how the female fighter is

constructed within her society and the movement comes from outside of the movement, allowing

feminist (in some cases western feminist) imperatives to guide the analysis. The "outside"

analysis may be within the country itself, but in a starkly different context and culture based in

the capital city of Colombo, or from outside of the region itself with little to no exposure to the conflict or the population living within it. These analyses rarely rely on in-depth interviews with female fighters themselves, imposing concerns that may have less relevance than they are assumed to have. (De Mel 2001; Schalk 1994) Those that have a more "insider" approach to the position, motivations, and challenges facing women within a social movement (coming from women deeply embedded in the movement itself) are likely to be politically biased in favor of a particular political agenda (Balasingham 2001), or rooted in personal experiences of trauma (Thirinigama 1990).

On the latter, the society surrounding combatants, these studies rely on assumptions of society and cultural norms as relatively static and uniformly applied across time and space – with some variation allowed for peacetime ("normal") versus conflict. Within the conflict zones of the North and East that were alternately under the control of state and non-state actors, these norms are often suspended, re-framed, or ignored all together. The concern with the approach taken by existing scholarship is that it threatens to not only overlook forms of agency and perspectives derived from within a fluid context, but also further undermines possibilities for women's agency in those cases where academic discourses inform policy formulations (Weber 2011).

These discourses also occur within the broader framework of a debate between competing feminisms. From those embedded within the LTTE or scholars within Sri Lanka, western feminist ideals are rejected as being irrelevant, or inapplicable in the context of Tamil women (Tambiah 2005) while some feel that Tamil women themselves saw the call to arms as their version of liberatory feminism (Balasingham 2001). Local activists and academics also cringe at

155

the analyses coming from the "outside", preferring to rely on scholarship by local academics to understand the positioning of Tamil women[130]. However, local scholars themselves often operate within paradigms of western feminism based on their class and educational background. While most scholars now situated within the "3rd wave of feminism" , remain very conscious of cultural differentiations and localized interpretations of feminism, some who look at the LTTE still decry the "martial feminism" that emerged within and around the LTTE (Schalk 1994,165).

Within the complex dynamics of existing theory, the only way to truly understand the agency of women in the LTTE would be to apply the useful rigor and objectivity of academic research to extended periods of field research, focusing primarily on in-depth interviews with the women themselves and an gaining an experiential understanding of the relatively unexplored temporary social structures erected within conflict zones. This study draws on those existing studies that have followed a similar approach, though in different disciplines and different case studies (Viterna 2006, Trawick 2007).

The Collective Level: Tamil Society

As discussed earlier, this study relies on a definition of agency that finds the capacity to act to be mediated by socio-cultural forces. The analysis must therefore be focused independently on Tamil society as a collective, the female fighter as an individual, and the interaction between the two, a space where insights on gender and nationalism emerge.

---

[130] Dr. Selvi, Womens Research and Education Center, Personal Interview, Colombo, Sri Lanka 2011.

Existing scholarship has highlighted the role of Tamil society in situating women within the nationalist project (De Mel 2001; Ismail 2000; Thirinigama 1990; De Alwis 2002). The basic tenets of Tamil society are analyzed both independently and as they lent themselves, or were drawn out, by nationalist movements like the LTTE. In order to identify forms of both oppositional and non-oppositional agency exercised by women, it is important to understand how extreme contextual factors such as militarization and displacement impacted the persistence of certain societal expectations and norms for women, and suspension of others. At the collective level during the time period of this study (2000-2010), Tamil society itself was continually adapting to processes that re-shaped the space for women's agency. The ways in which the context that would drive women's choices shifted the "socio-cultural" backdrop was explored through a series of interviews with both internally displaced people, civilian women, aid workers, and academics on the island.

Shifts in Tamil society were caused by external forces (such as the state) and social movements internal to the community, such as the LTTE[131]. The events, policies, and practices of each created different types of movement in the hierarchy of Tamil cultural values- some fleeting, some more permanent, and some whose impact will only be truly discernible in years to come. Within these shifting value systems, gender and the role of women in particular was also fluid, and difficult to recognize without understanding the ways in which the cultural and political space around them was molded.

---

[131] Other social movements did emerge within Tamil society, including rival nationalist movements, however this study looks primarily at the role of the LTTE.

State repression, often understood through the "contextual pressures" placed on women (Cunningham 2003), has been understood in this study as one primary form of direct repression (gender-based violence) impacting individual women coupled with and acting within indirect processes of militarization and displacement that operate at a collective level. The physical presence of state militarization from 2000 – 2010 discussed earlier placed women in an extraordinarily vulnerable position , with armed men permeating every aspect of every Tamil woman's daily experience. Gender norms in the community evolved to take into account the extreme pressure applied by this type of military presence. Education, and an emphasis on education above all other pursuits, has traditionally been the lynchpin for both boys and girls in Tamil society. In response to high levels of militarization- education, its availability and significance, was challenged, creating two distinct responses within Tamil society.

Girls, in particular, were wary of crossing through checkpoints to get to school and even walking a short distance was precarious for the safety of a young girl. Several families kept their young girls home from school, disrupting their education and success rates on standardized exams. Throughout the conflict this trend has been noted by local NGO's and educational experts alike. [132]One response to this was a heightened emphasis on the value of education in Tamil society, as it became seen as the only way out of an intractable war, and the only available opportunity for young women to leave insecure physical spaces in their villages across the North and East. As Zachariah Mampilly notes, from extensive field research, "Sri Lankan Tamils place a superlative emphasis on education as a means for social uplift" (Mampilly 2011, 121) Spending time with young girls in 2003 and 2004, several woke up at 4am to study for exams, taking breaks in the

---

[132] Dr. Ethirveerasignam, Personal Interview, June 2011: Colombo: Sri Lanka.

morning and evening only to eat meals. As one young girl recounted *"I only want to study. That is the only way that things can be better for us in Sri Lanka, if we are educated to help our people".*[133]

The opposite response, in both boys and girls – though more in young men – was a sense of futility in educational pursuits. In a highly militarized context, physical strength was the means of communication and resistance, undermining the relevance of academics, particularly since university admissions had historically been biased against Tamil students. The relevance of traditional roles as peaceful and nurturing beings were shifted within this response, where young women lost interest in their studies and sought out more immediate and physical means of security.

Conservative trends in Tamil society were again heightened as the insecurity facing women outside the home, led to increased protection from fathers and brothers, and limited mobility (and freedom) for women. The public/private dichotomy discussed in Chapter two, highlighted by existing scholarship, became increasing delineated as a militarized reality reinforced cultural norms. (Thirinigama 1990). The insecure environment for women also reinforced for conservative cultural forces the need for Tamil women to dress modestly, carry themselves in a humble manner so as not to attract "unwanted attention". [134]

---

[133] "Priya",Sister of LTTE fighter, Personal Interview, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. (July 2003).
[134] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

Periods of sustained displacement throughout the conflict, and specifically from 2000-2010 also made an impact on Tamil society in ways that were more permanent than one would expect. Men were often suspect and taken to separate camps (Interviews, 2010) or responsible for finding a means of temporary income, their physical absence forcing women into the symbolic role of nurturer she had previously occupied in Tamil culture. Women would be responsible for protecting their children in the process of displacement, obtaining supplies for them in the camps, and finding ways to address medical needs. The modesty of Tamil women was not considered in the planning of camp structures by INGOs or military forces, as the physical space allotted rarely allowed for any privacy. *"We cannot do anything in private, even breastfeeding. There will be a male relative or army watching everything."* (Interviews, 2010).

The context established by both militarization and displacement by the state both re-enforced a concept of the physical weakness of women, as well as the vulnerability of women, which played into the more conservative threads of Tamil culture. Both led to increased levels of gender-based violence from 2000-2010, experiences shaped the forms of agency adopted by women living in these areas.

As discussed in Chapter 3, the LTTE adopted a counter-militarization process, emerging from within Tamil society itself, complicating the response to state repression and its impact on Tamil society. Scholars of nationalism often assume that the leadership of the movement, the community, and the members of the movement act as a cohesive unit, unified under a particular nationalist cause [135]. An extreme opposite viewpoint argues that rational choices are made by

---

[135] "Finally (the nation" is imagine as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that

individual social actors based on a particular set of incentives (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Bates, 1983) . While focusing on the individual, this study privileges contextual factors which shape political identities and recognizes that inherent tensions that exist between the movement and the community it emerges from within.

Existing scholarship presents two understandings of the capacity of social movements like the LTTE to improve the status of women in society. The first supports the expectation that the inclusion of women in a social movement will elevate the states of women in society (Robnett 1996; Rajasingham 2001; Fanon 1965). The second de-constructs this expectation, finding that the structurally subordinate position of women in society will lead to gender inequity within a national liberation movement (Laboa 1998; Djebar 1992; Coomeraswamy 1988; Schalk 1994).

The reality, within the LTTE in particular, is situated somewhere in between these two camps. As with most aspects of the LTTE as a social movement, there were aspects to their overall ideology that were practical, heavily rooted in reality – and aspects that were emphasized or exaggerated for instrumental purposes (ie, mobilizing popular support for the cause). The counter-militarization process of the LTTE in itself created increased vulnerabilities for women, however was justified and grounded in a rhetoric intended to improve the security of women in relation to the state, and the status of women in Tamil society. Although violent movements are often understood to be an overall departure from the dominant cultural norm, movements like the LTTE, are in fact "shaped by their inclusion and modification of aspects of the dominant

---

may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginings" (Anderson, 1991:5)

culture" (Johnston 1995, 6).While rejecting the vulnerability and weakness associated with women, that was entrenched in the overarching context of a repressive state, the LTTE selectively drew on gendered elements to Tamil culture that might lend themselves to the construction of a national identity, and a stronger fighting force.

The LTTE articulated a vision of liberation for women that may have been temporary and disconnected to its practice[136], but did in fact shift aspects of Tamil society, either through immediate legal and policy codes or through the extended interaction of women in the movement with Tamil society (Trawick 2007). This relationship is clearer in areas directly under LTTE control, versus those with some ties to the movement, mostly subject only to their informal influence. (Mampilly 2011). In those areas directly under LTTE control, the rules to protect women mentioned earlier were puritanical and severely punishable. The ban on alcoholism, domestic violence, sexual violence, prostitution, and pornography led several women in the post-LTTE era to look back euphorically *"We women had it good under the LTTE"* (Crisis Group Report 2011). Civilians living in areas that were under "mixed control" experienced a sustained exposure to the policies and information campaign, and often had a personal connection to cadres in the movement. In these areas, slower shifts in Tamil society could be noticed. Central among these changes were shifts to marriage, dowry, and the caste system.

The most visible distinction was in the physical appearance of women. Women who joined the LTTE had to cut their hair, if not shave their heads and dress in typical army fatigues. In a rare

---

[136] This disconnect is understood at the level of the individual fighter in a later section of this chapter.

interview to a soldier, after the end of the war, one soldier recounts it was the part of training she hated the most.

"After a 10-day training at the Sinuthai Pulligal facility, all 20 girls of her batch were asked to form a line under the harsh sun. One by one, their heads were shaved. Symbolically, they were being sheared of their femininity, lest it cripple their readiness for war. Practically it did what easily identifiable smocks in rehab facilities do: it prevented recruits, especially minors, from escaping back to their normal lives."

(Caravan 2012)

Feminist scholars have pounced on the symbolism as interpreted here, as a process of masculinization that denies any space for the female agent to exist. Some female fighters interviewed found it to be a refreshing departure from socially expected norms of long, plaited hair – while on the reverse side short hair later became a slowly growing obstacle to their re-integration into society. Nuns in charge of rehabilitation centers for ex-cadres would often comment dismissively when questioned on the welfare of former combatants, *"They'll be fine, once their hair grows back"*. [137]Others dismissed symbolism at all, saying it was simply practical – long hair would get caught around the barrel of a gun. (Interviews, 2007). Perhaps it was the distinction in physical appearance, or the confidence through training, but female combatants were often treated, and seen differently by men. A well known male Tamil journalist and academic colleague once commented on a run-in with female combatants "They were both dressed and coifed identically. Short and Spartan hair, baseball caps, green shirts buttoned to the

---

[137] Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.

neck, wide black bets, black pants, thick shoes. They looked tough. They neither smiled nor waved and seemed as if they had been through it." (Sivaram, p.151). During times when the movement was popular and strong, young girls looked admiringly at these women, envious and re-examining the strict cultural codes that defined their own appearances.

Marriage, its importance and purpose, shifted under LTTE rule in the North and East. The LTTE initially banned marriage within the movement, later changing the policy but insisting that internal marriages include a vow, *"Even though we are married, we will place our nation, our Tamil soil, our Tamil people above each other"* (Caravan Article, 2012). Even though the leader himself was married, for female cadres marriage was seen as a distraction[138]. In one of the clearer overlaps between society and the movement, women who left the LTTE often had trouble marrying, seen as "too independent" in Tamil society more generally. Marriage remained a significant moment in the life of Tamil women, though the picture of marriage shifted under the LTTE.

Among their social policies, the dowry system was banned along with the caste system (which was harder to dismantle), often making it easier for women to marry. Persistent throughout the conflict was the perception of married women as auspicious and valuable than unmarried women or widowed women (Rajinisingham-Senanyake 2001) in Tamil society. Marriage, under both state militarization, and counter-militarization by the LTTE, outside of its cultural value was seen as a measure of protection for young girls from both security forces and recruitment into the movement. The practical value of marriage led to a significant number of early marriages

---

[138] In a recent article detailing the life of one female fighter, her request to be a suicide bomber was denied with the snide remark "Who asked you to get married?", the unit leader said, "And then have children also?"

between youth as young as 13 and 14, often leading to young women being "deserted" or "widowed" in their early 20s (CS6, CS10).

Research conducted in Batticaloa and Trincomalee (areas of "mixed control") in both periods of both GOSL and LTTE control, revealed that these communities had become increasingly conservative in their approach to women. Subject to intermittent forms of "dual militarization", the vulnerability of these women led to families often marrying them young, keeping them in the home, and monitoring their activities(CS 8). One young woman in the Batticaloa district wistfully commented on my own life in the United States *"If we were not living here, we would have the freedom to do what we liked – like you do in America".* [139]Singhalese culture was often conflated with the dangerous influence of the west, more "modern" values for women that were inherently destructive to the constructed norm of Tamil women.

While scholars on gender and nationalism have often drawn on the "traditional" Tamil culture in their analysis of this complex relationship, it is clear that at the collective level, the relevance of conservative cultural norms have been both emergent and receding in response to the pressures exerted by forces of state repression and the counter militarization of a nationalist movement. Context, and the immediate lived concerns of women then, has consistently affected the place of women in Tamil society, both symbolically and practically. It is against this ever-evolving landscape of women's position that the forms of agency exercised by individual women can be best understood.

---

[139] "Vasanthi", age17 student and participant in VISIONS program, Personal Interview, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka August 2004.

Individual Level: The Tamil Woman

Returning to Ahearn's understanding of agency, at the level of the individual, she emphasizes the need to understand forms of agency outside of oppositional agency. Scholars have challenged the notion of "I resist, therefore I am", in its oversimplified implication that third world women must continually define themselves in forms of opposition to repression that are easily identifiable from the outside (Mohanty 1991). The context established earlier created the space and the opportunity for new forms of women's agency to emerge at the level of the individual woman. The interaction between this specific fluid cultural "structure" and the individual female "agent" is the space in which new theories of gender and nationalism exist. Within open-ended conversations with civil society workers, civilians, and non-fighters conversations about Tamil culture and its connection to individual action inform the following section.

The individual woman's capacity to act in the North and East of Sri Lanka has been determined by the context of militarization and displacement, shifting cultural norms placed upon her, and individual experiences with targeted violence (in particular, gender-based violence). Most of the women interviewed in this study were exposed to both direct and indirect forms of state repression(displacement, militarization, and gender-based violence), yet found themselves most constrained by Tamil cultural norms that framed their ability and capacity to act. The view from the outside would see little space for women to act or exercise free will in any capacity, yet enough examples of action give us some insight into the women as agentive actors. Non-oppositional forms of agency amongst Tamil women should be understood within the suggestion of Andrew Pickering "within different cultures, human beings and the material world might

166

exhibit capacities for action quite different from those we customarily attribute to them"

(Pickering 1995, 245 in Ahearn 2001).

Non-Oppositional Agency

Amongst one group of refugee women in a Northern displacement camp in 2010 in government

control, several women described actions they took to protect the conservative cultural values

they felt served their own self-interest, and they willingly acted within. Sheets were erected by

women within tent structures, to protect the modesty of women in the family. Women sought out

the protection of a man in a neighboring tent when walking to fetch water. With the clothes they

had been given, they themselves emphasized the need for modesty in dress for their own safety,

and vehemently protested if garments were handed out in the wrong size (too tight fitting) by aid

workers. In this space they spoke adamantly *"Of course it is our duty to protect and nurture our*

children, it is what we have left that gives our lives meaning."[140] For some it was instinct, and

required they speak up, argue, or plead with camp officials to get the smallest rations for their

children – perhaps challenging their previous traditional roles, but , in their eyes, they were

upholding them. For others (undercover ex-fighters) it was instrumental *"After close to 15 years,*

she began wearing skirts instead of trousers. She always kept her children close. She knew it was

their cute faces that kept her beyond suspicion" (Caravan 2012).

As the public space become increasingly shadowed with men, guns, and militarization by both

the state and the LTTE, women were increasingly placed in a vulnerable position. The largest

shift for women under contextually-heightened conservatism was their freedom of movement.

Within this context, several young women lamented their inability to attend tuition classes, but

---

[140] "Lochana", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK

felt safer indoors under the protection of fathers and brothers. The entrenched militarization created the perception that the context was anything but temporary, and desperate to obtain the highest marks possible, these young women asked school teachers, wardens, and parents to bring private tutors into homes and churches – safe spaces for women . *"We are frustrated at the inability to attend our tuition classes, we are hoping to get very high marks on our exams and need this help."* [141] Despite staying within Tamil expectations of their behavior, these women self-organized within themselves to create a support network that would afford them a source of power and social mobility without an overt resistance to either external forces of oppression or Tamil conservative norms (CS 6,8).

In other instances, women capitalized on the physical "weakness" reinforced in the militarized environment to prevent recruitment into the LTTE or to gain access to areas prohibited by the army by purposely acting overly emotional or weak. *"He (a government soldier) was giving me a difficult time to get to the other hospital. I told him I was pregnant and feeling faint, and he let me through so I could find my husband."*[142] Each of these women had a clear vision of the purpose behind their actions, a purpose that was often self-serving, though they acted within existing social boundaries to achieve their goals.

In the previous chapter, the impact of experiences with gender-based violence in a context of displacement and militarization is understood by its impact on the individual and the impact on Tamil society. Placing these women in such a stark position of vulnerability, marked by social stigma, it is difficult to assert that even minimal amounts of non-oppositional agency would

---

[141] "Priya",Sister of LTTE fighter, Personal Interview, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. (July 2003).
[142] "Nanthini", refugee, Personal Interview, Allis Garden Refugee Camp, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, February 2005.

exist. However, even in highly restricted contexts, women did act in their own self-interest, amongst a set of limited options.

One case occurred outside of the large eastern city of Batticaloa, in a farming village, which was taken over by the GOSL in 2007 from LTTE control. At that time a large number of rapes and sexual assaults by paramilitary, police, and army forces occurred. (gender-based violence data). In this particular case *"Janaki"* was a married woman who was sexually assaulted by roving police officers when her family was away. Her husband encouraged her to report the incident (an uncommon response in the community). Yet, Janaki knew that the army was allowing for water and supplies to enter the area, as opposed to obstacles facing friends in other villages. She felt that by maintaining her silence she was ensuring a life and livelihood for her family. Despite the personal trauma she experienced, she felt that upholding her role as a nurturer of her family, gave her some amount of power back from what was lost in that moment. *"I think that the reality is these things are happening, but I need not make the situation worse for us, and my husband is understanding of what had happened".* [143]

In another case of domestic violence, also in Batticaloa, a wife who was abused, gathered a group of her friends from the village. The next time her husband showed up drunk, a group of women over-powered him, tied him to a tree. *"We told him not to come home until he was sober, and he would not touch his wife again"* (CS9). They did not have women's associations available to them, and acted outside any formal organizing. While an uncommon response, the

---

[143] "Janaki", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

incident drew little scorn from the conservative community, and most felt the man deserved his own treatment.

Of the ten non-fighters interviewed, six had been exposed to recruitment sessions at school or in their communities. All of them had been from areas exposed to sustained periods of militarization, and over half had experienced multiple displacements. Nine out of the ten rejected the idea of joining the LTTE or any armed movement in favor of continuing their studies. *"Yes, things are difficult for us as Tamils, but the only way to change things is if we are educated"*, said 'Dushy', a young girl living in the East. [144]Those who attended recruitment sessions often supported their fellow students who joined, and often felt strongly that there was a need for an armed resistance movement. Among this small sample size, a concern for the physical ability, or a strong tie to other priorities (education, family) kept young women who had similar experiences with multiple forms of state repression from joining. One young woman, who had experienced sexual assault at a checkpoint said, *"After what had happened, I felt like the best thing I could do was care for my ailing mother – not leave her to get revenge."[145]*

Oppositional Agency

 Among the most extreme versions of oppositional agency, where women challenged what was expected of them culturally to confront multiple forms of state and cultural repression, was their participation in armed resistance movements, particularly the LTTE[146]. The LTTE advocated for the rights of women as a recruitment strategy that was in some ways implemented in practice.

---

[144] Dushy" , Student (18), Personal Interview, Batticaloa 2006.
[145]   Anonymous, Personal Interview, March 2011, London, UK.
[146] Women did participate in other armed groups, however the data from this study is drawn from the LTTE, eventually the largest and most dominant group.

The disconnect between rhetoric and practice as seen through the lived experience of individual fighters allows for a more concrete analysis of the agency of women in this context and a more grounded analysis of gender and nationalism.

An analysis of recruitment should not be understood solely at the level and from the perspective of the movement, but should include individual reasons for joining. Among reasons cited by other scholars are biological availability, existing movement activism, emotional connections to the movement, and "contextual pressures" (Viterna 2006; Wood 2008; Kampwirth 2002; Cunningham 2003). "Feminism" or the notion of women's liberation in existing scholarship, is not prominent in the narrative surrounding reasons for joining, though the language of it may have played a part in their recruitment. The minimal role of feminism, or what is traditionally understood to be a feminist consciousness, in their individual thinking when entering the movement, will also provide some insight into the relationship between gender and nationalism. Of the small sample size of ten former/current fighters interviewed, each had different, and multiple reasons for joining.

"Yalini" was raised in a strict conservative Hindu household, where she thought she must follow what her parents told her to do. She joined the LTTE because of an experience she had with sexual assault from an IPKF soldier, and to earn some small income for her family, where her father was out of work.*"When my family was living in Jaffna, the IPKF came to search the house, and an 'incident' happened at that time. I only told my family but it made me feel useless."* She didn't want to fight, but felt her computer skills could help the movement. She felt optimistic about the possibilities the movement promised. *"At least in the movement, you are*

doing something for change. I'm not sure what my life would have been like if I hadn't joined them." Her parents did not support her decision initially, they had hoped she would get married, but as the situation for Tamils got worse in their area, they were more supportive.

"Jeeva" was always the best in her class in school. *"I had always wanted to be a doctor, maybe even a surgeon, so I studied hard."* Her family was middle-class and her father would discuss the struggle of "our boys", but encouraged her only to study hard. She joined the LTTE when her medical school was closed due to the war, and a nearby building was attacked. One afternoon, she was asked to help an ailing combatant carried to her village, with her medical knowledge. Unable to study, she felt she could help her people create a better life by joining the movement. As an older, unmarried woman she also felt that she could escape the social pressures of marriage by joining the movement. She had little interest in marriage, but felt stressed by the pressures of her family to find a suitable match. *"I think through the movement I will better use my own skills, and also learn new ones."*

"Tharini" was not very good in school, and came from a broken home *"My uncle would sometimes abuse me, and my mother would not say anything, so I spent most of the time away from my house. "*.She became close to a young boy in school. He would write her letters and wait for her after school, to walk with her to her home. He told her one afternoon that he was going to join the LTTE and fight for their people, and she should join as well. One leg was injured as a child, so she joined the political section, to learn about the cause, and to be closer to her "boyfriend". She hadn't thought about it too much at the time, she didn't think she had many other options and wanted to be with her boyfriend. Later, she lost track of him, but became more

172

involved in the social programs of the LTTE, *" I heard about things other women experienced, and I liked being able to help them with their lives"*.

"Rajathri" was hoping to get married, at the age of twenty three, when she was forcibly recruited into the LTTE. *" I knew of them, but had never wanted to join. I didn't see a point in fighting, the situation of the Tamils has always been bad."* She had little interest in fighting, though she had to join the combatant side when she failed an exam to work in a different sector. She did not want to join, but was afraid of resisting those who demanded she join at her house, afraid for the safety of her family. During the time she joined the LTTE was heavily recruiting, requiring one child from each family, and she had hoped to spare her younger brother from having to join.

"Thava" 's family was very poor, living on one of the islands off of the Eastern Coast. Her mother was ill from the time she was young. She dropped out of school to work in sewing for a small income to support her family. *"Our family never had enough to eat, studying didn't seem that important to me".* She joined the movement from primarily because they offered her food three times a week. She had discontinued her study in order to search for a means to make an income, and preferred to join the movement than to be a housemaid (where she heard she may be abused). *"My friends who went to Saudi Arabia and places said the treatment was very bad. In the LTTE at least they will treat you well, and I was doing something good."*

"Prema" joined from a session held in her middle school explaining the importance of fighting. Her parents had always warned her to stay clear of Singhalese soldiers, and she had always seen

173

them everywhere and been afraid. She was doing well in school, but was unsure what she wanted to be. A friend who was with her said *"Prema has always been very strong-minded. Even the boys in school were afraid of her. "*She had a lot of brothers and sisters, her older brother had joined another Tamil movement. The LTTE explained the situation of Tamils, and talked of other freedom struggles that were successful. *"Things seemed like they were always unfair for Tamils, and in other places things had changed."* She felt that she would be able to fight to save the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

"Lavanya" had been twice displaced from the tsunami and the conflict, and had spent most of her days in internally displaced camps, facing daily struggles to live and feeling despondent about her possibilities for the future. *" We would sit for hours in the hot sun, waiting for food, not knowing what we should do. "* She often had nightmares from the tsunami, and would tell people in the camp about them. She had lost her baby brother in the tsunami, and still felt a pain in the arm she held on to him with until he was taken by the waves. Local people would tell her she was "disturbed" or "abnormal" – and felt like an outcast with mental illness. This is the reason she joined the LTTE, to be accepted. *" I thought in the LTTE, people would stop treating me as if I am crazy"*.

"Sri" was abducted into the LTTE when walking to school. She had seen a shell hit a house on the road once, and ran by someone screaming for help. She didn't understand what was happening, but thought that the war was how life was. *" This is how it was, someone was always dying or getting killed. I never really understood why."* She hadn't earlier thought of joining the

movement, but was happy for the opportunity to do the same things as boys. *"I never thought I would be a fighter, but when I had to go, I felt ok after a little while".*

"Gaya" was in University in Jaffna and joined a group of women who wanted to join the nationalist cause, believing very strongly in the need for a separate state. She had been raised by parents who told her she could accomplish anything, and had studied books in politics and social science. Her family was displaced once during the fighting, but was able to return to their home. She met students in University who had lost family members during the war. She was frustrated with Tamil politicians and their inability to accomplish anything for the Tamil people. *"These people, they just talk, and work with the government."* She felt that nonviolence had been tried in the past, but it would not work against an oppressive state, particularly with the number of soldiers she saw. *"My whole life they have been everywhere, the army."* She was a firm believer in the mission of nationalism, and thought that the Tamils would never get justice in Sri Lanka.

"Sujanthi" joined as a young girl with the hope that she would have the opportunity to do something meaningful with her life. She watched her mother struggle as a widow, and the treatment she received from the community. Her mother was always afraid, of the military, of what people would think, of something happening to her daughters. Sujanthi felt that *"Women should learn to be stronger, even without men". "This (the LTTE) was my opportunity to do something outside of this village".* She felt trapped by her family, and her community, and wanted to do something to change the world. Though marriage was not on her mind, she said *"If I have daughters, I want them to learn to be strong, and they should fight for their own rights."*

There are several trends that emerge from these individual reasons, that are each unique and fit well into existing theories that there are multi-causal pathways (Viterna 2006) for women to join an armed rebel movement. Feminism, or the interest in joining purely for the advancement of "women's interests" or "women's issues" rarely emerged as a primary reason for joining the LTTE. While women's frustrations with cultural expectations placed on them factored in, this research complicates the role of "contextual pressures", as various experiences with both direct and indirect forms of state repression figure far more prominently in the narrative of causality. In cases where women had heard or been exposed to recruitment language that incorporated the notion of women's liberation, it increased the draw but was never the sole or primary reason for participation. The relevance of this in each woman's decision is largely derived from her own experiences with conservative Tamil norms.

Immediate, experience-based concerns dominated their thinking in their decision (when not forced) in the movement, over ideological engagements, except in the case of a select few. In these few, we see trends visible in other contexts of political identities being formed at the nexus of exposure, education, and experience, less so in those who were less educated and could not yet situate their experiences within a particular political grievance.

Participation

Low

Among those who can be categorized has participating at a low level [147] we see a variety of reasons and roles played in the movement. One cadre, "Rajathri" follows a relatively expected

---

[147] This category includes those who had ambivalent feelings towards their participation as well as those who were

trajectory, having been forcibly recruited, she maintained neither the ideology or interest even

once in the movement to stay in. "Thava" joined primarily for financial reasons, derived from

indirect experiences with state repression and lack of opportunity, and as such wasn't committed

to the movement beyond the point where they could provide a salary for her. "Sujanthi" was

ideologically committed to the movement as a way to change her world, the world – and rose to

a relatively high level of leadership (lieutenant) within the Women's Unit. However, through

decisions made by the leadership, that led to the split of the LTTE in 2005, she was in a position

where she was fighting against former combatants, and became disillusioned enough to

desperately want to leave the LTTE.

High

Several of the cadres who could be categorized as participating at a high level [148] follow a

pathway that has been theorized about as relevant factors pushing women towards strong

commitments to violent movements (Viterna 2006). However, some with high levels of

commitment to the LTTE organization and its mission defy the logic and expectations set up by

existing scholarship.

"Yalini" experienced sexual assault at the hands of the IPKF, dramatically shifting her

connection to Tamil society and ability to live within an expected social and political trajectory.

---

unhappy with their situation. These women would leave if given the opportunity, or actively tried to leave and
or/happily left when injured. These women were unclear on the goals of the LTTE or the purpose of fighting, or
didn't agree on the means to achieve these goals. These women often had no ideological commitment to
nationalism, and some felt strongly that women should be filling more traditional roles in Tamil society, longing
to become wives and mothers. (Ch. 2)

[148] Those that if given the opportunity to leave, chose to stay. These fighters had a strong belief in the goals of the
LTTE, and rarely questioned the decisions made by higher leadership. These women had an ideological
commitment to nationalism and a separate state for the Tamil people on the island. These women never
attempted to leave the movement and fought against parents and family members who asked them to leave.
(Ch.2).

The added economic strain caused by indirect state repression led her to join, and maintain a high degree of commitment to the movement. "Jeeva" was an educated woman, whose education was interrupted, who was older and unmarried, living under a dual strain of cultural conservatism and state repression. Both participated in lower levels of support/political work, but were highly committed to the cause of the LTTE, never wanting to leave. "Gaya" was a part of an intellectual movement to expand the nationalist struggle, serving at the highest levels and remaining committed to everything asked of her by the leadership, unquestioningly.

The remaining four cases complicate our understandings of pathways for these women as social actors, but reveal a variation that existing studies are unable to capture. "Tharini" joined for love, and consistently maintained a high level of commitment, primarily to stay close to the man she loved, rather than an ideological commitment to the movement. "Prema" had very little knowledge of the movement prior to joining, but became very interested in the nationalist cause after a recruiting session. "Lavanya's" experiences of censure within the Tamil community, and indirect forms of state repression through the displacement process, drew her to the feeling of "belonging" provided by the movement and in exchange remained very committed. "Sri" was abducted, but was the one amongst this small sample size that articulated a desire to achieve equality with "boys", and feeling that on the battle field, found a commitment to the movement to be preferable to living under the existing cultural norms of Tamil society. For some, even engaging in lower risk levels of participation (administrative capacity), left the movement with the strongest commitment to the nationalist cause and belief in the leadership of the LTTE. (Social Architects, 2)[149]

---

[149] http://blog.srilankacampaign.org/2012/03/social-architects-story-2-shamanthis.html

The unexpected links between reasons for joining and levels of commitment provide some insight into new ways of understanding the motivations and agency of these women. Among the most significant of these are the women who were abducted , had no prior interest in the movement, and who went on to become highly committed. Existing scholarship often centers the analysis of agency for female combatants on the moment that they joined the movement, which would leave those cadres who were abducted or forcibly recruited void of any agency at all. This necessitates a new approach, such as the one taken by this study which expands the understanding of agency to incorporate entire life histories. Even in cases like "Sri" who was abducted, earlier experiences with Tamil society and forces of state repression may have shaped her political identity in a way that shaped her decision to become more engaged in a movement she was forcibly drawn into.

Among these women, we see a particular type of political identity that is formed at the intersection of recruitment, motivation, and experience. This has been labeled by other scholars as a "participation" identity – however in the case of Tamil women's participation in the LTTE, the partially coerced or forced nature of participation makes it more useful to understand the formation of women's broader political identities. This study provides a nuance to understandings of state repression that reveals the ways in which contextual forms and direct experiences with state repression can inform women's political identities in ways that need not always involve participation in an armed rebel movement.

While less common, some of the non-fighter women interviewed, as well as several women drawn from the data set of women affected by gender-based violence, expressed forms of oppositional agency in non-violent ways. These avenues were less immediately and obviously available to women, and those who joined had heard through the community of groups of women working towards creating safe spaces for discussion and action. [150] The three women out of those interviewed who volunteered or participated in the activities of these groups felt that their experiences has created in them a desire to take action towards social change, yet they were unable to take the risks required of joining the LTTE.

The constant across women who acted to change their individual situation or the collective position of Tamil society was a shift in their own self-perception. The act of taking control of even the smallest aspect of their existence did inform a new sense of identity as Tamil women, one that challenged their own belief in their capacity to act.[151] This then becomes a key element that informs a new understanding of the relationship between gender and nationalism.

III. Gender and Nationalism Re-Visited

At the intersection of collective Tamil society, its values and norms, and the individual female fighter is a locationally and historically specific understanding of gender and nationalism. This agency of Tamil women is best understood through the two interrelated types of agency proposed by Sherry Ortner. (1) the agency of (unequal) power (2) the agency of projects. (Ortner 2006 in Ahearn 2001)

---

[150] Suriya Women's Center/UTHR.
[151] Please see a discussion of shifting self-perceptions in Chapter 2.

The first involves domination or resistance to domination, and is therefore largely defined by the terms of a dominant group or narrative. Tamil women wielded unequal amounts of power in both the Tamil community, and in the broader Sri Lankan state, as Tamils. Gender and the values assigned to it in Tamil society are largely dominated by cultural norms, and where there was variation and shifts in Tamil society throughout by contextual pressures of conflict, militarization, and displacement, the tendency was for women to be positioned between conservative and extreme conservative gender roles/practices – often for the practical purposes of survival and the protection of women. To "be a Tamil" was a source of pride required for mobilization, and was likely to become increasingly entrenched in conservative norms in response to the outside threat of Singhalese domination and an oppressive state (Arendt). Within Tamil society, as a result of the social movement, to "be a Tamil" placed one under suspicion, so in spaces such as IDP camps, the only means to freely act in accordance with one's cultural identity was in private-- often impacting women the most. [152]

In the nationalist project of the LTTE, upholding "traditional Tamil values" rooted in gender norms, was necessary for the formation of a national identity, and maintaining popular support (NG early research). The practice of liberation within the LTTE seems to have initially been seen as a temporary departure from cultural norms for a higher purpose, however its sustained practice did create visible shifts in the self-perception of women themselves. It is hard to claim that nationalism as a project is "inherently" anti-feminist, if feminism is afforded the amount of variation and interpretation that it must be in specific contexts. However, the leadership of the LTTE as an ethno-nationalist separatist movement did rely on symbols, language, and policies

---

[152] Community Meeting Notes, Personal Interviews, Kalladi Village, Sri Lanka 2007.

that placed the struggle of women squarely within the broader goals of the nationalist project. The disconnect between language and practice was not as hypocritical as some scholars are quick to note (Coomerswamy1998; Schalk 1994).

Perhaps because of the introduction of large numbers of women, or some genuine commitment to a shift in those gender norms that would not upset popular support – the LTTE did enact policies and laws that improved the daily lives of women.

The constant interaction between the individual Tamil woman, her experiences with multiple forms of repression, and the LTTE as a social movement can be productively viewed through the lens of Lichbach's "innovators and prisoners" dilemma. (Lichbach 1998). At a symbolic level, individual experiences were absorbed into the myth and memory of the nation put forth by the LTTE, which framed the collective understanding of women's experiences(Crisis Group Report 2011) [153] Though exercising individual agency in their actions and decisions, Tamil women in the LTTE were both challenging and creating the social structures around them. The influence of women was not tangential to these processes, in some cases women wielded a significant amount of influence within the LTTE, and chose to reinforce conservative Tamil values for women.

Against the backdrop of a constantly shifting and insecure physical space, and increasingly conservative Tamil society, and the "restricted" operational space available to women within the LTTE, women found ways to exercise various forms of agency. Experiences with direct and indirect state repression shaped women's agency in non-oppositional and oppositional forms,

---

[153] Stories like that of "Dhanu" or "Captain Sorthia" became legends in both their experiences with state repression and their heroism to combat it.

that formed the basis of emerging political identities. Feminist perceptions from the outside, or the symbolism behind their actions, rarely impacted their thinking process, which often found itself primarily concerned with immediate concerns of survival. The majority of women did not initially engage in various forms of action in order to address "women's issues", though these concerns played a role in both their initial recruitment and sustained participation. Through the success/failure of these actions we saw from 2000-2010 the seedlings of a women's movement that was varied, and rooted in the lived experience of these women – though it was often organized under the broader umbrella of the LTTE or in informal spaces. This agency existed in multiple forms and at multiple levels that challenge any attempt to frame these women within an "agent" or "victim" binary. A robust independent civil society that may have been able to translate the budding foundational consciousness for a women's movement outside of the LTTE as a "midwife for women's agency" (De Mel, 2001), was never able to emerge – making this perspective difficult to imagine, or view from the outside, and one that remains absent from our understandings of Tamil women in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion: How Women Rebel

To summarize the arguments of this study, it is useful to return to the overarching questions and

resulting theories posed in the introduction.

This study aims to address two main overarching questions around female participation in rebel

movements.

1) How do we take seriously the politics of female participation in violent politics without resorting to a feminist debate on agency ? Assuming that female fighters are agentive actors, how to we understand their politics at an individual and collective level?

2) How do variations in state repression affect the eventual nature of political participation for Tamil women? How do we understand agency for women confronting multiple forms of repression?

Drawing upon existing theories of mobilization and participation, I argue that in order to

understand the impact of state repression on female participation, we must adopt a new

theoretical framework. This study highlights the interactive nature of the relationship between

the individual and the collective, expands the timeline of analysis to incorporate entire life

histories, and understands female combatants as exercising 'restricted agency'**.** Working within

this framework, I find that given pre-existing conditions of inequality (both social and gender),

the identity of Tamil women are mobilized by multiple mechanisms, among which experiences

of direct and indirect state repression are most likely to shape the nature of political participation.

Theory 1: Among other causal factors, various forms of state repression are most likely to shape political identities as well as the nature of participation in rebel movements for individual Tamil women.

Existing scholarship has found that there are multi-causal pathways for women's participation in

armed resistance movements. (Wood 2009; Viterna 2006). While not specifically asking

questions around all of these categories, the open-ended interviews and in-depth life histories

provide some insight to suggest the levels of relevance of these factors. Biographical availability, defined by Jocelyn Viterna as including motherhood, family completeness, and age at mobilization (Viterna). This mobilization factor was relevant amongst Tamil women in this study, all of the fighters who were interviewed joined the movement when they were unmarried and did not have children – with a large number coming from broken homes. (Interviews). Refugee status and family ties to the movement have been identified by scholars (Schrijever? Alison? Viterna) as being relevant in pushing women towards participation in armed resistance movements. Among the fighters interviewed, both of these factors emerged in their life histories. Several had one or multiple experiences with displacement, and a few had family members participating in either the LTTE or another armed Tamil movement. (Interviews)

The least relevant of the larger factors identified by others, was previous organizational involvement, or existing movement activism. Almost none of the women interviewed had previously been involved in women's movements or other social organizations. This can be attributed to cultural norms discouraging this type of work for women, and the lack of available organizations as during the time period where the LTTE wielded some or complete influence over territory, most autonomous social organizations were subsumed into the movement. The strongest forms of community participation were in local churches and temples. When asked about her activities, one former combatant said, *"The only activities I did outside of the home were usually for the temple, and festivals"* . Though these sites were targeted in LTTE recruitment processes, involvement in religious spaces seemed to have little relevance in mobilization. A large majority of women interviewed were exposed to recruitment in schools, rather than in social networks they participated in.

Feminist literature often expresses a disappointment in the ability of the LTTE to make progress on feminist goals for women who participated. The relationship between LTTE and the status of women in society and the movement has been complicated and analyzed in this study, however as a recruitment device, the ideals of feminism rarely played a significant primary role in the decision to initially participate in the movement, though at times it did sustain involvement and commitment. For those exposed to recruitment materials or information on the LTTE's proposed approach to women's liberation, it did become an additional draw – depending on individual experiences with cultural repression. Gaya, head of her women's unit, once said *"I did not join the LTTE to fight for women's rights, but now our participation has shown that we must fight for women's equality as well".* (Interview). Conditions of cultural repression did emerge as a frustration and a concern for nearly all of the women, with varying degrees of significance, but across a majority of the interviews, this was a secondary concern to experiences with state repression.

Immediate, experience-based concerns tended to dominate the formation of individual political identities and levels of participation. As discussed earlier, state repression is often folded into a discussion of "contextual pressures" as a factor in women's mobilization (Cunningham). This study disaggregates these understandings of state repression into direct and indirect forms of repression which are the most relevant in shaping political identities, and the nature of participation for individual women. In doing so, the study accounts for both "how the context of repression changes over the course of the movement" and "how repression affects individuals differently based on their individual-level biographies" (Viterna, 10). Both culture and context

are not taken to be static in this analysis, and are understood as necessarily fluid and varied in their impact on individual women. Even for those who chose not to join the movement, direct and indirect experiences with state repression did form or impact new political identities. (See Chapter 4).

In existing studies, the moment of recruitment has come to define our expectations of levels of participation . Abduction or forced recruitment into the movement often leads to overlooking the agency of these individuals as their entrance into the movement was against their will. By expanding the timeline of analysis to incorporate broader life histories, this study finds that the moment of recruitment is less relevant in determining participation outcomes than experiences with direct and indirect forms of state repression. This study defines variation in the nature of participation in categories of high and low levels, determined by measures of emotional engagement, moral commitment, political beliefs, and levels of risk. Rejecting oversimplified understandings of "empowerment", women who joined at any level reported a shift their own self-perceptions of their abilities and possibilities for future life goals.

Indirect and direct forms of state repression form the basis of a unique political identity which emerges at the intersection of these experiences, exposure to recruitment, and personal motivations.

Theory 2: Tamil women, living within a context of repression by both state and non-state actors (militarization, displacement, violence), coupled with cultural repression, are able to exercise forms of agency that shape political identities and levels of participation.

At a base level, this study examines the position of Tamil women in society before understanding additional layers of semi-permanent contextual experiences that shape the position and

perceptions around Tamil women. What it meant to be a "good " Tamil woman was strictly defined by cultural norms. Tamil women exist behind the lines of the public, private divide, often robbing them of a political identity or voice. In these hidden spaces women were expected to be married, demure, place values of family and honor above all else. Where they crossed over into the public domain in education or professionally, they were expected to apply a similar sense of discipline and duty to their work, and achieve the highest levels possible in this work. These norms have been noted by existing scholarship (Chatterjee, Rajini-S, De Mel, Coomeraswamy), and are understood in this study through the perceptions of youth. What is revealed through the perspective of young tamil men and women , is the entrenched nature of these norms. Even where young women challenged them in discussion, they were well aware of the expectations. Most notably, the young women had a strong sense that their future path was set out for them – pre-destined by culture and elders.

These foundational cultural norms were then shaped and re-shaped by various processes Tamil women faced continual exposure to. The primary ones examined in this study are the processes of militarization and displacement and the primary forms of violence occurring within the contexts these create. Within their actions, and reactions, new forms of agency can be located and examined.

The study of militarization in this study provides the first example of an indirect for of repression by both state and non-state actions. Actions by military officials or militarized units are often noted as examples of state repression, however the process of and ideology behind militarization is not analyzed as a contributing factor to repression. Militarization is understood in this study

through structural, behavioral, and ideological manifestations – looking separately at state militarization and counter-militarization by the LTTE. In disaggregating these forms of militarization by the primary actors involved, we find that differences in resources, strategy, and supporting ideologies produce distinct forms of militarization.

This finding then requires that we understand women's responses and experiences within varied contexts as distinct, rather than homogenized within a nationalized context, as has been the tendency. The study creates a distinction between areas of primarily Government of Sri Lanka control, LTTE control, and those under "mixed-control" during the time period 2000-2010. Those under "mixed control" are understood as living under "dual militarization". Within these contexts found that responses varied by individual dependent on personal factors, but could generally be understood as either violent or non-violent responses to both state and non-state forms of militarization. The primary distinction within different contexts, was that in areas controlled by the state, women feared gender-based violence at the hands of the military, while in non-state areas women often feared being forcible recruited by non state actors. Non violent responses to both state and non-state militarization included ways to minimize direct exposure to military personnel or sites, drawing on culturally reinforced notions of weakness, and creating communities of women to navigate the public space with. Women also became more engaged in local political movements and community conversations aimed at addressing the insecurity felt by women in these environments.

Violent responses to state repression were often not direct participation in violence, but the belief that violence created a protective barrier against multiple forms of infiltrating militarization.

Those who joined the LTTE felt a security against real and perceived threats to themselves in gender-specific ways, particularly gender-based violence. One particularly attractive aspect to a violent, armed response, was the ability for women to protect themselves, without waiting or relying on the care or presence of men. Militarization, combined with individual life histories was a significant contributing factor in the motivation of young women to join armed rebel movements like the LTTE.

A narrative around the capabilities and nature of women put forth by cultural norms is first reinforced through the process of militarization and further entrenched through the displacement process. This narrative revolves around the Tamil woman as a "victim", robbing her of both agency and political identity. The lived experience of displacement by Tamil women, from in-depth interviews and time spent in the field, fundamentally shaped their politics and political identities. My humanitarian work allowed me a unique insight into the conditions and politics around the space of the refugee camp, helping to contextualize how even food rationing process can create an experience so intense as to leave an indelible mark on one's political consciousness. The role of INGO's in creating politically compromised dependencies can also contribute to the perception and treatment of women in various categories (widows, ex-cadres) as "victims".

Within these contexts, it is the act of gender-based violence which marginalizes Tamil women even further, weighing them down with cultural scorn and political repression in a single moment of violence. The current discourse around gender-based violence leaves little room for understanding subjectivity and agency at an individual level. The primary focus of this study is

on the subset of women who experienced gender-based violence at the hands of state forces or their affiliates. This study understands gender-based violence as a form of political violence which individually, or when coupled with cultural ostracization, has the capacity to shape political identities in Tamil women. Both civilian and ex-cadres women felt the acts they experienced to be targeted and overtly political based either on their ethnic identity or affiliation with an armed political movement, like the LTTE.

Three aspects frame the discussion of gender-based violence in this study. The first is the contextual vulnerability of high militarization (including triumphalist sentiments), low levels of protection, and lack of resources for women significantly increased the likelihood of gender-based violence from state forces. The second aspect is the manner in which the act is processed, understood by the woman herself, and the broader community. The third is the impact of complete loss of agency or control in the experience and subsequent labels. A combination of these three factors both increase the likelihood of the occurrence of gender-based violence, as well as shape the political identity of women in such a way as to make political violence a viable option.

Existing scholarship often highlights the "dual" nature of women's vulnerability in regards to gender-based violence, whereas a closer look at Tamil women's experiences and positioning in relation to their communities and the state exposes, reveals that Tamil women are processing traumatic events in an environment in an environment of continual, and constantly shifting, forms of repression. Through these processes, unique political identities are formed, some of which will lead to participation in violent forms of politics.

The analysis of political identity and participation in this study is unique in that it is drawn from extensive research with former fighters, following a methodology that allows their insights to guide the findings without an overarching political agenda. Looking at the society surrounding and absorbing female fighters, this study finds that society and cultural norms are not static, rather these norms are often suspended, re-framed, or ignored all together. The agency of individual women should be understood within a fluid context, without applying external feminist imperatives to their choices and motives.

Looking at the space provided for women in the LTTE in particular, there were aspects to their overall ideology that were practical, heavily rooted in reality – and aspects that were emphasized or exaggerated for instrumental purposes (i.e., mobilizing popular support for the cause). The counter-militarization process of the LTTE, primarily through recruitment practices, did increase levels of vulnerability for women, however was absolved through rhetoric of intent. The LTTE articulated as one of its goals the ability to protect Tamil women and their identity, temporarily and permanently - in relation to a repressive state and made some claims to elevate the status of women in Tamil society. While rejecting the vulnerability and weakness associated with women that was entrenched in the overarching context of a repressive state, the LTTE did draw on gendered elements to Tamil culture that might lend themselves to the construction of a national identity, and a stronger fighting force.

The LTTE articulated a vision of liberation for women that was at times temporary and disconnected to its practice[154], but had (the perhaps unintended impact) of shifting aspects of Tamil society, either through immediate legal doctrines or through the extended dialogue and exchange between women in the movement and women in Tamil society. While scholars on gender and nationalism have often drawn on the "traditions" of Tamil culture in their analysis of this complex relationship, it is clear that at the collective level, the relevance of conservative cultural norms have been both emergent and receding in response to the pressures exerted by forces of state repression and the counter militarization of a nationalist movement. This then frames the individual experience and available space for agency.

The final analysis of this study looks at the participation of women in the LTTE in particular. The examination of ties between articulated reasons for joining the movement, and the levels of commitment (including moral and emotional engagement) provide useful insights into the role of state repression. In some cases women who were abducted were later the most committed, taking on the most challenging and risky roles in the LTTE. Similarly some who joined voluntarily, often left or had the desire to leave.

By expanding our understanding of agency to incorporate individual life histories, we can see that among women who chose to fight a unique political identity is formed at the intersection of recruitment, motivation, and experience. Nascent political identities are often shaped early on by forces of direct and indirect repression. Disaggregating the forms of agency displayed by Tamil women, this study also looks at the women who chose not to join the movement, but whose

experiences with multiple forms of cultural and governmental oppression, even in the extreme form of gender-based violence often veer from their expected social trajectories and engage in grassroots forms of politics to address these concerns.

The constant across women who acted to change their individual situation or the collective position of Tamil society was a shift in their own self-perception. The act of taking control of even the smallest aspect of their existence did inform a new sense of identity as Tamil women, one that challenged their own belief in their capacity to act. The overall goal of this study has been to create a unique approach to the question of female participation in the LTTE as well as identify factors that are often overlooked as having salience in the formation of women's political identities. These identities reveal spaces and forms of agencies that have hitherto been misunderstood and overlooked, in forms of both violent and nonviolent action.

War and Women: Where Do We Go From Here?

The analysis in this study is intended to be grounded in the lived experience of Tamil women in Sri Lanka. Its findings will have a continued relevance to the complicated environment Tamil women exist in today, exactly three years after the cessation of hostilities in Sri Lanka. In a highly militarized context (purely state militarization), reports point to war widows turning to sex work, alcoholic fathers engaging in child abuse, and young girls abducted into labor in the garment industry (Crisis Group Report 2011). Despite repressive forces quelling free media and civil society, stories of women have begun to seep out into the public realm. [155] In these we begin

---

[155] http://blog.srilankacampaign.org/2012/03/social-architects-story-7-three-women.html

to see women's lives contextualized and complicated to understand the multiple forms of repression present in their daily lived experience.

While women find forms of survival in unconventional ways, Tamil society appears to be entering a highly conservative cycle -seeing a re-entrenchment of "traditional" norms and values. *"Women involved in politics will be seen as stupid, due to the outcome of the war. It is safer for them to stay home"* (CS 6). Coupled with the high levels of risk required to engage in community mobilizing or any form of civil society, Tamil women now are further marginalized with minimal opportunities to engage in political activity. As the findings here show, even in restrictive spaces these women do have agency in their actions and decisions, but the avenues available to them are largely dictated by a militarized authority and the international humanitarian support apparatus they live within.

Access to former female cadre is extremely limited, however a recent article reveals that the state plan of "Rehabilitation" includes a re-feminization of these women, de-politicizing them to minimize them as a political threat to the administration. The women were involved in a local fashion show. The transformation from armed cadres to heavily lipsticked models has been heralded as a successful rehabilitation but a deeper look may find a complicated national political agenda intersecting with cultural norms to again, rob Tamil women of their agency, and their politics.[156]

---

[156] http://greenblood.hubpages.com/hub/Rehabilitated-Former-Terrorists-Girls-Participate-in-a-Fashion-Show-A-Story-from-Sri-Lanka

Bibliography

Articles/Books

Anonymous. caravanmagazine.in. 2012. "The Defeated: Sri Lanka's Tamils Pick Up the Pieces After a War That Defined – and Shattered- The Lives of a Generation" February 1. http://www.caravanmagazine.in/Story/1271/The-Defeated.html (accessed February 12, 2012).

Anonymous. cpj.org. 2012. "Amid Sri Lankan Denial, Threats Rise For Journalists." March 23. http://cpj.org/blog/2012/03/amid-government-denial-threats-rise-for-sri-lankan.php. (accessed March 28, 2012).

Anonymous. Michigandaily.com. 2000. "*Female Fighters Push on for Tamil Victory"* March 10. http://www.pubumich.edu/daily/2000/mar/03-10-2000/news/09.html (accessed July 15, 2011).

Anonymous. sundaytimes.lk. 1997. "LTTE Women- Is This Liberation?." January 5. http://sundaytimes.lk/970105/plus2.html (accessed December 11, 2011).

Ahearn, Laura M. 2001.*"Language and Agency." Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (October)**:** 109-137.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., Eyerman, Ron, Giesen, Bernard, Smelser, Neil J., and Sztompka, Piotr. 2004. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Alison, Miranda. 2003. "Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam." *Civil Wars* 6 (Winter): 37-54.

Alison, Miranda. 2004. "Women as Agents of Political Violence." *Security Dialogue* 35 (December): 447-463.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, *Revised Edition*. New York: Verso.

Anderson, John Lee. 2011. "Death of The Tiger: Sri Lanka's Brutal Victory Over its Tamil Insurgents." *The New Yorker*. January 17th.

Balasingham, Adele. 2001. *The Will to Freedom: An Inside View of Tamil Resistance*. London: Fairmax Publishing.
--1993. *Women Fighters of The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*. Jaffna: LTTE International Secretariat.

Beckman, Peter R., and D'Amico, Francine. 1994. *Women, Gender, and World Politics: Perspectives, Policies, and Prospects*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Bernal, Victoria. 2000. "Equality to Die For?: Women Guerilla Fighters and Eritrea's Cultural Revolution." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 23 (November): 61-76.

Blattman, Christopher; and Annan, Jeannie. 2010. "The Consequences of Child Soldiering." *The Review of Economics and Statistics 92 (November): 882-898.*

Bloom, Mia. 2005. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Brady, Henry E., Collier, David, and Seawright, Jason. "Toward a Pluralistic Vision of Methodology." *Political Analysis* 14 (June): 353-368.

Branch, Adam. *2011.* Displacing Human Rights: War and Intervention in Northern Uganda. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Branch, Adam, and Mampilly, Zachariah**. 2005. "**Winning the war, but losing the peace? The dilemma of SPLM/A civil administration and the tasks ahead." *The Journal of Modern African Studies 43 (March): 1-20.*

Campbell, Patricia. 2005. "Gender in Post-Conflict Society: Eritrea." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7 (September): 377-400.

Caruth, Cathy. 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

--1996. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.; "The Nation and Its Women", in A Subaltern Studies Reader :1986-1995. 2007. Minnesota: 1997

Chenoy, Anuradha M. 2002. *Militarism and Women in South Asia*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Clapham, Christopher. 1993. "How Many Ethiopians." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 63, (July): 118-128.

--1998. *African Guerillas*. London: James Currey Publishers.

Collier, Paul. 1999. "Doing Well out of War." *Paper prepared for World Bank Conference on Economic Agendas in Civil Wars* (April): 1-16

Collier, Paul, and Hoeffler, Anke. 2004. "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers* 56 (August): 563-595.

Coomersawamy, Radhika. 1998. *The impact of tradition, culture & religion on women in South Asia*. Colombo: International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Agains Women of Color" *Stanford Law Review* Vol 43:1241 No 6 July.

Cunningham, Karla J. 2003. "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26 (May-June): 171-195.

Daniels, Valentine E. 1996. *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Das, Veena. 2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent Into The Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Davenport. Christian. 2007. "State Repression and Political Order." *Annual Review of Political Science* 10 (June): 1-23.

De Mel, Neloufer. 2001. *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

--2007. *Militarizing Sri Lanka: Popular Culture, Memory and Narrative in the Armed Conflict*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

De Silva, K. M., and Wriggins, William Howard. 1988. *J.R. Jayewardene of Sri Lanka: a political biography*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

De Alwis, Malathi. 2002. "The Changing Role of Women in Sri Lankan Society." *Social Research* 69 (Fall): 675-681.

Hyndman, Jennifer,and De Alwis, Malathi. 2003. "Beyond Gender: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Humanitarianism and Development in Sri Lanka." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 31 (Fall-Winter): 212-226.

Enloe, Cynthia. 2000. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Djebar, Assia. 1992. L'amour, la Fantasia. Casablanca. Eddif.

Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* by Cathy Caruth (JHU Press, Baltimore: 1995).

Fearon, James, and Laitin, David. 2003. "Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War." *American Political Science Review* 97 (February): 75-90.

Goldstein, Robert Justin. 2001. *Political Repression in Modern America: from 1870 to 1976*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Goldstein, Robert Justin. 1978. *Political Repression in Modern America: from 1870 to the Present*. Cambrigde: MA: Schenkman Books, Inc.

Gowrinathan, Nimmi. huffingtonpost.com. 2009 "We Don't Want Development, We Want Our Rights!." August 27. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/nimmi-gowrinathan/we-dont-want-development_b_270473.html (accessed January 15, 2011).

--UCLA Asia Institute. 2005. "Refugee Babies: The Lasting Impact of Tsunami Aid in Sri Lanka." March 3. http://www.international.ucla.edu/asia/article.asp?parentid=21403 (accessed November 15, 2011).

Guidry, John, and Sawyer, Mark Q. 2003. "Contentious Pluralism: The Public Sphere and Democracy." *Perspectives on Politics* 1 (June): 273-289.

Gunaratne, Rohan. 2005. "International and Regional Implications of the Sri Lankan Tamil Insurgency." *Peace in Sri Lanka: Obstacle and Opportunities* 1 (August): 169-211.

Gurr, Ted R. 1970. *Why Men Rebel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Halbwachs, Maurice. 1992. *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hale, Sondra. 2001. "The Soldier and the State: Post Liberation Women: The Case of Eritrea." *Frontline Feminisms* 1 (August): 343-361.

Harrell-Bond, Barbara. 2002. "Can Humanitarian Work With Refugees be Humane?." *Human Rights Quarterly* 24 (November): 51-85.

Hechter, Michael. 2000. *Containing Nationalism*. London: Oxford University Press.

Henderson, N.R. 1995. "A practical approach to analyzing and reporting focus group studies: Lessons from qualitative market research." *Qualitative Health Research* 5 (August): 463-477.

Henry, Nicola. 2011. *War and Rape: Law, Memory and Justice*. New York: Routledge.

Hollan, Douglas. 2005. "Setting a New Standard: The Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation of Robert I. Levy." *Ethos* 33 (December): 459-466.

Horowitz, Donald L. 2000. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

--Horowitz, Donald L. 2001. *Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Humphreys, Macartan, and Weinstein, Jeremy. 2006. "Handling and Manhandling Civilians in Civil War: Determinants of the Strategies of Warring Factions." *American Political Science Review* 100 (August): 429-447.

Chatterjee, Partha, and Jeganthan, Pradeep. 2001. *Community, Gender, and Violence: Subaltern Studies XI*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Qadri Ismail *"Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism: The Southern Tamil Woman and Separatist Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka"*, Community, Gender, and Violence: Subaltern Studies XI (Ravi Dayal Publisher, New Delhi: 2000).

--1992. "Boys Will Be Boys: Gender and National Agency in Frantz Fanon and the LTTE" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, no.31, pp. 1677-1679.

Iyob, Ruth. 1995. *The Eritrean Struggle for Independence: Domination, Resistance, Nationalism, 1941-1993*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Jakobsen, Tor Georg, and de Soysa, Indra. 2009. "Give Me Liberty, or Give Me Death! State Repression, Ethnic Grievance and Civil War, 1981–2004." *Civil Wars* 11 (June): 137–157.

Jeyaraj, DBS. 2009. " Sexual Violence in the Past by Police and Security Forces Against Tamil Women." *Dbsjeyaraj.com*. October 4. http://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/1149

Kalyvas, Stathis. 2003. "The Ontology of "Political Violence": Action and Identity in Civil Wars " *Perspectives on Politics* Vol.1, No.3 (September): 475-494.

Kapferer, Bruce. 2001. " Ethnic Nationalism and the Discourses of Violence in Sri Lanka", Communal/Plural, 4 (2001).

Kampwirth, Karen. 2002. *Women in Guerilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* . Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press. 1-22.

Keller, Edmond.1988. *Revolutionary Ethiopia: From Empire to People's Republic.* Indiana: Indiana University Press.

--1992."Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea", *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, 4 : 609-624.

Kessler, R.C., Sonnega, A., Bromet, E., Hughes, M., & et al.1995. Posttraumatic stress disorder in the National Comorbidity Survey. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 52 (12):1048-1060.

Kitzinger, J. 1995. "Introducing Focus Groups" *British Medical Journal* 311: 299-302.

Kumarasamy, Renuka. 2006. "Caste, Dowry and Arranged Marriage in Tamil Society". Novemeber 20. http://www.sangam.org/taraki/articles/2006/11-20_Marriage.php?uid=2057.

Labao, Linda M. 1998. "Women in Revolutionary Movements: Changing Patterns of Latin American Guerilla Struggle" *Women and Revolution: Global Expressions* . Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing.

Laqueur, W. 1999. *The New Terrorism*. NY: Oxford Univ. Press.

Lichbach, Mark Irving. 1998. "Contending Theories of Contentious Politics and the Structure-Action Problem of Social Order" *Annual Review of Political Science* 1: 401-24.

Lofland, John. *Social Movements: Guide to Research on Insurgent Realities*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Lyall, Jason.2009. "Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence from Chechnya." *Journal of ConflictResolution* 53:3. (June) 331-362.

Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mahmood Mamdani.2002. *When Victims Become Killers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mampilly, Zachariah. 2011. *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.

Manchanda, Rita.2001. *Women, War and Peace in South Asia: Beyond Victimhood to Agency.* New Delhi, India: Sage Publications.

Marshall, Catherine, and Rossman, Gretchen B. 1995. *Designing Qualitative Research 2nd Edition.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Mcadam, Doug, Tarrow, and Tilly.2001. *Dynamics of Contention* . UK: Cambridge University Press.

McConnell, Dierdre. 2008. "The Tamil People's Right to Self-Determination", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. Volume 2.1. *(March)*

Midlarsky, Manus I. 1995. "Environmental Influences on Democracy: Aridity, Warfare, and a Reversal of the Causal Arrow"*The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, No.2 (June): 224-262.

Mkandawaire, Thandika. 2002. "The Terrible Toll of Post-Colonial "Rebel-Movements" in Africa: Towards an Explanation of the Violence Against the Peasantry"*Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 2: 181-215.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres. 1991. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Morgan, David L. 1988. *Focus Groups As Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Muller, Tanja. 2005. *The Making of Elite Women: Revolution and Nation Building in* Eritrea. Boston: Brill.1-25.

Ndegwa, Stephen. 1997. *"Citizenship and Ethnicity: An Explanation of Two Transitional Moments" American Political Science Review*91, No.3 (September) :599-616.

Neraya, Tegisty. 1982. "Women in the Liberation Struggle in Eritrea", presented at the conference *The Eritrea Conflict*. Oslo: November 1982.

Niederle, Muriel and Lise Vesterlund. 2005. *Do Women Shy Away from Competition?* Manuscript.

Olson, Mancur. 1965. The Logic of Collective Action. Boston: Harvard University Press.

Ortner, Sherry. 2006. *Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power, and the Acting Subject*. Duke University Press.

Paige, Jeffrey M. 1975. *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World*. New York: Free Press.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 2006. *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Pateman, Roy. *Blood, Land, and Sex* .Bloomington: Indian University Press.

Paul, Robert A. 1990. "What Does Anybody Want? Desire, Purpose, and the Acting Subject in the Study of Culture?" *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 5, No.4 (November):431-451.

Peterson,V. Spike. 1996."Review: Women and Gender in Power/Politics, Nationalism and Revolution." *The Journal of Politics* Vol.58, No. 3 (August): 870-878.

Pickering, A. 1995. *The Mangle of Practice: Time, Agency, and Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pool, David. 2001. *From Guerrillas to Government: The Eritrean People's Liberation Front*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press.

Popkin, Samuel L. 1979. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Prager, Jeffrey. 2001. "The Psychology of Collective Memory.", in *The International Encyclopedia of Social and Behavioral Sciences*, edited by Neil Smelser and Paul Bates. Pgs. 2223-2227

Pratap, Anita. 2001. *Island of Blood* . India: Penguin Books.

Prunier, Gerard. 1995. *The Rwanda Crisis, 1959-1994: History of a Genocide* . New York: Columbia University Press.

Ray, R. and A.C. Korteweg. 1999. "Women's Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilization, and Autonomy". *Annual Review of Sociology* Vol. 25 (August): 47-71.

Rajasingham-Senanayake. 2001. "Ambivalent Empowerment: The Tragedy of Tamil Women in Conflict", *Women, War and Peace in South Asia*. New Delhi: Sage Publications. 105-125.

Reddy, Muralidhar. 2008. "All Out War." *Frontline* 25 (February)

Ross, Michael. 2004."What do we know about Natural Resources and Civil War?", *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 41, No. 3/. 337-356.

Rotberg, Robert. 2003. *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Ritter, Gretchen and Nicole Mellows. 2000. "The State of Gender Studies in Political Science" *AAPSS,* 571 (September).

Samarasinghe, Vidyamali. July 2000.*"Subverting Patriarchy? Leadership and Participation of Women in Politics in South Asia"*. Ethnic Studies Report, Vol XVIII, No.2 (July): 2000.

Sangarasivam, Yamuna. 2001. "Researcher, Informant, "Assasin", Me", *Geographical Review* Vol. 91, No.1/2 (January): 95-104.

Sangari, Kumkum. 1999. *From Myths to Markets: Essay on Gender* . New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Schalk, Peter. 1994. "Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamililam: The Martial Feminism of Atel Palcinkam" *South Asia Research* No. 14, (Autumn): 163-83.

Scheff, Thomas J. 1996. *"Two Types of Moral Indignation: Self-Righteous Indignation and Moral Superiority"*, *Wellness Lecture Series*, Volume IV.

Schrijvers, Joke. 1999. "Fighters, Victims and Survivors: Constructions of Ethnicity, Gender and Refugeeness Among Tamils in Sri Lanka*". Journal of Refugee Studies*, Vol 12, No. 3. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Schneider, Annedith M. 2003. "Building the Nation: Narrating Women and The Algerian War". *Gender Forum*. Turkey: Sabanci University.

Sinnathurai, Rev. Chandi. 2005. "Eelam Encounters-1: Women in Tamil Society". May 5. www.sangam.org/articles/view2/?uid=1007.

Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolution: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, James C. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in SouthEast Asia.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Somachandran, Subash. 2010. "Sri Lanka: War Widows Left in Poverty". October 27. http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/oct2010/sriw-o27.shtml.

Sprinzak, Ehud. 2000. "Rational Fanatics". *Foreign Policy*. September 1.

Stasiulis, Daiva. 1999. "Relational Postitionalities of Nationalisms, Racisms, and Feminisms". In *Between Woman and Nation: Natioanlisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, edited by C. Kaplan, N. Alarcon, and M. Moallem. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Stefanos,Asgedat. 2002. "The Status of Eritrean Women in the Post-Independence Period: Advances and Reversals", *National Union of Eritrean Women 20th Anniversary Conference*. 77-83.

Suthanthiraraj, Kavitha. Cristina Ayo. 2010. Promoting Women's Participation in Conflict and Post Conflict Societies.

Tambiah, Stanley J. *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia.* (University of California Press, California: 1996).

Yasmin Tambiah. 2005. "Turncoat Bodies: Sexuality and Sex Work Under Militarization in Sri Lanka", *Gender & Society*, Volume 19, No.2

Thiranagama, Rajini. 1990. "No More Tears Sister", *The Broken Palmyrah* . Claremont, CA: Sri Lanka Studies Institute. 305-330.

Tilly, Charles, Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow. 2003. *Politics of Collective Violence* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Trawick, Margaret. 2007. *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood, and Play in Batticaloa*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

--1990. "War and Tamil Women: A Women's Eye-View", August 1, 2005. www.tcefund.org/womensday/eyeview.htm.

Trnka, Susanna. 2008. *State of Suffering : Political Violence and Community Survival in Fiji*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Troller, Gordian and Claude Deffarge. 1997. *"Women in the World in the Service of the Revolution: Report on Eritrea"* Asmara: Research and Information Center.

Uyangoda, Jeyadeva. 2008. *The Way We Are: Politics of Sri Lanka 2007-2008.* Colombo: Social Scientists Association.

Varshney, Ashutosh 2003. "Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Rationality", *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol 1. no. 1,86.

Viterna, Jocelyn. 2006. "Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerilla Army", *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 112 No.1 (July):1-45.

Weber, Max. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. UK: Oxford University Press.

Welikala, Asanga. 2009. "The State of Emergency in Peacetime", The Sunday Leader, June 7.

Weinstein,Jeremy. 2006. *"Who Rebels? The Determinants of Participation in Civil Wars"* (Presented at UCLA Department of Political Science, February).

--2007.*Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Whitaker, Mark P. 2007. *Learning Politics from Sivaram.* Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto Press.

Wilson, Amrit.1991.*The Challenge Road: Women and the Eritrean Revolution.* London: Earthscan.

Winslow, Deborah & Michael D. Woost. 2004. *Economy, Culture, and Civil War in Sri Lanka* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Wood, Elisabeth Jean. 2002. *Forging Democracy from Below: Insurgent Transitions in South Africa and El Salvador*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

--2008.*"The Social Processes of Civil War: The Wartime Transformation of Social Networks"*, Annual Review of Political Science, 11: 539-61.

--2009."Variation in Sexual Violence During War", Politics and Society 34 (March) :307.

Yuval-Davis, Nira & Anthias, Floya. 1989. *Women-Nation-State*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Press.

Wrong, Michela. 2005. *I Didn't Do It For You*. UK: Harper Perennial.

Reports

American Psychiatric Association. 1987. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 3rd Edition*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychiatric Association. 2000. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

Global Tamil Forum. September 2009. *Sri Lankan Internment Camp: International Community Helping Interned Communities Achieve Freedom of Movement and Self Sufficiency*

Center for Humanitarian Agencies (CHA), "Field Mission to Vavuniya: Comprehensive Report" September 2008

Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA) " A Profile of Human Rights and Humanitarian Issues in the Vanni and Vavuniya" March 2009

Focus Report. 2011. *On the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325*. (January)

Government of Eritrea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 1995. *Rising from the Ashes*. Asmara: Government of Eritrea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Human Rights Watch. December 23 2008. *Besieged, Displaced, and Detained: The Plight of Civilians in Sri Lanka's Vanni Region*. New York: Human Rights Watch.

IGWGofUSAID.2006.*Addressing Gender Based Violence through USAID's Health Programs:A Guide for Health Sector Program Officers*.Washington,DC.

Institute of Agriculture and Women in Development. 1995. *Women, Transition and Change: A Study of the Impact of Conflict and Displacement on Women in Traditional Tamil Society*. Colombo: Gala Academic Press.

The Institute for Inclusive Security, Hunt Alternatives Fund. Michelle Page, Tobie Whitman, Celia Anderson. 2009. *Strategies for Policymakers: Bringing Women into Peace Negotiations*, October.

The International Crisis Group 2012. Sri Lanka's North I: Denial of Minority Rights. Asia Report No219. March 16.

--2012. Sri Lanka's North II: Rebuilding Under the Military. Asia Report No229. March 16.

--2011. Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East. No217. December 20.

National Union of Eritrea Women. 2002. *The Proceedings of the 20th Anniversary Conference of the National Union of Eritrean Women*. Asmara: National Union of Eritrea Women.

Norwegian Refugee Council. September 2007. *Civilians in the Way of Conflict: Displaced People in Sri Lanka.*

UN Office of the Secretary General. 2011. *Report of the Secretary General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*. March 31.

unicef.org. 2009. "Crisis for children in Sri Lanka: Over 100,000 flee fighting, thousands more trapped." April 23. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/sri_lanka_49479.html. (accessed February 23, 2011).

Watchlist on Children and Armed Conflict. 2008. *No Safety, No Escape: Children and the Escalating Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka*. April.

Women's Development and Information Unit (WDIU, LTTE). 1998. "Tamil Women and Children: Living and Dying Under Sri Lankan Occupation", London.

Women and Media Collective. 2008. Emmanuel, Sarala. *Strategic Mapping of Women's Peace Activism in Sri Lanka*. April.

Films

"No More Tears Sister", National Film Board of Canada (Canada: 2004)
"The Terrorist", Santosh Sivan, Phaedra Films (India :1997)

Personal Interviews

Sri Lanka

General
Lavanya, Office Manager, St. Johns Church, Personal Interview, July 2004, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
Julia, Program Director, Tamil Rehabilitation Organization, Personal Interview, July 2004, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Nimalan Karthikeyan, UNDP, Personal Interview, June 2003, July 2005, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
M. Gowrinayake, Director, Hindu Board Childrens Home,Personal Interview, June 2004, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.
Late Mr.Pulidevan, Head of LTTE Peace Secretariat, July 2004, Personal Interview, Killinochi, Sri Lanka.
Maren, Head of LTTE Planning and Development Secretariat,Personal Interview, July 2004, Killinochi, Sri Lanka.
T. Lankaneson, Director, NECORD, Personal Interview, July 2005, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
Anita Nesiah, formerly with CARE, RED CROSS, UNDP, Personal Interview July 2005, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Chrishara, Psychosocial Director, Consortium on Humanitarian Affairs,Personal Interview, February 2005, Colombo, Sri Lanka.
Father Miller, St. Michaels Boys College, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka (July 2004, July 2005).
Shanthi S., Viluthu Women's Organization,Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Inthu, Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK
Father J, Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.

Dr. Ethirveerasignam, Personal Interview, June 2011: Colombo: Sri Lanka.
Dr. Selvi, Womens Research and Education Center, Personal Interview, Colombo, Sri Lanka 2011.

Anonymous Interviews

Civil Society/Politics

(names have been changed for security reasons)

Staff at Suriya Women's Center, Personal Interviews, July 2005, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
Dr. P, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka
"Sharmila", Civil Society Worker, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo: Sri Lanka
Anonymous, Aid Worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.
Father J, Personal Interview, October 2010, Mannar: Sri Lanka.
Anonymous, civil society worker, Personal Interview, October 2010, Colombo: Sri Lanka.
(Multiple CS 1-10; Vavuniya, Sri Lanka16-24)
Anonymous, Civil Society worker, Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa. (Multiple, CS 10-15)
Oxfam Worker, Anonymous, Personal Interview, New York, 2009

Anonymous (Asylum Seeker from Detention Facility), Personal Interview, London, UK 2011.
Anonymous, Auto Driver, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka, 2011.
Anonymous, Warden, St. Johns Church Childrens Home, Personal Interview, June 2004, July 2005, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
Anonymous, Asylum Lawyer, Personal Interview, London, UK, 2011.
Anonymous, Women's Organization Worker, Personal Interview, Colombo, January 2009.
Anonymous, Human Rights Lawyer, Personal Interview, Colombo, June 2011.
Anonymous, Tamil National Alliance Party Member, Personal Interview, New York, NY February 2010.
Anonymous, Church Official, Personal Interview, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka 2010.
Anonymous, Former Education Minister of North and East, Personal Interview, June 2011, Colombo.

Former/Ex-Fighters

"Yalini", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
"Jeeva", Personal Interview, July 2007, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.
"Tharini", Personal Interview, July 2004, Killinochi, Sri Lanka.
"Rajathri", Personal Interview, December 2008, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
"Thava", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
"Prema", Personal Interview, November 2008, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
"Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.
"Sri", Personal Interview, July 2004, Killinochi, Sri Lanka.

"Sujanthi", Personal Interview, November 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
"Gaya", Personal Interview, August 2006, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
Kamodini", "Kamala", LTTE ex-fighters, released in April 2004, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
(July 2004) (February 2005)

Non-fighters/Youth
"Vasanthi", age17 student and participant in VISIONS program, Personal Interview, August
2004, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
"Priya",Sister of LTTE fighter, Personal Interview, July 2003, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
Group Sessions: Participants of VISIONS Batticaloa and VISIONS Jaffna programs (2003,
2004).
"Nanthini", refugee, Allis Garden Refugee Camp, Personal Interview, February 2005,
Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
 "Lochana", Personal Interview, March 2011, London: UK
"Dushy" , Student (18), Personal Interview, Batticaloa 2006.
"Lavanya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.

Gender-Based Violence Cases

"Theva", Personal Interview, March 2011, London, UK.
 "Jeyanthi", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.
"Chanthrika", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka
"Selvi", Personal Interview, March 2011, London, UK.
"Asha", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
"Kanapathipillai", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
 "Jeya", Personal Interview, June 2011, Vavuniya, Sri Lanka.
 "Janaki", Personal Interview, June 2011, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.
 Anonymous, Personal Interview, March 2011, London, UK.