

WOMEN COMBATANTS AND GENDER IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS

THE CASE OF THE LTTE

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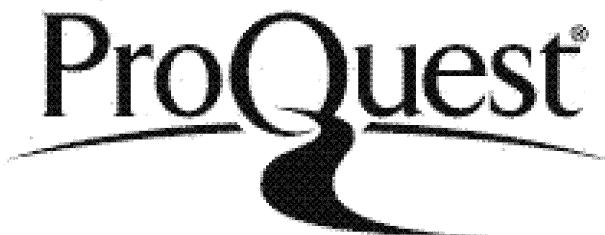


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ABSTRACT

Three decades of ethno-nationalist war in Sir Lanka has contributed to a major social change for Tamil women in Jaffna. An important component of this change has been the recruitment of women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This thesis explores the role of the women combatants from a gender perspective to identify how gender is constructed for women within the revolutionary movement, and the impact that construction has on civic society. The research is based on the narrative life histories of seven combatant women, one ex-combatant woman and seven civic women. In undertaking this research, the methodology had to take into account the researcher's positionality through reflexivity, and the multiple identities that link and separate the researcher and participants. Through these life histories, the thesis investigates the link between displacement to LTTE controlled areas and women's recruitment. It identifies the LTTE as providing an 'alternative' familial kinship founded upon friendship, which transcends caste and religion. It further enquires into the role of women suicide bombers, revealing a self-image of unselfish givers of a 'gift' to those they care for, including the Tamil nation. The main argument of the thesis is that combatant women's paradoxical equality may differ from Western feminist notions of emancipation but represents a profound change within Jaffna's patriarchal society. The engagement in armed conflict has transformed combatant women into female slayers of injustice and protectors of the Tamil nation, with a (re)constructed gender identity and empowerment (*Ah-lu-mai*). The combatant women and the war are a powerful force for change, and combatant women's alternative roles radically alter the perceptions of women in civic society. The Gender (re)construction and form of equality that both combatant and civic women achieve accelerates a social change towards a new gender identity, 'new' women (*Puthumai Pen*).

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge the death of CH, a civic woman participant, whose untimely death is a tragic loss. With the ongoing war, and lack of many basic items such as food and medicine, I fear there will be more deaths of those I have now come to know. Our differing ethnic identities were not held as barriers by the women combatants or by the civic women participants, raising hopes for a better future.

ACRONYMS

Please see the appendices for a list of acronyms used in the text.

NOTES ON THE LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS USED IN THE THESIS

Note on Citations:

I have used the commonly accepted English language spellings for Tamil words such as *Thambi* (younger brother) or the name *Prabhakaran* for ease of accessibility.

Note on Transliteration:

The usage of Tamil language words in the text are based on phonetics as reflected in the writings of Tamil speaking authors.

Note on research informants:

Most participants were mono-linguistic (Tamil language) with a few who were bi-lingual (Tamil and English language).

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PREFACE

This thesis is about women combatants in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), an armed resistance group that has been active since the early 1970s in Sri Lanka, led by Vellupillai Prabhakaran and pursuing the goal of an independent Tamil state, named *Tamil Eelam*¹ (see Maps on page 291). The LTTE control large parts of the North, including the central Northern Province known as Vanni and parts of the Eastern Province, although the Sri Lankan government currently control all other areas including the Jaffna peninsula in the Northern Province and land along Mannar in the North West.

The central research question of the thesis asks “How is gender constructed within the revolutionary movement of the LTTE?” My main conclusions are that female gender identity is negotiated in complex ways and is transformed as a consequence of women becoming fighters. They become socially constructed images of armed virgins (viewed by some feminists as androgynous), female warriors of injustice, who protect Tamil nationals. Civic women have also adapted to changing socio-political conditions, although they have retained some aspects of their traditional gender identity. There is evidence that both combatant and civic women become part of the (re)construction of ‘new’ women (*Puthumai Pen*), with a new gender identity. This new identity may not conform to Western feminist notions of emancipation, but within the Jaffna Tamil context, it represents a profound change.

My thesis addresses the currently limited understanding that exists in relation to the combatant women of the LTTE. I believe the original contribution of this thesis lies in increasing the knowledge about women’s involvement in the LTTE. In addition, two of my findings have more general application. First, the empirical evidence gathered

¹ The word *Tamil Eelam* means the *Tamil part of the Eelam*. The word ‘Eelam’ it self is synonymous with the word ‘Sri Lanka’ and believed to have been in use circa 200B.C. to 250A.D., when the Tamil language word for Sri Lanka was *Ilankai*, (pronounced as *Eelankai*) meaning Lanka. Tamil phonetic language does not contain ‘la’ to be a starting sound, thus the vowel ‘ee’ comes before ‘lankai’ (Sivathamby 2006).

during this research reveals a previously unrecognised link between those who are internally displaced to the LTTE controlled area of Vanni, and voluntary enlistment. Those researchers who have studied displacement in Sri Lanka have previously overlooked this link. This may be due to inaccessibility, or difficulties in gaining entry to both LTTE controlled areas and combatant women. However, this is a key point in understanding the combatant women, as the sense of security that is offered in Vanni (even when living under a tree exposed to the elements) is preferable to living with the comforts of a home but in a state of continuous fear. The finding that displacement is an important factor in the recruitment of armed combatants may be relevant in other cases elsewhere.

Second, I also contribute to the debate on suicide bombings, by focusing on women combatants' involvement in the act. Through the empirical research, I have concluded that women combatants view suicide bombing as a selfless act of giving, a view that directly connects suicide bombing to Durkheim's concept of 'obligatory altruistic suicide'. My research findings show that there is a clear gender dimension to the women combatants' involvement. Although suicide bombing at first appears to contradict the traditionally socio-culturally constructed female role of carer and unselfish giver, the combatant women's discourse construes the act an extension of this nurturing and giving role. Consequently, the combatant women view it is a willing gift to the Tamil nation, rather than a sacrifice, in order to progress the cause of Tamil Eelam.

I also contribute to discussions of the feminist methodology of representing the Other through multiple identities (Sinhalese, Tamil, and British), which both link and separate the researcher and the participants. Issues around multiple identity form recurring themes both in, and away from, the field, and had to be continually negotiated. These negotiations form the base of a reflexivity that links me to the combatant women, through our shared identity (Sri Lankan) and yet separates us through the differences of ethnicity (Sinhalese/Tamil, British identity) and language.

Chapter One is an overview of Sri Lanka's history and the conflict. It discusses the historical influences in the social construction of female identity in Sri Lanka and in particular Tamil women in Jaffna. Sri Lankans have practiced diversity and tolerance of religion and ethnicity for many years. However, within the last three decades, their social position has changed to a deeply embittered and divided ethno-centric split

between Sinhalese and Tamils. The chapter describes the construction of a Sinhalese ideology that treats Sri Lanka as Sinhalese-Buddhist and views Tamil nationalism as a minority issue. Tamil Nationalism argues that only war and the construction of their own state can address Tamil political aspirations, and the way that the government has treated the Tamil nationals has enhanced and strengthened that belief. The conflict is then defined in terms of ethnic identity based on language and geography and is intrinsically linked to territory. Therefore, both ideologies have become further entrenched in war and violence.

This chapter also illustrates that Tamil women's traditional gender roles have evolved to include 'new' social roles, which are contradicted by the recruitment of combatant women. A new image of an 'Armed Virgin' is emerging in the combatant woman that contrasts with the civic woman. This image is socially paradoxical and the newly constructed womanhood is fraught with multiple issues.

Chapter Two discusses the methodological and ethical concerns that are central to the thesis. It analyses the issues relating to the gathering of data under violent socio-political conditions. It also addresses my own field research experiences that lie within a framework of concerns and the specific issues of access, power of the Gatekeeper and security. It addresses the differences encountered in Power relations in conflict areas where the researcher is more dependent on others and the relationship dynamics that impact on these relationships. Ethnic identity is an influential factor that is examined through a discussion of legitimacy and how ethnicity affects the data collected.

The chapter is divided into three sections consisting of Interviews, Safety, and Reflexivity. The Interviews section addresses a range of issues from planning through conducting interviews. The Safety section addresses the key components of safety of participants, safety of data gathered, and safety of the researcher. The final section on Reflexivity focuses on my own position, as well as issues relating to presenting the Other, objectivity and impartiality.

As the conflict continues, the safety of all participants has been paramount to this research. Therefore, the interview participants have been given anonymity with alternative names and alphabetic characters. It must also be noted that the interviews conducted in the English language on a one-to-one basis retain their original format

throughout the thesis. These transcribed texts have been identified with the asterisk symbol (*) next to the alias of the interviewee.

The pronunciation of Tamil language is different to English, often resulting in Prabhakaran's name being written phonetically by Tamil-speaking writers (variations include Pirabhakaran, Pirapakaran, and Pirabakaran and other words such as Tahmbi or Tahmby meaning younger brother) but this does not interfere with the text or the context of the thesis.

Chapter Three discusses the effects of displacement that impact on the lives of women who later became combatants. Displacement affects a significant number of people, with many emigrating overseas. The majority of displaced people are from the Jaffna peninsula, and Tamil nationals describe displacement as *Idampeyatha*, meaning a forceful expulsion from home, which has now entered into the mainstream language.

The chapter discusses the factors that contribute to women joining the LTTE, which include the loss of home, exclusion from schooling, helplessness and loss of agency, and the break up of the family unit. It then examines the influence of a nationalist environment, with particular emphasis on the recruitment of children by the LTTE, because of both displacement and the sympathies of their families, along with the insecurities felt by the children. The chapter suggests that displacement is a key factor in the recruitment of women into the armed struggle, and explores the link between displacement to LTTE controlled areas and the decision to join the LTTE.

Chapter Four addresses the LTTE construction of a sustainable fictive kinship through friendships amongst women combatants from various socio-economical, religious and caste backgrounds, which to some extent replicates the familial kinships. In this chapter, the words 'kinship' and 'friendship' are used as analytical tools to explore the non-consanguine ties that are built and maintained within the LTTE replacement family. The word kinship is detached from its consanguine roots, and kin terminology is used to metaphorically describe an alternative family unit or 'fictive' kin (re)created by the LTTE, which is founded upon friendships that override blood ties.

One success of the LTTE's (re)constructed family is its ability to transcend the basic social prejudices that are engrained in Jaffna society; hence, kinship in the LTTE successfully rises above social barriers such as caste and religion, and has freed

combatant women to accept each other. I also critically examine how combatant women (re)construct an alternative gendered role within the movement that challenges the socially dictated roles for women. Kin relationships cultivate loyalty regardless of personal circumstances and reaffirm the combatant women's shared experiences that place them in a valued position within the kinship group.

Chapter Five discusses the involvement of women in suicide bombings and the gendered dimensions of the motivational forces behind their participation. It argues that the LTTE suicide bombings are part of a collective rational strategy for cost-effective attacks and that individual motivation is best explained through Durkheim's notion of 'obligatory altruistic suicide'. The chapter also analyses the loss of sexual purity as a motivational factor and reveals a number of politicised issues ranging from body politics to the nation state. It discusses the symbolic nature of rape victims, using their socio-culturally viewed "polluted bodies" as bombs, in a process of purification by immolation. The engagement of women as suicide bombers raises issues about individual agency and autonomy along with gender identity. The chapter argues that social perceptions of women lie behind the sensationalised media reporting of women who commit such acts.

The chapter explores the way in which death is constructed in the LTTE, and how it impacts on equality. Women Combatants see the role of a suicide bomber as a career pinnacle and as 'a gift' to society, the ultimate gift to those they care for and the nation. The women combatants reveal that they feel the act of suicide bombing empowers them, by reinstating the individual's lost agency. However, the gender equality argument needs to be seen in the context of violent political conflict, and it is questionable whether women can maintain the equality gained through self-sacrifice, and sustain this particular form of negotiated equality.

Chapter Six analyses the gender (re)construction in the LTTE and the levels of gender equality that the combatant and civic women have achieved. It argues that the LTTE struggle has accelerated a social change, sweeping women towards a new gender identity.

This final chapter highlights that the number of women combatants in leading roles is limited and that their lack of training in decision-making may contribute to them being excluded from higher levels of the LTTE. It argues against adopting an essentialist feminist view of women as pacifists by claiming that this runs the risk of overlooking the

social impact of combatant women on both civic society and civic women. It maintains that women have moved from support roles to active roles and challenge the existing patriarchal views and subordinate roles of women in society. The combatant women's (re)constructed identity has granted them a form of equality that must be seen within the historical framework of Jaffna and its patriarchal culture.

This chapter investigates a number of paradoxes that the new gender identity has created, and the levels of achievements are contrasted and compared between combatant and civic women. The chapter also questions the role the leader (Prabhakaran) has played in promoting combatant women to new social positions above that of the women in civic society and how their active involvement in the LTTE has placed combatant women outside civic society without their realisation. The chapter ends by claiming that the combatant women, together with the continuing civil war, form a powerful force for social change and have radically altered the perceptions of women in society.

CHAPTER 1

THE LIONS AND THE TIGERS

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE

SRI LANKAN CONFLICT

AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Introduction

According to the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE), three decades of violent political conflict in Sri Lanka has now entered a ‘Final Phase’². Historically and culturally, Sri Lankans have regarded themselves as both peace loving and tolerant, with particular empathy shown to the ethnicity and diversity of religion. However, within the last three decades their social position of “... warmth, hospitality, and good humour [...] that amongst other things, can laugh at themselves...” (Tambiah 1986:1) has changed to a deeply embittered and divided ethnocentric nation split between Sinhalese and Tamil identities. This division has caused fear amongst the Sri Lankan people, resulting in suspicion, animosity, and violence against each other’s community. The unitary state established in colonial times gave way to a war between the State and the LTTE that is reflective of a contemporary conflict constructed in the postcolonial era as a consequence of the state-building process.

The conflict is defined in terms of ethnic identity, and in this chapter, I argue that the conflict can be understood as an instrument for constructing an ethnic identity based on language (not religion at this stage) as well as geography. According to the nationalist ideologies of identity politics, ethnic identity is linked to territory (e.g. Tamil speaking areas must belong to LTTE etc). Therefore, extreme forms of violence are a method of

² Human Rights Watch Report (March 2006). See The Hindu International (28 May 2007), Ministry of Defence Sri Lanka (15 March 2007), The Asian Tribune (21 March 20007) Access 22.10.2007. See also information from personal contacts, identity withheld due to safety reasons.

gaining exclusive ethnic control over territory. To this end, the membership of the LTTE was formed from disenchanted and frustrated young men, with women being added later.

I argue that gendered relations play a critical role in the construction of identity. In particular, Tamil identity is based on a gendered concept of masculinity within which women are cast in a female role defined by the hegemonic masculinity embedded in patriarchal Tamil society. At the same time, the realities of the conflict have directly challenged gender construction in Tamil society. According to the cultural perspective of Tamil society, women play the role of patriotic mother which is extended during conflict to include their becoming embattled. However, this ideological paradigm of patriotic mother has been contradicted by the recruitment of women as fighters that in turn has created a new kind of femininity, which is culturally alien to Tamil women. The newly emerging image that encompasses the roles of female slayers of injustice in order to protect the Tamil nationals is in contrast to the civic women in society.

This newly constructed womanhood is fraught with multiple issues and social paradoxes. The role is heavily criticised by some Sri Lankan feminists as an androgynous role that is contrary to femaleness (see Coomaraswamy 1996, Maunaguru 1995 and de Mel 2001). The next few chapters will address the socially paradoxical issues that Tamil women (both combatant and civic) have learnt to negotiate during a period of heavy conflict and violence.

This chapter is separated into two main sections, which focus on the evolution of the conflict, and the role of women in Jaffna's Tamil society. The first section provides a chronological history to the country's political history and the issues relating to discontentment, and ethnic separation, resulting in the war with the LTTE. The second section provides an overview of the history of women, covering the social changes that affected all women in Sri Lanka, and focusing on Tamil women in particular during colonial and post-colonial periods. It also addresses the gender roles in Jaffna from ancient times through to modern era, which has transformed Tamil society from a matrilineal society to a patrilineal society under the influence of cultural practices that have evolved to include 'new' social roles for women.

The Evolution of the Conflict

Background

According to narratives from both sides, the complexity of the ethnic conflict is embedded in history and mythology; a legend claims that a union between an exiled Indian King and a Lioness created a new ethnic group, the Sinhalese³. The word *Sinha* means *lion* in Sanskrit, which is believed to be the language used in Sri Lanka during ancient times (Mendis 2003)⁴.

The ancient Buddhist text, *Mahavansa* that chronicles Sri Lanka from A.D.362 to the mid 18th century does not mention the existence of Tamil nationals in the island (Mendis 2003:2)⁵. Despite the lack of formal evidence, Tamil nationals (in Jaffna) claim that they are the original inhabitants of the island, asserting an ancient Tamil presence in the northern part of Sri Lanka (Mendis 2003, Pujangga 1997, Thambiah 1954, Navaratnam 1959, Rasanayagam 1926). There is however later historical evidence of a Tamil ruling monarchy during the arrival of the Portuguese invaders in 1505 (Thambiah 1954, Mendis 2003, Rasanayagam 1926, Ram 1989)⁶.

³ The king Vijaya arrived with 700 “fair skinned” Aryan men (Ram 1989:32). The ‘lioness’ may well have been a woman from an existing indigenous group³ that called themselves the Lions that were inhabiting the island at the time of King Vijaya’s arrival.

⁴ There is a claim by Navaratnam (1959) that earlier forms of language were a mixture of Tamil and Sinhalese.

⁵ *Mahavansa* is an accepted text amongst historians as a record of ancient history of Sri Lanka; it is none the less considered a religiously biased document written for the period “encrusted with miracle and invention” (de Silva 1984:3). Somasundaram (1998:34) and Sivanayagam (2001:13), argues that *Mahavansa* has given rise to an ideology of ethnocentric claims of descent from the Aryans of Northern India. The North Indian culture and civilization is perceived as more advanced than that of South India. The conceptual notion that Sinhalese are an Aryan ethnic group is portrayed by Bose as a “racist myth that made its first appearance during the second half of the nineteenth century” (1994:14). The use of the term Aryan to describe a race of people is further argued by the German indologist Mueller to be a scientific descriptive term unsuited to application to a race (Bose 1994:41 referring to Gunawardena 1990:71).

⁶ Tambiah (1954) refers to a number of scholarly works including Rasanayagam, *Ancient Jaffna* (English edition); Fr.Gnanapragasar, *Yalpana Vaipava Vimarsenam* (Tamil edition); Sivanathan, *Early Settlement in Jaffna* (Tamil edition); Muttutamby, *Jaffna History* (edition not known). Detailing a number of regency periods in The Laws and Customs of Tamils of Ceylon, which includes fifteen kings and the periods in which they reigned in Jaffna (1954:10-16).

The Portuguese found three kingdoms in the island upon their invasion: Kotte, Kandy and Jaffna. Of these, the Kandyan kingdom retained its autonomy through winning battles first with the Portuguese (1505-1658), and then the Dutch (1658-1796). The British expelled the Dutch in 1796⁷ and made the whole island a Crown Colony in 1802, but they did not control Kandy, its kingdom and the surrounding hill country until 1815. Scholars argue that the Tamil kingdom in Jaffna had ceased to exist by this time (Ram 1989, Weerasooriya 1970). The British began the creation of modern Ceylon by centralising its administration and economy, and that included controlling Sri Lanka's two ethnic groups. "In their administration the British favoured the Tamils over the Sinhalese, in their typical "divide and rule' policy." (Bandara 2002:19)

Ethnicity, Language and Nationalism

The current violent political struggle between the Tamil minorities and the Sinhalese majority is a relatively recent development. Indeed these two ethnic groups have co-existed for several centuries, pre and post-colonial eras that I would argue is indicative of some degree of tolerance, which makes the conflict a new war (see Mendis 2003, Bose 1994 and Weerasooria 1970). In her book, *New and Old Wars* Kaldor (2001:70) states,

New forms of power struggles may take the guise of traditional nationalism, tribalism or communalism, but they are, never the less, contemporary phenomena arising from contemporary causes and displaying new characteristics.

The emergence of Sinhalese and Tamil national identities based on language and religion was borne out of a reaction to colonialism and the need to provide a political basis for statehood. The start of open disharmony dates to when the struggle for independence from Britain was the main objective of both groups. A strong national identity began to emerge amongst the Sinhalese Buddhists who challenged the western Christian values of the colonialists. In addition, the suppression of Buddhism under colonial rule became a tool used by Sinhalese nationalists to challenge the existing social order created by the ruling British. The British in turn "...devised arrangements and made concessions in the 1870s, that in the long run evolved into a policy whose central

⁷ The Dutch expulsion and British acquisition of the country came via the British take over of the Dutch East India Company in 1796, of which Sri Lanka was a part.

features was a special concern for – if not a special position for – Buddhism within the Sri Lanka polity" (de Silva 1998:4).

The first Sri Lankan Prime Minister D.S. Senanayake withstood pressure from the Sinhalese Buddhist majority to break away from the colonial historical past to create a 'new' Sri Lanka with a concept of a utopian state based on its Buddhist tradition⁸. However, the 1956 elections changed this tenuous political position.

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike's election victory in 1956 was a significant turning point in Sri Lanka's history, for it represented the rejection of the concept of a Sri Lankan nationalism, based on plurality which Senanayake had striven to nurture, and the substitution of a more democratic and populist nationalism, which was at the same time fundamentally divisive in its impact on the country because it was resolutely Sinhalese and Buddhists in content.

(de Silva 1998:5)

The elevation of Buddhism continued until 1972 when there were visible signs that Buddhism had marginally failed to become a state religion, but had promoted a national identity based on religious status (ibid:4). In 1977, the government declared Buddhism to be the state religion despite much opposition from minority groups. This declaration effectively rendered all non-Buddhist practitioners as the Other within the state of Sri Lanka. It led to the notion that Sri Lankan nationalism was based on Buddhism and Sinhalese ethnicity.

To be Sinhalese is to be automatically a Buddhist and an Aryan, and to be Buddhist is to be able to make a total claim – territorially and politically – over Sri Lanka. Conversely, to be a Buddhist is to be Aryan Sinhalese by "race" and "language" and to be Sinhalese by race gives the right to exclude, perhaps even exterminate, other "races" in Sri Lanka, especially the Dravidians.

(Tambiah 1986:58-9)

Sinhalese nationalism is then based on the idea that they are the 'sole' indigenous ethnic group in Sri Lanka, and Tamils are regarded as foreigners⁹. It is often argued that 'Tamils have India to go to, but the Sinhalese only have the small island of Sri Lanka'. The view that the Sinhalese are the sole indigenous ethnic group of Sri Lanka, at its

⁸ A list of Prime Ministers and Presidents can be found in Appendix 1.3.

⁹ The argument of a sole indigenous race of a single country resonates heavily with the Bosnian struggle (in conversation with Kaldor 2004).

extreme, is translated into a feud that is substantiated by violent conflict. The majority of the Sri Lankan population is Sinhalese by ethnicity and Buddhist by religion¹⁰. De Silva claims that “language became the basis of nationalism, and this metamorphosis of nationalism affected both the Sinhalese and Tamil population” (de Silva 1998:5). As Tambiah (1986) states “to be truly Sinhalese was to be born Singhalese, speak Sinhalese, and practice the Sinhalese religion, Buddhism” (Tambiah 1986:69). The identity politics reflected in these sentences forms the very basis of the nationalist struggle linking religion (Buddhism) to language (Sinhalese) as a single unit to include the majority and exclude the minority. This linking of language and religion as the basis of the ethnic identity makes the hegemonic group even more powerful.

Under British rule, English was the official language and became a tool in the hands of the Sinhalese elite and a large number of Tamil nationals in Sri Lanka (Ariyaratne 2001). The Tamil nationals viewed the English language as a necessity to succeed in daily life, granting them economic advancement as well as social mobility. Advanced academic qualifications opened pathways to professions such as Medicine, Law and Civil Administration that were taught and practiced in the English language (Ram 1989). In 1948, Tamils constituted 10 % of the population and 31% of students at universities, which resulted in Tamils gaining a higher percentage of employment in the professional sphere (Ariyaratne 2001). Though a majority of Sinhalese did feel discriminated against due to their lack of English language skills, this did not become an issue of concern until the 1930's.

In 1935, linguistic discontent resulted in the development of a new nationalistic ideology. The Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) was the catalyst, created solely to promote Sinhalese and Tamil languages as ‘*swabasha*’ meaning ‘one’s own language’, and promoted the idea that Tamil and Sinhalese languages should gradually replace the English language as the nation’s official languages for education, legislature and civil administration.

The ruling Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) brought in the Official Languages Act in 1956. The minority Tamil representation at parliament were unable to influence the

¹⁰ According to the last conclusive census carried out in 1981, the non-Sinhalese minority was 26 % and the non-Buddhist minority was 30.7 % (of the total population) (Hyndman 1988:7).

Sinhalese majority who dictated that Sinhalese became the official language of trade, commerce and education, which sowed the seeds of disharmony.

In a democratic polity, if the majority community becomes autocratic and the promoter of its own interest at the cost of the minority, it is not only an infringement of basic democratic norms, but also creates a very fertile ground for ethnic violence which will lead to a civil war.

(Ariyaratne 2001:2)

In 1957 S.J.V. Chelvanayakam, a leading Tamil politician, launched a ‘*satyagraha*’ (peaceful protest) demanding the repeal of the Official Languages Act (1956) and equal status for the Tamil language, which culminated in the first major anti-Tamil riots in the capital city Colombo, with many deaths and destruction of property owned by Tamils¹¹. Many Tamil nationals moved to the safety of northern part of the island where there was a larger Tamil presence (Sabaratnam 2001:181, Ram 1989:39-41, Narayan-Swamy 2002:13). The Official Language Act caused the Tamil language to be restricted to the North and East parts of the island, and those (Tamils) who lived in any other part of the island were subject to a compulsory requirement of undertaking a Sinhalese proficiency test within 3 years¹².

Educational standardisation

The 1960’s saw Sinhalese disenchantment over the difference in social status between Tamil nationals and Sinhalese that was directly linked to the level of education obtained by the Tamil nationals to secure a superior life style. As Vittachi states, “the extent of [Tamil] participation in public life had been far in excess of their numbers” (Vittachi 1958:18 cited in Bandara 2002:43). The increase (in effect) was due to the post-colonial promotion of free education,

¹¹ Ram (1989:41) claims that over 10,000 Tamils were evacuated from Colombo to Jaffna and another 12,000 were kept in camps “for their own safety.”

¹² This policy not only affected the Tamils but also other minority nationalities in Sri Lanka such as the Burghers (European descent), Muslims and those Sinhalese who were educated in the English language.

however, the expansion in all-round education, and the nascent presence of discrimination in favour of the Sinhalas, added to the pressures of competition at the higher level. The Tamils needed to look to higher and more specialized professional education (engineering, medicine and science) to stay ahead in the competition...

(Ram 1989: 46)

In 1971 the government reacted to Sinhalese national discontentment by creating a 'standardisation' policy to address this imbalance by marking down Tamil university applicants to allow the Sinhalese of rural areas, where education was not easily accessible, to compete more easily. The actual underlying principle of this rule meant that Tamil applicants had to gain higher marks in order to enter the education system; consequently, there was a rapid decline of Tamil students entering into universities. According to Ram (1989:47), the figures comparing pre-standardisation university entries with the post-standardisation period showed the numbers of entries by Tamil students into higher education were significantly reduced. The results of the employment statistics of 1980 exemplify that Sinhalese nationals occupied the majority of civil service, professional and technical positions in comparison to Tamil nationals. This is also reflected in the administration and management sectors (*ibid*).

Tambiah (1986) argues that three main factors contributed to the volatility of the political situation; the language restriction, free education system and the slow growth of the economy during this period. Tambiah correctly identifies that language has been central to the arguments raised in politics since post-independence, and language is highly relevant to both education and employment. The white-collar employment in the government sector became the ideal occupation for young people in the post-colonial period. Jaffna is a dry zone, meaning that there is extreme hardship involved in agriculture-related employment and so education and white-collar employment was the way for Tamil nationals to move out of poverty. The ethnic tension started from the beginning of the post-colonisation period when young people dreamt of becoming white-collar workers with middle-class social status and gain employment in the government sector. Tambiah states,

that is why it is no distortion to say that although the educated 'middle classes' amongst the Sinhalese and Tamils may not actually participate in the rioting – violence and thuggery is the play of the urban poor, the footloose and the displaced – it is in their bosom that the ethnic conflict incubates.

(Tambiah 1986:74-5)

The Sri Lankan economy was not growing at a sufficient rate to accommodate the emerging educated youth with meaningful employment, and with impending unemployment, a new generation grew up with unfulfilled expectations and bitter views of the future (ibid:55).

Sinhalese became the official language of administration but education in schools (both primary and secondary) and in universities both Sinhalese and Tamil continued as separate mediums, with English used as a subsidiary language. The separation based on language distanced the two ethnic groups in the same educational establishments or in separate language-based schools. The reduced social contact between the young turned "...into enmity and confrontation, and to create distrust, dislike and fear..." (Tambiah 1986: 76)

The first casualties of the emerging Sinhalese nationalism were the Tamil nationals of Indian origin, who were born in Sri Lanka. The Ceylon Citizenship Act no. 18 (1948) demanded proof of eligibility for citizenship through descent or registration. This can be identified as the first instance of state discrimination against the Tamil nationals (Ram 1989).

Causes of Discontent

The stable birth and death rates changed rapidly during late 1940's primarily due to the usage of western medicines (Somasundaram 1998). The increase in population was evident in the urban areas (e.g. Colombo) and the South West of the island. In order to accommodate the growing population the government initiated a relocation programme in 1953 to distribute the population evenly throughout the island and avoid any centralised or dense growth in urban areas. The programme was known as the Peasants Colonisation Scheme, which relocated the urban poor of all ethnic groups into dry zone¹³ areas of the North East of the island (Manogaran 1987, Somasundaram 1998). The majority of these relocated people were Sinhalese, but Tamil nationals already inhabited the zones to which they were relocated, even if they were relatively sparsely populated.

¹³ The island of Sri Lanka is divided into dry and wet zones based on rainfall. The wet zones are fertile land easy to irrigate, unlike the dry zones, where water is often difficult to obtain. The government has addressed this issue by building a number of irrigation facilities and man-made lakes.

The Tamil nationals believed that ‘Tamil speaking’ areas must belong to them, a notion of regional exclusivity not shared by Sinhalese nationals or the Sinhalese government¹⁴.

The Tamils perceive the influx of Sinhalese as a threat to the integrity of their ‘traditional homeland’ where they want to retain their voting majority, control over their own affairs and cultural identity, if not, at least the names of their villages.

(Somasundaram 1998:32)

The Sri Lankan economy worsened in the 1970s for two main reasons. First, the government of the day decided to follow a policy of ‘self-sufficiency’ creating adverse international trade terms, and secondly there was a decline in the agriculture sector especially the tea and coconut export markets. Tambiah (1986:55) argues that this decline was primarily based on Mrs Bandaranayake’s government nationalising industries with foreign investment, such as the tea industry. The mismanagement and incorrect economic decisions taken during this period were evident by the 1980s. The economic depression, along with the Sinhalese nation State’s anger, were focused on Tamil nationals as the “nominated enemy” as the Tamils were seen as being gainfully employed and prosperous against a backdrop of rising unemployment (ibid. Also, see Wilson 2000).

The 1970s also became an era of discontent for many Tamil youths in Jaffna and saw a rise in revolutionary organisations operating in Jaffna. These organisations mostly recruited disillusioned Tamil youths who saw no future prospects and were disappointed with moderate Tamil political leaders who engaged in ‘Gandhian’ style peaceful agitations for a political recognition that was not materialising. The Tamil politicians were adamant in following the same path of peaceful negotiations with the Sinhalese government that they had relied on for many years whereas many Tamil youths wanted both a radicalisation of policy and of methods. They shifted the demands from an equal language status to a newly initiated concept of an independent state of Tamil Eelam in areas they recognised as their traditional homeland in the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. Nadaraja Thangavelu, a well-known smuggler from the Velvetithurai

¹⁴ The second and third generations of Sinhalese and Muslim peasant farmers and their families living in these areas are often targeted by the LTTE, who see them as outsiders, and brutally murdered.

district¹⁵ of Jaffna, initiated the use of violent methods, and held meetings with other known criminals to plan their campaign of violence (Kalansooriya 2001). Yet, these incidents were of a minor scale when compared to the violence that was to follow in Jaffna. Against this backdrop the Tamil Tiger movement was born in 1972 with Vellupillai Prabhakaran as its leader. At the same time, the Tamil political parties united to create the Tamil United Front (TUF) that changed its name in 1976 to the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)¹⁶. They moved away from the equal language demand and promoted a single self-government in the North and the East as the only way out of their predicament (Ram 1989).

In 1977, disregarding the Tamil opposition, the Prime Minister, Sirimavo Bandaranayake not only enforced the 'Sinhalese only' ruling, but also proclaimed a special status to Buddhism as the state religion¹⁷. This action created a fresh phase of communal antagonism along religious lines.

In July 1983 the 'Black July' riots erupted following the response of the LTTE to the death of a close friend¹⁸ of Prabhakaran. The reprisal attack by the LTTE killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers¹⁹ (Narayan-Swamy 2002, Hyndman 1988). Many of the Sinhalese population retaliated with frenzied attacks upon Tamil citizens living in the city. This particular period in history is described by Bose (1998:96) "...was [of] crucial significance in exacerbating Sinhalese-Tamil polarisation, and in driving thousands of previously uncommitted young Tamils into armed struggle." Many young Tamil nationals who were displaced in refugee camps in South India and within Sri Lanka joined the LTTE. McGowan (1992:182 cited in Bose 1998:96) observes, "issues such as national self-determination, university admissions and equity in land settlement paled before basic desire for vengeance and the quest for safety in an independent Tamil

¹⁵ The LTTE leader Prabhakaran comes from the same district, Velvetithurai, is situated by the sea. He attended meetings and was recognised as an animated speaker (Kalansooriya 2001)

¹⁶ The Tamil political parties that united were the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress, and the Ceylon Workers Congress

¹⁷ The Sinhala Only rule contributed greatly to sympathy and support of Tamil militancy (Kalansooriya 2001).

¹⁸ Charles Anthony was known to be the closest friend Prabhakaran had. Prabhakaran's eldest son is named after this person.

¹⁹ The torture and killing of the 13 soldiers (all under the age of 21) happened in Tinnevely, Jaffna.

state.” Balasingham also noted that in 1984 the LTTE had a “rapid expansion and growth” (2003:76).

The early wars fought in Jaffna by various revolutionary groups were factional, with different parties fighting each other as well as the state, but they were unable to maintain their revolutionary status without overseas government assistance. In this instance the assistance came by way of the Indian government, who allowed them to be trained and nurtured in Southern India under the auspices of its government ministers and India’s secret service Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). RAW performed both a covert and overt role in the training and arming of Tamil youths for guerrilla type wars against the Sri Lankan government (Ram 1989, Narayan-Swamy 2002). The LTTE along with other revolutionary groups (three key revolutionary groups in Appendix I) received additional training by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) (Narayan-Swamy 2001). The fractional nature of the Tamil revolutionary groups continued and by the end of 1986, the LTTE took a strategic view to eliminate all opposition and promote themselves as the sole representative of the Tamil population, and the single revolutionary force for the state to deal with. By taking this action the LTTE was able to radicalise not only their own image as a violent revolutionary group but also the type of demands they made. A brief summary of the relationship between the LTTE, PLOTE and the TELO is given in Appendix I along with a list of other revolutionary groups that were operational during this period.

Present Political Situation: “no peace no war”

Following the anti-Tamil insurgency of 1983, the Indian government made the first peace interventions, with an Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) being based in Jaffna²⁰. Indian diplomats organised the signing of the peace accord whilst Prabhakaran attended talks in New Delhi ²¹ (Narayan-Swamy 2002), which heightened his animosity towards the Indian government (Pratap 2001). The IPKF enjoyed a warm welcome that did not last beyond their arrival, as they got involved in the conflict.

²⁰ The involvement of dealing with peace negotiations in Sri Lanka came at a time when Rajiv Gandhi was badly in need of a political uplift. At the time, it was believed that Rajiv Gandhi had received 50million US dollars to support a Swedish arms deal, raising many questions in the Indian governments tarnishing Rajiv Gandhi’s image.

²¹ Prabhakaran was returned to Jaffna in August, almost after a month of being held.

Further, the Sinhalese opposed the Indian intervention in what was seen as an internal Sri Lankan political matter (Narayan-Swamy 2002:248). The unpopular and controversial agreement between the Indian and Sri Lanka governments was finally dissolved in 1989 with the newly elected Sri Lankan government offering a unilateral ceasefire to the LTTE and inviting them to discussions on the future of the island.

Since then there has been many failed peace talks, at times resulting in temporary ceasefires. Often these talks would collapse due to LTTE being dissatisfied with the progress and actively disengaging from the talks, plunging the country back into civil war. A chronology of events given in Appendix 2 illustrates all the peace talks that have taken place to date.

On the 22nd February 2002 the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), which includes the Nordic countries of Norway, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, undertook the role of monitoring the cease-fire agreement signed by the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE²². However the Sinhalese view the SLMM as sympathetic to the cause of the LTTE and within February 2002 a new government agency was created titled 'the Secretariat for Coordination of the Peace Process' (SCOPP) to facilitate the peace-making process²³. Its mandate includes liaising with the SLMM and the monitoring of ceasefire agreement (CFA) between the LTTE and the State (Global IDP 2002 and <http://peaceinsrilanka.com>, accessed 10.9.2007).

In 2003, as part of the Peace Process a Sub-committee on Gender Issues (SGI) was created with representation from a government appointed group of feminist academics and a group of LTTE women combatants, which was suspended by 2005 due to the

²² The SLMM website claims "The cease-fire in Sri Lanka is not a result of a memorandum of understanding (MOU), but that of The Cease-fire Agreement (CFA), signed formally by the GOSL and LTTE" (accessed on 24.1.04).

²³ It is also interesting to note that the LTTE has been 'active' during the ceasefire period. An example of this can be seen in the summary of recorded complaints and violations from all districts compiled and published by the SLMM for a period of 8 months from 1st January 2003 to 1st September 2003 . Further the activities include forceful recruitment of children, and gathering of firearms. One of the most frequent activities is the recruitment of children into the ranks of combatants by the LTTE. UNICEF has identified a large percentage of children who have been forcibly conscripted into the ranks of the LTTE (UTHR: 10.5.02, SPUR: downloaded 20.9.01: Harrison: 2003). The figures referred to by the SLMM show an incredible 537 child recruitments, which does show that there has been no active policy change in the LTTE where child soldiers are concerned.

collapse of peace talks and the lack of autonomy of women from both groups. (see del Viso 2005, Harris 2004, <http://www.peaceinsrilanka.com>, accessed 20.10.2007,)

The major political parties hold differing views towards the struggle with the LTTE. Ariyaratne (2001) describes how Chandrika Bandaranayake-Kumaratunga (People's Alliance Party) supported a strategy of a political solution that did not result in a military victory. The political deal is viewed as a tool to isolate and defeat the LTTE, and not a possibility of opening dialogue for peace. Ranil Wickramasinha (United National Party) drafted a framework for a 'unitary state and non-military approach' to be adopted towards the LTTE and stated in 1999 that he would begin discussions with the LTTE, even through a third party, for a negotiated settlement²⁴ (Ariyaratne 2001). The current President Mahinda Rajapaksa has invited the LTTE to the negotiating table, backed up with a militaristic assault in retaliation to the LTTE attacks upon the army and Sinhalese citizens²⁵ (International Alert: 17.4.2007). The daily situation in Jaffna remains tense as stated in the SLMM weekly reports with continuing killings and abductions (SLMM 2007)²⁶.

An Overview: The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Prabhakaran was born on 26th November 1954²⁷, and he personally identified with the Tamil youths who were disappointed by the lack of state reforms. This made it possible

²⁴ Ranil Wickramasinha was the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka from 9th December 2001 to 6th April 2004.

²⁵ From 19th November 2005 onwards Mahinda Rajapaksa held Presidency in Sri Lanka.

²⁶ SLMM weekly report 27 August – 2 September 2007 access 10.9.2007. The latest (September 2007) security measures in Jaffna require anyone over the age of 10 years to carry identity cards and all vehicles (including bicycles) to be registered with the government. All mobile phones will also need to be registered, however the registration process is difficult as the documents provided by the Sri Lanka Government are not in the Tamil language. Currently those who enter Jaffna (by air as there is no road link) are photographed before being issued with a temporary entry permit. They must return these permits and be re-photographed upon leaving Jaffna. Further, there are restrictions imposed on movements including those related to employment such as fishing (Sibernews 2007).

²⁷ Prabhakaran is the youngest of 2 sisters and 2 brothers from an educated lower middle class background. His mother, Vallipuram Parvathi, is known to be a deeply religious housewife. His father Tiruvenkatam Velupillai was a District land officer in the government's civil service, who adored his youngest son Prabhakaran and was very concerned with his average abilities relating to education. Due to this concern the father would take Prabhakaran along with him on his various postings around northern parts of the island including Batticaloa and Vauniya (Narayan-Swamy 2004:49).

for him to form the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) in 1972 and subsequently the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1976.

According to Ram (1989:47), the Tiger emblem portrays a roaring tiger with its paws stretched out in preparation to attack and signifies both guerrilla warfare and the rise of Tamils. Although the animal analogy is again seen in the LTTE's use of the word Tiger, it has a different symbolic meaning to the Sinhalese Lion as it does not represent the creation of a nation. The use of the tiger image by the LTTE is discussed later in this chapter; however, the everyday usage of the word does not refer to tigers but to leopards²⁸.

It is also believed to be the emblem of the historical South Indian Cholai kingdom, which is linked to ancient Tamil history in Jaffna through South Indian invasions (ibid). Hellman-Rajanayagam (1986:77) referred to in Sabaratnam (2001:256) claims that the function of the symbol represents the coming together of Tamils from Jaffna and Batticaloa²⁹. Narayan-Swamy (2002:52) on the other hand claims it to be the result of a particular fondness Prabhakaran had for Phantom comics, where the Phantom wears a skull ring whilst fighting evil men and always is one-step ahead of his captors.

In Ram's (1989) book *Sri Lanka, the Fractured Island* he clearly suggests that the LTTE focussed on an area where there had not been any previous political dynamism or extreme violence. Somasundaram also notes that, "the Tamil youth dedicated themselves wholeheartedly and with full force of their youthful energies to the historical task of saving their threatened community, of regenerating the Tamil nation" (Somasundaram 1998:97).

²⁸ The Tamil word for tiger is *Puli* and leopard is *Si-ru-thai*. The LTTE uses many animal names for its combatant units e.g. *Karup Puli* meaning the Black Tigers, the elite suicide squad. Further, Sri Lanka is not known to have had tigers, but they do have leopards in its jungles. Both Sinhalese and Tamils often use the word tiger to describe a leopard. The misuse of the word tiger and leopard is generally attributed to the lack of a correct linguistic understanding of the two English words in relation to the animals.

²⁹ Amongst Tamil nationals, those from Jaffna district are generally viewed as superior to other Tamils in Sri Lanka. There is currently a breakaway group of LTTE combatants led by Col. Karuna in Batticaloa region. The cause for its separation is believed to be the Jaffna combatants being treated more favourably within the organisation than those of Batticaloa. The Sri Lankan army is using this split to their advantage by providing support to Col. Karuna and his breakaway group to cause further disharmony against the rest of the LTTE.

In the initial stages, the LTTE carried out similar guerrilla attacks to the other Tamil revolutionary groups such as PLOTE, TELO etc. (A list of the main Tamil revolutionary groups is given in Appendix 1 table 1). The revolutionary groups had a membership of some 2 to 3 thousand trained in both Sri Lanka and India and had the ability to mobilise many more should the need occur (Narayan-Swamy 2002:186. Also, see O'Balance 1989, Manogaran 1987, Hellman-Rajanayagam 1994 and Wilson 2000).

The revolutionaries favoured attacks on police stations and army patrols. In addition, the robberies of state-run banks were greatly favoured, which provided some of the funding for the group's activities. Other sources included a local tax system on a number of goods such as cigarettes and liquor and combatants further collected money from house to house known as 'funds'. It is arguable whether the funds were given willingly or under fear and duress. However many civic citizens support and assist the rebel groups and by doing so incur the wrath of the armed forces which often results in their deaths³⁰ (Narayan-Swamy 2002:187).

The LTTE used a method widely known as '*Lamp posting*', a method of public execution to eliminate individuals amongst the civil population believed to be informants of the state, which was very effective in instilling fear amongst the civic citizens in Jaffna³¹. The act of *lamp posting* also conveys a message of deterrence to others who may consider being disloyal to the LTTE (Thiruchandran 1999, Narayan-Swamy 2002). The LTTE 'mastered suicide bombing' and soon gained notoriety as a deadly revolutionary groups. The LTTE also film and photograph their major operations, which is characteristic of contemporary revolutionary groups³².

The LTTE raised funds through the Tamil diaspora living in Canada, England and Australia. However, the latest Anti-Terrorism legislation in Britain (that came to effect on 19th February 2001) outlawed the LTTE and its funds were frozen. Though the LTTE no longer raises funds openly in the UK, Canada and other western countries, they have

³⁰Some of the civic women I interviewed confirmed that their assistance was interpreted by the state run army as collaborating with the revolutionaries.

³¹ Lamp posting is a form of punishment metered out to collaborators and criminals by the LTTE. The suspected person is tied to an electric pole (lamp post) and shot in the head, generally with a single bullet (Narayan-Swamy 2002)

³² Furthermore these video recordings are used as propaganda material and are readily available to be purchased along any of the high street stores in Jaffna and Vanni.

devised a new system whereby extremely polite and well-mannered young Tamil men visit homes of the Tamil diaspora and request that a large sum of money should be given to the LTTE as a bond to develop war-torn Jaffna. The sum of money is negotiable up to a point, and assurances are given that the bond will be repaid in full by the future LTTE Tamil State (information received through a Tamil contact, details withheld for safety reasons). The LTTE is also involved internationally in credit card fraud, which became headline news in the UK in April 2007. The change in legislation also changed the face of the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lanka government from a national to a global level of conflict. The LTTE is essentially involved in a nationalist struggle but they are aware that in the future they will be dealing with the international community and are increasingly aware of the international dimensions to their conflict (Uyangoda 2003).

In her book *The Will to Freedom* Adel Balasingham (the wife of Anton Balasingham the political theoretician of the LTTE) refers to the complex nature of the LTTE's revolutionary struggle.

The national liberation organisation conducts its struggle on the politico-military level. In an armed revolutionary struggle for political freedom, the military and the political aspects are inextricably inter-linked. The military struggle becomes the very instrument to achieve the political cause of liberation

(Balasingham 2003:75).

Within these issues, she discusses how the social dynamics based on repression are able to attract people to the LTTE revolutionary movement (also see Bose 1994). One such person was Anton Balasingham, grounded in both Marxism and Leninism. He was invited to join the LTTE in 1979 to teach ideological classes, although the LTTE is neither a Marxist nor a Leninist organisation (Narayan-Swamy 2002). After joining the movement, he became the LTTE's theoretician and chief negotiator. Although Prabhakaran was a practical man with no interest in political ideologies of Marxism, they shared a passion for Tamil nationalism that made them very close companions.

The LTTE's major tactic is 'hit and run'. They often justify their actions through the claim of acting in self-defence. This argument is frequently used for revenge killings against the State's armed forces. Pratap claims that Prabhakaran once stated, "we don't want Eelam on a platter. We will fight and win Eelam" (ibid:94).

Thousands of my boys have laid down their lives for Eelam. Their death cannot be in vain. They have given their life for this cause, how can I betray them by opting for anything less than Eelam?

(Prabhakaran interviewed in Pratap 2002:95).

Thus, the usage of violence appears to be a tool to achieve the objective of a Tamil nation state of Eelam.

The LTTE has a respectful view of death in battle, which can be argued as being manipulative due to the portrayal of such deaths as martyrdom, (as discussed in detail in Chapter Five). In the LTTE movement, there is a pragmatic approach to killings and assassinations that are considered as part of the revolutionary process. The very first political assassination (of Jaffna's Mayor Duraiyapah on 27th July 1975) is credited to Prabhakaran (Narayan-Swamy 2002:56)³³.

In the early stages the LTTE only targeted the Sri Lankan armed forces (Kalansooria 2001) but then spread to Sinhalese villagers in rural farming areas in the northeast³⁴. The attacks then spread to Colombo and the targets became more high profile, with the then President Premadasa³⁵ (2nd January 1989 to 1st May 1993) and a number of cabinet ministers assassinated in successive suicide bombings

The greater claim for notoriety by LTTE is in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi on Indian soil³⁶. The act committed in 1991 by a woman suicide bomber had until recently been denied by the LTTE. For many years, the only admittance was in private, made by Anton Balasingham who referred to the incident as a "historical blunder" (Pratap: 2002) and a public apology was made in 2006. However, the attack on Gandhi prompted India to close down and outlaw LTTE operations in India. The attack further led Indians to

³³ It is believed that Prabhakaran used an old rusted revolver and bullets made out of matchstick tips to carry out this assassination (Narayan-Swamy 2002:56).

³⁴ These areas also forms part of governments redistribution of population to Northeast sector of the island, which the LTTE viewed as their land. The LTTE is known to have used knives to commit murder, especially in Sinhalese villages. This may be because it is easier to kill unarmed and untrained civilians (children and babies included) with a knife than wasting expensive bombs or bullet to accomplish the same result of taking lives.

³⁵ President Premadasa was in power from 2nd January 1989 to 1st May 1993.

³⁶ Dhanu, a woman combatant from the LTTE suicide squad known as the Black Tigers killed Rajiv Ghandi. She detonated the bomb whilst bending down to touch the feet of Rajiv in the accepted customary manner of showing respect among Indians.

view the LTTE as a dangerous and untrustworthy group of militants rather than a desperate collective of innocent victims (Pratap: 2002).

Impact of Violence

Between 1989 and 1995, Sri Lanka plunged into a civil war after several failed peace talks with distrust, hostility and violence against each other's ethnic communities (Thiruchandran 1999). This fear has been manipulated by the ruling government, which contributed to a state of confusion amongst the people. The armed forces and the State police misinterpreted the inactivity and the silence of the Tamil civic population as support for, and collaboration with the LTTE (ibid). The reality of such behaviour (often unrecognised) is that their silence and inactivity is the result of intimidatory pressure on the population by the LTTE.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act 1979 contributed to the legalisation of State violence against Tamil nationals. Under the Act, a suspected person can be held incommunicado, with no access to legal representation or trial, for a period of 18 months and confessions obtained through torture are accepted as admissible evidence. Many indiscriminate arrests took place amongst Tamils and relatives were taken into custody by the armed forces until the wanted people gave themselves up (ibid). There were many violations of human rights³⁷.

Details of violence committed by the State's own armed forces; the IPKF and the LTTE are widely documented and published by international agencies such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The brunt of such violence is borne by the citizens by way of beatings, rapes, disappearances and murders, contributing to ethnic polarisation and mutual fear.

³⁷ One such tale conveyed to me by an interview participant, how a Tamil peasant farmer was put inside a sack and thrown into an open fire in front of his wife and children by the Sri Lanka army. The child, who is now a grown woman, has said she "saw the sack dance in the fire." This was not an isolated incident. There were many more equally horrifying and violent tales.

Women in Jaffna's Tamil society

Background

A few English language texts reflect on Tamil ethnic identity in ancient Jaffna, but these often overlook the roles played by women. In her book, *Ideological Factors in Subordination of Women* Thiruchandran (1993) focuses on the historical roles of Tamil women. However, the specifics of gender discussed focus more on Tamil women of Southern India rather than Jaffna. This was not problematic, as the related identity between the two groups of women has made the text relevant to both. With such limitations, it was exciting to discover literature relating to a matriarchal society with a matrilineal social structure in Jaffna c.2000BC. Within this socio-cultural structure, Tamil women had a great deal of autonomy and social freedom (Rasanayagam 1926³⁸, Navaratnam 1959), and were free from the moral sanctions that were to follow a few centuries later.

Women enjoyed great freedom and liberty. Young men and women met each other freely in pleasure gardens, in groves and in the fields where the girls were engaged in guarding the crop. They fell in love and later married³⁹ with consent of the parents

(Rasanayagam 1926:170).

The period in reference to this text is claimed to be the *Sangam*⁴⁰ period c.2347 B.C, a time of enlightenment in ancient Jaffna, where women were encouraged to develop their

³⁸ Rasanayagam (born in 1870 and died in 1940) wrote *Tamils of Ceylon* in 1926. Since then his work has been criticised for inaccuracies. With such criticisms in mind I have only included his work where I can corroborate it against other works, such as Navaratnam (1959) or Thiruchandran (1998). However Rasanayagam's work must be recognised for the elements of nationalist ethics in Tamil Historical literature produced at a time when there were none written.

³⁹ Marriages of this type were known as 'kalavu' and were widely practiced amongst Tamils during early historical times.

⁴⁰ The *Sangam* period described by Rasanayagam (1926) refers to circa 2347 B.C. and Thiruchandran (1998) refers to the same period as AD 100-300. Whilst the accuracy of dates for their period has been debated, Thiruchandran (1998:37) states this debate has now been settled, which reflected in her writing as AD 100-300 and in Rasanayagam as 2347 B.C. This variation may be due to Rasanayagam book published in 1926, prior to the debate being resolved. The first preserved literatures of Tamil areas are known as *Sangam* literature, also spelt as *Cankum*. The poems themselves were written by citizens of varying social backgrounds with twenty-eight women and four queens amongst women writers and amongst the male writers including kings, chieftains, and various carpenters, blacksmiths and artists (Thiruchandran 1998:37).

minds and engage in education. However, the matrilineal cultural practice may have predated the records of the *Sangam* era (Rasanayagam 1926:171, Thiruchandran 1998:37). It is not known what precise social changes occurred that ended the matrilineal socio-cultural system and gave way to the patrilineal society that is seen to date.

After the *Sangam* period, a clear division was seen separating women into two groups, those who stay within the confines of home, *Kula Makal*, meaning ‘women of the family’, and *Vilai Makal*, those who are ‘available for a price’(Thiruchandran 1998:23). The role of the *Kula Makal* became more focused then with an added dimension of religious fervour elevating women to a pious social role and at the same time reducing their sexuality to procreation purposes and a passive submission to the domination of males (ibid). Thiruchandran however does not address the issue of this social separation creating moral social hierarchies amongst women. I would argue that the piety attributed to the female body, at the cost of its’ sexuality, was the start of the perception of women in the domestic sphere as morally virtuous, meaning ‘good’ – as opposed to those women engaged in sexual activities being seen as morally decadent, and as ‘evil’. Therefore, women who were engaged in sexual activity fell into the category of *Vilai Makal*, women who were seen as being available for a price, and were viewed as evil temptresses, set against the good and pious wife⁴¹.

Colonial and post-colonial eras

The separated social roles played by women in the domestic sphere and the public sphere continued until the colonisation by the Europeans. The male consciousness and the masculinity of colonisation contributed to Tamil conservative ideology forming a new social identity for Tamil women in the community in the 19th century. Thiruchandran (ibid: 109) claims that female roles were idealistically feminised, in

⁴¹The separation of women in society into either good or evil further created new words to describe women who are engaged in the sexual appeasement of men. “Prostitution had become institutionalised with a stigma on the women who were socially marginalised with derogatory names” (Thiruchandran 1998:24. also see Kersenboom 1987). Names such as ‘*Paratai*’ meaning prostitute; ‘*Vilai Matu*’ meaning women available for a price; ‘*Poruppendir*’ women who are paid materially with goods; ‘*Kanikaiyar*’ meaning courtesan and ‘*Potumakal*’ meaning morally loose common women. Within these sexualised groups of women there emerged a secondary group containing ‘*Ill Paratai*’ the concubines, and ‘*Seri Paratai*’ meaning women from slum dwellings that accommodated any paid customers (ibid).

which rigid moral behaviour was considered the only acceptable social norm for Tamil women. Interestingly much of the prescribed normative behaviour imposed on Tamil women was drawn from Victorian morality, with the bodies of women being turned into sites of male moral consciousness.

Female gender construction in Sri Lanka is full of paradoxical complexities. On one hand, women of high socio-economic status have made considerable strides towards emancipation; on the other, lower class women are defined by cultural boundaries that have not changed for generations. Women from middle or upper classes backed with a strong English education provided a fertile ground for creating a women's movement in Sri Lanka during the latter part of colonial rule through to the early postcolonial period. Jayawardane and de Alwis (2002:246) describe the women's movement as being "...a broad based movement that encompasses a variety of organisations and groups that have arisen out of different struggles and conflicts, at different historical moments". For example, women succeeded in winning the right to vote in 1931 despite adverse male comments such as "Do not throw pearls before swine, for they will turn and rend you...[...]...what suits European women will not suit us"⁴² (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:0).

The women of the Women's Franchise Union (WFU)⁴³ are particularly remarkable as they were not militant (in comparison to British and Indian women's movement), but part of the conservative elite in Colombo. Their role should be recognised not only for their active participation in obtaining the vote for women, but also for the fact that they were "the first autonomous, multi-ethnic women's organisation in Sri Lanka that was founded with the sole purpose of claiming *their* political right..." [my italics] (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:247)⁴⁴.

⁴² This comment was made by Sir P.Ramanathan as cited in Special Commission on the Constitution, Oral Evidence, Vol.1, 30 November 1927pp 248. The full reference of which is St Mathew chapter 7 verse 6, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you" cited in de Alwis and Jayawardena (2001:10)

⁴³ More information on the movement can be found in de Alwis M and K. Jayawardena, (2001) *Casting Pearls: the Women's Franchise Movement in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, Social Scientist Association.

⁴⁴ Their confidence was reflected in their conduct as seen by Agnes de Silva, the leader of the WFU delegation who remarked, "w]e went in the spirit of crusaders and answered the questions in an inspired manner. Lord Donoughmore asked if we wanted Indian Tamil women labourers on the estates to have the vote. I replied certainly, they are women too. We want all women to have the vote" (Tambiah 2002:427).

The Donoughmore commission (1927) made recommendations on engaging the “...population in the election of Ceylonese to the Legislative Council, as well as to devise a constitution that would give substantial power to the Ceylonese representative in the council to govern the country” (Manogaran 1987:34). It recommended that the vote be given to all women aged 30 and over but upon implementation this became 21 years of age to broaden the basis of political power across both ethnic groups (Jayawardena 1992:128-9, Tambiah 2002:427).

Women have generally entered politics in Sri Lanka because of the death of a male relative such as a husband or a father. The best example of this was the political engagement of the world’s first female Prime Minister, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranayaka, who succeeded her assassinated husband, S.W.R.D. Bandaranayaka. Jayawardena (1992:129) refers to this pattern of female entry into the male world of politics as “inheriting, as it were, the male mantle of power,” which could be argued was the only way of entering the masculine world of politics and state governance in a postcolonial era. Mrs. Bandaranayaka’s victory gave many women confidence to enter the patriarchal public arena. This dynastic approach was further seen when Mrs Bandaranayaka’s daughter (Chandrika) also entered the political arena. This is reflective of many other countries (e.g. India and the Nehru family; Pakistan and the Bhutto family) where elite women have spearheaded political change (see Minault 1989).

Tamil women with influence all resided in Colombo, a progressive modern society when compared to Jaffna, a city still steeped in patriarchal culture and values. As noted by Tambiah (2002), Jayawardena and de Alwis (2002), the concept of modernity was embedded in Sri Lanka’s socialism. It is the privileged and educated minority of women that have led social change. Their very education and idealism “...contributed to the socializing of women into roles that were only superficially different from those of traditional society” (Jayawardena 1992:136).

It is unfortunate that those most in need of pragmatic social change were overlooked in the march towards progress. Women of rural areas and the non-elite who lived in urban areas (both Tamil and Sinhalese), were committed in their demands for social change and female recognition, but their lives were still dictated and controlled by hegemonic masculine practices.

Sri Lanka is thus an interesting example of a society in which women were not subjected to harsh and overt form of oppression, and therefore did not develop a movement for women's emancipation that went beyond the existing social parameters. It is precisely this background that has enabled Sri Lanka to produce a woman prime minister, as well as many women in the professions, but without disturbing the general patterns of subordination

(Jayawardena 1992:136).

The number of Tamil women who have entered politics since the postcolonial era is limited. Tamil women have historically been supporters of their husbands or sons who were the carriers of the cause. During the early postcolonial era, Tamil women in Jaffna have never been in leading positions of any political struggle which is reflective of their social position, and their relationship to the struggle or the cause was through their secondary roles to masculine politics by way of engaging in peaceful protests known as *satyagraha* (Maunaguru 1995:160).

However, a number of Tamil women c.1920 made political statements with public criticism of the patriarchal state system⁴⁵. De Alwis and Jayawardena (2001:56) describe these women as "professional independent women [who] were able to speak out loud and clear." Tamil women conducted their activities through writing articles to national newspapers on gender equality (ibid). This kind of non-confrontational but effective activity is reminiscent of the maxim of '*the pen is mightier than the sword*' because they were forthcoming with their approach and criticisms⁴⁶. The first Tamil woman to enter the State Council in 1932 was a popular figure who lasted a decade in that role⁴⁷. From

⁴⁵ A journalist named Mangalammal Masilamany, a doctor Nallama Sathyavagiswara Aiyar and a writer Meenachi Ammal Natesa Aiyar. Of all of these women, Masilamany was the most vociferous, for instance in regards to the issues of women and marriage she stated, and "Marriage is not the end result of a woman's life." Dr Nallama Sathyavagiswara Aiyar became the first Tamil woman to practice medicine in Sri Lanka (de Alwis and Jayawardena 2001:57)

⁴⁶ The maxim '*the pen is mightier than the sword*' is legendary in Sri Lankan history with a story of E.W. Perera, a nationalist minded lawyer from the 'National Congress Party' carrying a letter to the Queen of England requesting independence from Britain. The letter is believed to have been hidden in his shoe for the fear of it being confiscated by the governing authorities in Sri Lanka. Since independence the schoolchildren have always been taught that the "*pen is mightier than the sword*" and much can be achieved through non-violent means.

⁴⁷ Naysum Saravananuttu joined the State Council from Colombo North Seat that she kept for 10 years. After many years, Ranganayaki Padmanathan was appointed as a replacement for her dead brother in Pothuvil district in 1980. In 1989, Rasa Manohari Pulendran was nominated in place of her murdered husband. From her re-election in 1994, she became the first Tamil woman Minister in Sri Lankan government, in charge of the Minister of Education.

1942 to 1980, there has been no Tamil female representation in the government; 1994 saw the first Tamil woman as a government minister in charge of the Education Department. These culturally imposed limits were exacerbated by the assassination of Sarojini Yugeswaran, the mayor of Jaffna in 1997 – believed to have been carried out by the LTTE – which reduced the number of political appointments for women in politics⁴⁸.

According to the Human Development Report, women in Sri Lanka are a “model for developing countries” (Tambiah 2002:428). They have some of the highest literacy levels (83.1%) and female life spans (74.2 years) amongst developing countries.

The same report records that the female fertility rate have dropped, due to the number of females entering higher education and a rise in the average age of women at marriage (25.2 years) (Women and Men in Sri Lanka, A Report, Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo 1995, cited in Tambiah 2002:428). These figures reflect the State’s commitment to welfare issues during the postcolonial era, which created a Women’s Bureau and a Ministry for Women’s Affairs, along with a constitutional guarantee of equality and the adoption of a Women’s Charter.

Nevertheless, these achievements:

...do not necessarily mean empowerment of women in terms of greater participation in the decision making process

(Tambiah 2002:428).

Tambiah argues that it is still difficult for women to enter public spaces hence women’s representation in the labour market is still half that of males. This significant difference can be explained by the gender construction in a society that sees women’s roles as primarily being wives and mothers and is central to the nationalist discourse of the late colonial era and its heavy reliance upon the postcolonial female identity (de Alwis 1998a referred to in Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:258).

Women of Sri Lanka (regardless of ethnicity) act as primary carers in families for the children and the elderly as is common in many other societies. In addition to these roles

⁴⁸ Sarojini Yugeswaran was a widow of former Member of Parliament in Jaffna who was assassinated. Her own assassination was allegedly committed by the LTTE for her calling for an end to the culture of violence that was taking place in Jaffna and for her election affiliation with the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), whom the LTTE considered as one of its enemies. (Tambiah 2002:434).

in the domestic sphere, many women are compelled to seek employment, which may not be in the formal economy, and so not recorded in official statistics (Tambiah 2002:428). Women are tied to a moral code of conduct, which unites all women in Sri Lanka and overlooks their ethnic identity.

The do's include chastity, modesty, servility, self-sacrifice, and confinement to home, preoccupation with children, husband, relations, and husband's friends, not to mention looking after his property. There were also several don'ts including loud talk, laughing, running, idling and keeping the company of independent (therefore bad) women

(Jayawardena 1986:23 referred to in Tambiah 2002:249).

The women's socialisation process that takes place at home constructs a culturally acceptable female identity.

These ideas are then internalised and reproduced from generation to generation. Education has done little to change these attitudes and perceptions, and all along had been a powerful reinforcing factor operating as an agent to socio –cultural reproduction, legitimising gender-role stereotypes

(Ibid).

This reinforcement of gender roles also restricts women's activities in public spaces, where women's representation in decision-making roles or in political activism is often thwarted and at times discouraged by the men in their families.

During the past two decades, there has been a notable change in women's social recognition, with the Covenant for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (1981) and the Women's Charter (1992). In 1994, the existing colonial laws regarding the age of consent and marriage were changed, and incest was criminalised (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:255). It is clear that the influence of a few progressive women changed much in society for all women.

An anti-feminist backlash was seen in the mid-1980s. Women who wished to change discrimination were accused of being culturally misguided due to their westernised views and of failing to understand the freedom women in civic society have always had (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:257). Some feminists claim the reason behind society's change of attitude was the intrinsic tie of the role of women to masculinity.

Consequently

One of the reasons all males, including those of the left, refuse to support women's liberation is that they do not want to lose the benefits of participating in their homes as well as in society

(Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:257
in reference to Jayawardena and Kelkar :1989).

The gap has widened since the ethnic violence of 1983, prompting feminists to criticise the military and its handling of Tamil civic citizens. This action has further enraged the men in society, who are supported by the media, which has portrayed Sri Lanka feminists as "...dishonouring their country by publicising 'private' and local problems internationally" (ibid:263). They accused the feminists of Sri Lanka of not collaborating in the 'nationalist' agenda and exposing the 'private' matter of ethnic violence to the world.

An overview of modern Tamil women in Jaffna

Jaffna has a strong hierarchical caste-based social structure; for example, the landed gentry known as the *Vellala* are defined by a higher social position by the caste system (see Pfaffenberger 1982). Although there is a social link between the women of Jaffna and Southern India, there are some major differences between the women of Jaffna, the community in which they live, and South India. One such difference is seen in the hierarchical roles played by Brahmins. Whilst they are respected in both communities, the roles of the Brahmins of Jaffna are limited to attending to rituals in temples, whereas the Brahmins of South India hold a great deal of power in society and have imposed a very strict code of conduct for women (Subrahmanian 1996, Thiruchandran 1994 and 1993). Due to this hierarchical variation, the women of Jaffna have not suffered the same extreme socio-cultural conditions, and this has meant some freedom, albeit marginal, within the patriarchal social structure.

Women within the domestic sphere hold either an elevated social position, as *auspicious* women (married with children), or a lowly position, as *inauspicious* women (widowed and/or childless). In modern times Jaffna Tamil women have enjoyed a great deal of power within the confines of the home, but are dependent on their male family members whilst in public spaces. A woman who behaves in an assertive way in public spaces may

be criticised for her immodest behaviour. However women with a lack of social capital are restricted to seeking employment away from domestic boundaries, and are aware of and negotiate their roles in public spaces. At the onset of war, Tamil women in Jaffna renegotiated this identity, without straying too far from its core patriarchal values. Thiruchandran (1998:79) states that those who do not follow the existing norms are seen as the Other, which includes women who practice various forms of Christian faiths. Such women, though seen as the Other, are not totally excluded from society, due to a shared hegemonic identity based on ethnicity, language and culture. This invokes a sense of belonging to the Tamil nation state, and a consequent nationalistic identity. This has prevented the creation of an exclusive religious value-based subculture for Christian-Tamil women. The absence of any politicisation of religion has assisted the LTTE in demanding a traditional homeland rather than a Hindu-based identity.

The opening of a university in Jaffna in 1974 contributed to the development of a political consciousness amongst Tamil women. The women of the university, such as Maunaguru and BP (one of the civic participants in this thesis), were founding members of the 'Women's Progressive Association'. Their aim was to raise awareness amongst both their male and female peer groups who met up for weekly meetings to discuss feminist literature. They also included those outside the campus and introduced a 'Women's Study Circle' to engage with a wider peer base in Jaffna. The Association and the Study Circle, with the support of the faculty, were immediately successful (Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002:255 in reference to Maunaguru's unpublished paper). Unfortunately, the article by Jayawardena and de Alwis (2002) does not go beyond the beginning of the Association and Study Circle, however through my research interviews I am able to confirm that the groups were forced to dissolve under escalating violence that made it impossible for them to meet and discuss social issues. The group is now scattered around the world, barring a very small number still residing in the country that pursue an alternative form of political activism amidst the ongoing conflict.

The Women and the LTTE

The Tamil women of Jaffna found themselves highly exposed during the periods of war, as the LTTE guerrilla style fighting made it difficult for these civic women to be distinguished from the combatant women (Ram 1989). This also meant many civilians were tortured, raped and murdered as suspected LTTE combatants or supporters and women who suffered sexual violence often committed suicide (Thiranagama, Hoole et al 1990). This was particularly poignant when the IPKF stated that they could not differentiate between the civic and combatant women. As one officer stated:

We are not checking women deliberately. You see, one day, when one of our officers was going on an open vehicle, there were two young women on the roadside. One waved while the other raised her skirt and fired an automatic gun at our officer and Jawan. Don't you think we have to check women? It is women who are carrying weapons strapped to their thighs and in their blouses.

(Thiranagama, Hoole et al 1990:316)

It is apparent that women were targeted due to their vulnerability with a clear disregard for the social norms concerning civilians and women in particular⁴⁹.

As discussed later in this thesis, the reasons for women joining the movement are both varied and complex, however the LTTE policy of recruiting women has brought criticism from some feminists. De Mel (2001), Maunaguru (1995), de Alwis (1998b) and Coomaraswamy (1996) state that it is the need for human resources within the LTTE that prompts them to recruit women rather than the promotion of women's social involvement and equality during a period of political conflict. This debate is analysed at length in Chapter Six. In 1984 the Tamil language magazine *Thalir* stated in their editorial the following,

Women are half of our population and hence their participation in various levels of armed struggle is extremely necessary. Women are the internal revolutionary force in any national movement. The level of participation of women in the Eelam struggle including armed combat will prove the revolutionary potentialities of Tamil women

(*Thalir* magazine 1984, issue 21:pp31 cited in Maunaguru 1995:163).

⁴⁹ Male soldiers (Hoole et al 1990) were giving women full body checks at sentry points manned by the IPKF soldiers. The continual targeting of women is cited as a contributing factor that led women to join the LTTE due to the lack of safety they felt as discussed in later chapters.

Whilst globally it has become a familiar sight to see women combatants in the 20th century armed forces (see Carreiras 2006, Elshtain and Tobias 1990, Enloe 1988, D'Amico 1998, Elshtain 1987 Klein 1998,) it is still a new concept for Tamil nationals to see Tamil women in this role. In other countries there have been clear examples of women warriors such as the Trung Sisters of Vietnam⁵⁰ (Eisen-Bergman 1975) and the Dahomey women warriors of West Africa (Edgerton 2000), however Tamil history does not have any similar militant female figures to draw upon (Coomaraswamy 1996). I suggest that this is a result of the dominance of patriarchal religious culture in Tamil society, as discussed earlier on in this chapter. The LTTE based its women combatants on the image of a masculine warrior in a feminine guise, and placed her in a role of a protector, combining the cultural ideology of the auspicious mother and the modern concept of the female warrior/combatant (see de Mel 2001, Jayawardena and de Alwis 2002, Maunaguru 1995 and de Alwis 1998b). The LTTE recognised Tamil women's potential beyond the narrowly constructed gender roles of reproducers to include them in a wider social context of a combatant. "...'woman' was not only considered to be a reproducer of male heroes, but also a fighter herself" (Maunaguru 1995:163). Women are trained to the same skill levels as men in guerrilla warfare, the paradoxical nature of this role is discussed throughout the thesis to establish the precise role that the women combatants now hold.

Summary

The Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups have co-existed for centuries. Post-colonial Sinhalese and Tamil national identities were based on language and religion. The basis of nationalism was Language, and this affected both Sinhalese and Tamils. The suppression of Buddhism under colonial rule became a tool used by Sinhalese nationalists, and Sri Lankan nationalism was based on Buddhism and Sinhalese ethnicity.

Nationalist identity politics linked of religion and language in a way that favoured the majority and excluded the minority. From the Sinhalese perspective, the issue of Tamil nationalism was viewed as a minority issue not a question for the whole nation. The Sinhalese ideology has assumed Sri Lankans to be Sinhalese-Buddhist, a view that

⁵⁰ Trung Trac and Trung Nhi known as the Trung Sisters led an army of 80,000 people to drive the Chinese out of Vietnam in 40 A.D. (Eisen-Bergman 1975:30-31).

excludes all other inhabitants. The view that the Sinhalese are the sole indigenous ethnic group of Sri Lanka translates into an ethnic polarisation that is substantiated by violence. The radicalisation of Tamils shifted demands from an equal language status to an independent state of Tamil Eelam, in the context of growing discontent of youth generally and romanticism about armed struggle.

The LTTE has developed a vision of a secular autonomous geographic state and responded that Tamils are a nation and not a minority. The fundamental belief amongst Tamil nationalists is that Tamil political interests can only be addressed through war and the construction of their own state, and the way that the government has treated Tamil nationals has only strengthened that belief.

Since the late 1970s Sri Lanka has endured a civil war, several failed peace talks, and distrust, hostility and violence between the ethnic communities. The LTTE targets changed from military personnel to Sinhalese nationals, and the elimination of anyone who criticises or disagrees with its practices. Thus the usage of violence appears to be a tool to achieve the objective of a Tamil nation state of Eelam, and the dominance of the LTTE within that state.

Many civic citizens support the rebel groups and incur the wrath of the armed forces that often results in their deaths. The State, the peacekeeping forces, and the LTTE itself have all committed acts of violence that have targeted civic society – beatings, rapes, disappearances and murders. One poignant story is that of the IPKF claiming not to be able to differentiate between civic and combatant women.

The entry of women into the political sphere did not challenge the patriarchal social fabric. Tamil women's historical autonomy changed to domesticity and subservience. In modern Jaffna civic and combatant women are inextricably linked to a patriarchal society constructed through hierarchies of caste, class and masculinities, which they have to continually negotiate.

The emphasis on women who stay within the confines of home, *Kula Makal*, elevates domestic women to a pious social role and reduces their sexuality to a passive submission to the domination of males. The women's socialisation process takes place at home and constructs a culturally acceptable female identity that is idealistically feminised, where rigid moral behaviour is the only acceptable social norm for Tamil

women. Further, domestic women are viewed as either auspicious women (married with children), or inauspicious women (widowed/childless).

Tamil women do not actively participate in decision-making, which is still in the hands of men (as discussed further in the Chapter Six), and it is difficult for women (who are also reluctant) to enter public spaces, including the political arena. This significant imbalance in female representation can be explained by the construction of gender by a society that sees women's roles as primarily being wives and mothers.

The LTTE combatant women have an image of a masculine warrior in a feminine guise, a role with the paradoxical nature of the protectoress, combining the cultural ideology of the auspicious mother and the modern concept of the female warrior. By this action, the status of Tamil women is raised from their traditional role of subservience. Against this backdrop, the combatant women of the LTTE are critically important to the success of the revolution. But does this promote female equality and empowerment? That is the central question of my thesis.

CHAPTER 2

ENTERING A TIGER'S LAIR: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN GATHERING DATA

Introduction

“In situations where the roots of conflict are deeply structural, the possibility of violence often restricts the methodological options open to the researcher” (Lee 1995:18). This statement highlights one of the issues faced in conducting this research in the Jaffna peninsula in March and October 2003. Methodological and ethical concerns are central issues for all theses; however, through my own fieldwork gathering data under violent socio-political conditions, difficult and dangerous for both the researcher and participants of the research, I have also gained an insight into the particular methodological and ethical issues such research raises.

The focus of this chapter is the many methodological issues that confront researchers conducting fieldwork in subject areas involving violent political conflict. My own field research experiences lie within this framework of concerns and I address specific issues of gaining access, the power that is held by the Gatekeepers to grant and withdraw access, and the issues of security of both the researcher and the participants and the data collected. There is a vast feminist literature addressing issues such as power in research, and concerns regarding representing ‘the Other’ which I have also drawn on. I also discuss the issue of language as a primary concern when interviewing combatants, given an incorrect usage of words may cause suspicion and even withdrawal of cooperation. Ethnic identity is also an influential factor, as it separates the researcher from the researched and this is examined through discussion of the legitimacy of conducting research in violent political conflicts where one’s ethnicity may be expected to indicate a loyalty to a particular regime. This line of inquiry includes consideration of questions such as how far ethnicity affects the data collected.

Power relations in conflict zones differ to those conducted in non-conflict zones. In conflict areas the cultivated relationships are riddled with relationship dynamics that influence the power relationships and the researcher is more dependent on others. I find that this dependency led to increased caution in the relationship interactions and increased awareness of the need not to offend the participants during the interview.

This chapter is divided into three sections consisting of Reflexivity, Interviews and Safety. Reflexivity, focuses on the researcher's position as a British-Sinhalese in the research, raising issues relating to presenting the Other and the dilemmas this particular research situation raises in relation to issues of objectivity and impartiality. The Interviews section addresses a range of issues, from planning to conducting interviews. The final section, Safety addresses three key components of safety in relation to this thesis, namely the safety of participants, the safety of the data gathered, and the researcher's own safety.

The in-depth biographical narrative interviews discussed in this chapter are from a small number of combatant women and civic women (15 in total), with the aim of gaining an insight into specific women's roles within the revolutionary organisation and the impact they have had on the women in civic society. Therefore this thesis is not a generalised study of whole of the LTTE movement, but impact upon widening the available knowledge.

The interviews were all conducted in the Jaffna and Vanni provinces, located in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. A selection of maps of the areas are provided in Appendix 9. At the time these interviews were conducted, Jaffna was returning to being a bustling township. The basic food items appeared on streets along with luxury items such as apples and grapes. Electricity, telephones and public transport were working as normal giving an impression of a returned normalcy to the town and its villages. This overall impression however is only on the surface. The street corners still had bunkers manned by soldiers with automatic weapons and State Army foot patrols were a regular sight.

Reflexivity

Researcher Identity, Positionality, and Empathy

The researcher location, positionality and identity has impacted deeply on the research conducted amongst the Tamil women of Jaffna. Throughout this chapter I have identified issues based on my dual Sri Lankan and a British identities. During the time spent in the field, I positioned myself within my British identity and actively distanced myself from my hegemonic Sinhalese identity. I took this decision with a view that being British would grant me a more favourable position of acceptance by the combatant women and simultaneously make me acceptable to the group and the Gatekeeper as I was seen as being impartial. The intricacies of a dual identity based on Britishness placed me outside of the struggle whilst my Sinhalese identity connected me to them through my hegemonic Sri Lankan identity. This was in line with Anthias (2002:512) argument of "...location and positionality are more useful concepts for [the] investigating process...". It did concern me that being an outsider with multiple identities but without a Tamil ethnic identity might make it harder to build trust with the LTTE.

My own fieldwork experience showed that being a student of a prestigious university that is viewed as progressive of acceptance by made it easier to be accepted by the Contact, the Gatekeeper and the LTTE. A common background in academia made the Gatekeeper aware of the importance of my research into the LTTE and to me personally, and as an outsider (researcher) I formed a potential voice for their struggle. Once contact was made with the Gatekeeper, and he had established my credentials and my loyalties, it became easier for me to be accepted.

In 1967 Becker wrote,

There is no position from which sociological research can be done that is not biased in one way or another.

(Becker 1967:245 cited in Hammersley 2000:61)

This highly insightful view became the foundation upon which I thought through my reflexivity. At the preliminary stage of planning the researcher can be clinical about how they wish to direct the whole of the research project. However once the researcher enters the actual field relationships develop. Blackwood (1996) states that the word 'friend' is often used amongst American field researchers to describe their participants. The word 'friend' emerges as a situation-specific word that describes relationships built in the field and the comfort that such relationships offer the researchers who are away from the home environment. Through these friendships the researchers gain a valuable understanding of the conflict they research. I found that the Gatekeeper and his wife located me as part of their family and I was accepted as a friend. They took it upon themselves to act not only as hosts but also as teachers of Tamil culture and as previously mentioned, as interpreters for the participants on some occasions.

The relationship between the Gatekeeper's family and myself as the researcher was built upon a common focus, that of the political struggle of Tamil people but with differing objectives, mine was focusing on an academic research and theirs was finding a voice for the suffering endured. This common aim also brought forth an empathy with the participants, as they became the face of the struggle. I had heeded Kondo's (1986) separation of 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. She claims that knowledge is obtained from a certain perspective and that understanding is based on culture, history and biography. My relationship with the Gatekeeper provided me with much-needed understanding. This relationship was reflected in Kleinman and Copp (1993:29) who claim that, "participants are the teachers and we are the students." The understanding was obtained by my constant questions requiring explanations of situations and behaviour that left little room for ambiguity.

I was always very aware that the enhanced status of residing with the Gatekeeper, who was viewed by the LTTE with a great deal of respect, enabled me to have a level of access and trust based on the Gatekeeper's extended connections.

The ethnographic experience is more than an identification of positionality or subjectivity; we occupy multiple positions and identities that transform over time, forcing us constantly to reconstruct who we are in relation to people we study.

(Blackwood 1996:55)

Based on the above I discovered that self-reconstruction located me within the Gatekeeper's family circle as a 'trusted' person. Trusted to live with the family; trusted to roam free in their home; trusted to see their interactions with other civic citizens and combatants of the LTTE. In a way, this kind of trust is historical in Sri Lanka and forms part of its customs, where strangers are welcomed and treated as part of a family. However I was surprised to discover this custom is still practiced in Jaffna, especially after many years of bitter civil war. They would organise their day around my needs and safety as they were concerned about me firstly as a British student of Sinhalese ethnicity and secondly as a female in a foreign country where the rules of equality are not as defined as in western countries. Moreover this custom was extended to someone who could have been a British Agent or Sinhalese spy. Being neither is irrelevant to this argument, however what remains is the result of such trust being bestowed upon a total stranger, as neither the Gatekeeper nor his family knew anything about me other than what I chose to tell them. I presume such kindness was previously extended to Schalk when he was conducting his research in Jaffna in 1990.

Some view Schalk's (1992) work on women combatants of the LTTE to be biased, as he became sympathetic to the LTTE cause. I do not share this view as I found (based on my experience) that Schalk has written quite an accurate description of the women of LTTE. Many who are critical of the women combatants and of Schalk have never met any women combatants in their own socio-political and geographical location. Not meeting the women in their own space often leads to alternative forms of representations that may not be accurate. One can question whether he was blinded to the harsh realities of the LTTE by being overly involved with his research topic, and those who were part of that topic. My own research visits illustrate that he is well known and highly regarded amongst the LTTE and its sympathisers. Was this 'high regard' then due to his inability to criticise the LTTE as a violent political organisation? Can I criticise those who placed their trust in me and accepted me so readily? These are hard questions but are recognised in other academic writing, such as Kleinman and Copp (1993:27) who argue, "...favouring intimacy over analysis also reflects the value we place on empathy, understanding the perspective of those we study through role taking".

It is perhaps inevitable that researchers tend to locate themselves within the research based on loyalties and relationships formed in the field⁵¹. Researchers are often challenged to ascertain where their sympathies lie in a conflict. The explanation given by researchers generally centres on being neutral in the setting as objective observers rather than engaged participants (see Gilmore 1991, Sluka 1990 referred in Lee 1995). The advantage of being neutral is the fact that the researcher stands outside “local categorical distinctions and boundaries” (Lee: 1995: 23). That said, there are occasions when claiming neutrality becomes problematic, as the researcher’s intentions are then questioned – especially in areas of high conflict, where social relations have little precedence (Gilmore 1991 referred to in Lee 1995). Peritore stated, “assertion of scientific objectivity or neutrality can be perceived as being naïve or as screening a hidden agenda” (1990:360 cited in Lee 1995:23). Complete neutrality is perhaps extremely difficult as it is impossible to be sympathetic in equal degrees to all parties engaged in the conflict (ibid).

There is an issue of empathy that a researcher needs to be aware of where there is the possibility of being drawn into a subject area. This may well be due to romanticising about or empathising with those that the researcher is researching which means we are unable to represent those we research without romanticising. This danger of romanticism / empathy can spill over into one’s own research. At times, I may be guilty of representing the participants in idealistic and romantic ways in my own research, which reclaims a romantic notion that suits my own social perspective, especially in representing an Other who is involved in danger and violence. Above all it is documented that to challenge the gender stereotyping of a patriarchal society may cause some romantic awe of the researched where, as Salazar(1991) claims, the participants

⁵¹ Related issues include political sympathies that researchers may bring with them to an issue. An example here is Moreno, recognised as the only sociologist ever to have played a participant observer role in a political struggle (Whyte 1984:31). In the late 1960’s Jose Moreno from Cornell University went to the Dominican Republic to research inter-village systems for his PhD study. A few days after his arrival in Santo Domingo an armed struggle ensued resulting in the city being taken over by the rebel group, to whom Moreno was sympathetic. He volunteered to work with them as a non-combatant, and “his dedication and abilities in organisation the supply of food and medical and health services for the people of the beleaguered city led him into a close working relationship with the rebel leaders” (Whyte 1984:31). When Moreno returned to university, he changed his research topic and “Faculty members on his committee agreed that a study of inter-village system could always be done, while major rebellions aimed at over throwing a government were relatively rare events” (ibid). Following his PhD, in 1970 he published a book based on the same titled *Barrios in Arms*.

are aware of their circumstances and actively take up issues to end their oppression. This notion clearly applies to the women combatants of the LTTE.

However I am a researcher who has an agenda to understand the women of Jaffna and especially those who become combatants. As the research developed, it has become difficult not to empathise to some extent with the women and the harrowing experiences they have undergone, whilst not agreeing with all of their political ideologies or objectives and struggling to develop a cognitive empathy with them⁵². “Researchers usually argue that participants’ immoral acts stem from a social or structural problem rather than individual failures in moral behaviour” (Kleinman and Copp 1983:39). I was aware that at this point I needed to defer any sympathy and understanding of the women’s plight (including that of the combatants) and arrive at my own findings. In a way my research is founded on this subtleness between attachment (empathy / sympathy) and detachment (neutrality).

Role of the Researcher in representing the Other through interviews

Many feminists confront with the dilemma of *how* to represent the Other (Russell 1996, Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996, Bola 1996, Ang-Lygate 1996). It is imperative to recognise the fundamental reasoning for conducting research of this nature, which in essence tries to give a voice to the Other that has been overlooked under masculine-orientated data gathering. Feminists argue that research conducted under the auspices of feminist research does not merely reflect and validate whatever the interviewees choose to say about their experiences but also supplies “a feminist critique and challenge to the way in which women’s experience is constructed under (hetero) patriarchy” (Wilkinson and Kitzinger 1996:573).

I would like to contribute to the debate of validating the researcher in the research by identifying the researcher’s positionality in the research. In some situations it may be appropriate for researchers to come from similar background as the participants, as the difference can enhance the resulting data. However this concept comes from a belief that social research is best obtained if the same ethnic group conducts the research, for

⁵² Kleinman and Copp (1993:38) define ‘cognitive empathy’ as “understanding why people think, feel, and act as they do”.

example a black researcher is best suited to conduct research on the black community, as the same racial group will be less inhibiting and more forthcoming with one of their own social group⁵³. Social science often deals with the non-ideal world where the researcher has to manage with the researched subjects as given. The interviewer has an effect on the responses received, either by the social characteristics of the interviewer impacting on the results in various ways, or by the expectations harboured by the interviewee about the interviewer (see Lee 1995, Collins 1980, Bradburn 1983). However Phoenix (1995) argues that,

...the strategy of matching interviewers and respondents on particular characteristics (such as gender and 'race') does not produce 'better' data. Indeed, since respondents are not positioned in any unitary way, it does not avoid the necessity for analysis of the ways in which wider social relations enter into the interview relationship"
(1995:70).

Following from the above it can be argued that had I been a Tamil national the women of the LTTE may have been more forthcoming with their life histories. However, my status as an 'Outsider' may have given rise to attempts to 'explain' their experiences in ways that were more productive, as is suggested by the primary and secondary interviews with both groups of Tamil women. They might otherwise have made incorrect assumptions regarding my level of knowledge about the issues they were explaining.

The issue of legitimacy directed me to a certain kind of behaviour when dealing with the revolutionary group. I found that I was distancing myself from my hegemonic background and embracing my British identity more, as I believed this would make me appear less hostile to those I was interested in interviewing. English language was perceived as much less prejudicial even though this had to be conveyed through a translator. I found that each single ethnic group I laid claim to brought specific socio-political differences to my research. My British passport helped me to gain access far more easily than my hegemonic origin of being Sinhalese, however through the latter I had a related identity to the researched Other⁵⁴.

⁵³ The debate can be extended to intersectionality of class etc, but the focus here remains as race or ethnicity.

⁵⁴ Albeit the 'enemy' in the greater context of the political discourse.

Upon reflection the legitimacy argument regarding my hegemonic identity bears a strong dichotomy that can be viewed in somewhat contradictory terms. My Sri Lankan identity ties me to the Tiger women thus legitimising my involvement in the research; however my Sinhalese ethnicity within the hegemonic discourse distances us and thereby questions my legitimacy. Therefore legitimacy has no precise definition or standard recipe. Researchers will invariably raise issues of legitimacy, especially when feminists conduct research in representing the Other away from their own ethnic background (see Phoenix 1995). Thus my role as a researcher was constantly being negotiated.

Power dynamics and power relations in representing the Other

Within debates concerning Otherness it has become evident that the impact of conversation between the researcher and the researched is of greater significance than was previously understood (Oakley 1981 and Phoenix 1995). Women's own knowledge and experience tends to be obliterated thus invoking a silent Other, which forms a central theme in the feminist debate and raises further important issues such as the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee which has been a major topic of debate for many years. A new twist to this argument arose in the 1980's that contradicted this power status. It was argued that women enjoyed talking with other women who happened to be researchers, thus disregarding the inherent power relationship within the interview scenario (Oakley 1981). However there is an acknowledgement by Phoenix (1995) that the 'cosiness' is not a bi-product of gender based on "women discussing women's issues" (1995:50), but also due to a shared identity based on ethnicity or class. As such, gender may not be enough to indicate a shared identity.

Simply being women discussing 'women's issues' in the context of a research interview is not sufficient for the establishment of rapport and the seamless flow of an interview

(Ibid).

This creates a positioning of both the researcher and the researched in a specific social formation, enhancing the seamless flow of an interview. Thus class, race, gender, and

sexuality should be recognised only if they bear any procedural consequence on the research or are influenced by the researched themselves (Schegloff 1997).

Feminist researchers interviewing mostly non-feminist interviewees further reflect on this tension or conflict. The women I interviewed, or had social interaction with within the confines of an interview scenario, were not familiar with Western notions of feminism. Therefore one of the challenges in this research was not to use words which were not readily understood such as 'feminism', and to find terms that might be more familiar, such as 'women's liberation'. The very fact that women combatants are active in the field of armed conflict (which some feminists have argued to be a masculine subject area⁵⁵) and successfully train alongside men to the same standard, is central to the focus of the research considering gender identity. Based on this I would agree with Schegloff (1997) that the intersection of class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity do form a more complete picture within the above-mentioned context. Therefore singling out one aspect, such as ethnicity, risks obtaining partial data, as the Otherness is only seen through a spectrum of understood differences. Further, from my own research experience with the Tamil women of the LTTE, I would argue that the major obstacle to conducting interviews was not so much a difference in ethnic identity but in language, as described above.

Outsider inside the friendship and kinship formation: the researcher's positionality within the combatant women's group

I was prompted to look at my own friendship with the combatant women whilst analysing the data relating to the breakdown of the family and subsequent transference of affections to an alternative family within the LTTE (as discussed in Chapter Four). Understanding my own position (as a researcher) in relation to the group meant having to understand the kind of relationship that is practiced within the revolutionary group itself. This understanding became heightened once I realised that 'kinship' in this context refers to a deep friendship, unlike a kin identity that is indicative of a familial relation rather than a depth of emotion. Friendship itself encompasses many levels, such

⁵⁵ See Coomaraswamy (1996), De Alwis (1998b) and de Mel (2001). Also Enloe (1988), Tickner (1992), Carreiras, (2006), Elshtain and Tobias (1990).

as the friendship that is extended to the outside Other (e.g. strangers such as visiting researchers, journalists etc.), and the friendship that is practiced within the group.

The friendship offered to the outside Other has many complicated facets that differentiate it from the friendship that is practiced within the revolutionary kin group. I was offered a friendship as a researcher that overlooked my hegemonic identity and was extended to me due to my British identity and my status as a foreigner in 'their' (the LTTE's) geographically controlled area. However I was very aware of being accepted at a different level and being granted the hospitality of partaking in meals where casual conversation flourished, spending time viewing videos together with women combatants or going on day trips with them, which made me conscious of occupying a certain privileged position of friendship with women combatants. At the same time, I was aware that this friendship also removed me to some degree from civic women in society.

I was also aware that my position was fragile and restricted, as discussed in this chapter. During the visits made to the LTTE Political Wing office, I noticed a number of foreign nationals, predominantly journalists, visiting with the aim of interviewing Arasi (as Head of the Women's Political Wing). Though these outside Others were treated politely and with caution, they were not given the same quality of hospitality as I was. In turn the outside Others had a different type of freedom than I, due to the level of acceptance based on relationships other than friendship. For instance another PhD researcher who was a New Zealand national had easier access to women combatants than I, due to her New Zealand identity presenting her as more of a *foreigner* than I. However her level of acceptance into the inner realm was also restricted by these very same differences.

It can be argued that from (a Western perspective) these outside Others were not friends but mere visitors, gathering information in order to gain an insight. However within a Sri Lankan /Tamil cultural context they are none the less viewed as friends and it is noteworthy that the word 'acquaintance' does not exist in Tamil culture. The extent and development of the friendship is dependent on issues such as levels of trust and compatibility. My own position has been one of a continued friendship with the combatant women of the LTTE since the initiation of the field research. However had I been a Tamil national there would have been the possibility of putative kinship, for example being called a *sister* or *aunt*, depending on the physical appearance of the individual. This particular form of kin identity overrides identity politics as the

relationship in this instance is based on a non-political level. My position stops short of a kinship identity and affinity due to my Sinhalese ethnic identity and British cultural differences.

As discussed in Chapter Four, these forms of address convey a certain degree of acceptance through kinship, and also operate as a mark of respect for the Other. Addressing me by name places me in the position of an outsider, who does not have a kin identity that can be related back to the revolutionary group. The lack of kin identity also forms a part of the social interaction within the friendship and its power relationship. My relationship with the women combatants was part of a friendship and not in the inner realms of kinship. However an inevitable question arose as to whether the women combatants or I were in fact exploiting this extremely unusual relationship⁵⁶. The answer perhaps lies in our separate needs, theirs for a recognition that reaches beyond the shores of Sri Lanka and mine, a British individual of Sinhalese origin (and a female⁵⁷), to conduct a piece of academic research that is accessible. Therefore it is safe to assume that within the dynamics of the discourse of friendship and exploitation, we both stand to gain rather than lose due to the very nature of the research. It would be unwise to assume that any continuation of the relationship during the current period of 'Final War' is possible where communications have been greatly hampered.

Interviews

Pre-Interviews

The nature of this research required careful planning and necessitated a detailed understanding of safety issues involved⁵⁸. The initial plan included two visits to the field, a short visit in the early part of the year 2003 (March), and a second longer visit during the latter part of that same year (October). The aim of the preliminary visit was to

⁵⁶ The unusualness of the relationship lies not only of my being the quintessential enemy, the Sinhalese, but also the foreigner, the British. Further it is my understanding that I am the only Sinhalese woman to have ever undertaken such a task of researching women combatants of the LTTE through personal interviews in their own environment.

⁵⁷ From a cultural perspective, most activities that are considered as dangerous remain in the realms of men.

⁵⁸ The issue of safety was discussed with a number of people both within and outside the university who gave sound advice.

establish contact with the Gatekeeper and the revolutionary movement and allow an assessment of the potential dangers that might occur in the field when conducting such research with women combatants. The dangers to be assessed included the extent of the control the Sri Lankan Army had over the Tamil nationals in Jaffna and over the women combatants. The initial visit was scheduled for three weeks. The second and final visit was scheduled to last for six weeks and was designed to concentrate solely on conducting both single sitting and group interviews.

Plans for fieldwork cannot be rigidly implemented and adhered to under field conditions, and often flexibility is needed in order to achieve the objectives desired which includes taking any opportunities that present themselves in a dynamic environment. For example, during my initial visit I was not expecting to conduct any interviews. An opportunity arose to interview the most senior woman combatant of the LTTE, Arasi, though not under ideal interviewing circumstances, and it proved productive. The reason for accepting opportunities when conducting interviews with senior members of any organisation (not necessarily in a revolutionary set-up) as discussed by Dexter (1970) in *Elite and Specialized Interviewing* is often due to the difficulty of meeting senior people and the fact that there may not be a second opportunity. This sense of limited opportunity is heightened when dealing with those who are engaged in conflict, given the nature of the activities they are engaged in.

Within the planning stages personal safety was considered from two angles. One considered ethnic identity relating to Sinhalese hegemony, and the other considered employment identity relating to an organisation that can be perceived as part of British government's extended interest in Sri Lanka or the assistance given to the Sri Lankan State when engaging in sensitive data gathering. Therefore I took a decision that my British identity only would be maintained in the field and any personal representations were only to be conducted as a doctoral research student at a university in London. I also decided to withhold any personal address details or family details as I viewed these as being potentially high risk. The LTTE, as stated in Chapter One operate quite strongly in the UK (as well as in Canada, Europe and Australia), even though legally they are an outlawed organisation. They have a network system that has the ability to identify any individual; therefore, it was important not to volunteer any personal information. The best way of self-presentation was to put forward a university student identity only, which has a universal acceptance with less suspicion attached to it. Thus a number of

university business cards were printed and readily handed out at every opportunity with a view to dispel or avert any possible suspicions. Furthermore, in order to enhance this identity, a letter of introduction was also taken from the Gender Institute of the LSE. The planning stage also included one final safety point and I took the cautionary measure of being registered at the British High Commission in Colombo prior to travelling to Jaffna⁵⁹.

Many researchers describe field research as a rite of passage. Though there are many books written on the subject, such as Raymond Lee's *Dangerous Field Work* (1995), Don Kulick and Margaret Wilson's *Taboo* (1996), Smyth et al (2005) *Researching Conflict in Africa* and Geraldine Lee-Treweek and Stephanie Linkogle's *Danger in the Field* (2000), they cannot replace the physical experience of being in the field, of coming into contact with situations and potential problems that need to be resolved on the spot. Sanders (1980), referred to in Lee (1999:121), suggests that learning the ropes of fieldwork itself also brings forth 'rope burn' and it is not possible to achieve one without the other. He states that the requirements for researchers to carry out tasks that run against social experiences and socialisation may cause them unavoidable fear. There is also the fear of rejection that is inevitable when dealing with strangers and seeking detailed information about their life, and the fear of violating the normative standards of the participants (ibid). Whilst there is undoubtedly excitement and anxiety in being in the field, the reality of fieldwork conditions can be hostile, alien or simply difficult to manage unlike a controlled setting with which the researcher is fully familiar. These hostilities can vary from natural elements of heat or rain to antagonistic human interaction. The costs of errors in this environment are high as the damage that can be done is difficult to resolve (Fiedler 1978) hence the fear factor is greater.

The participants and the selection process

The Gatekeeper and the Head of the Political Wing selected a suitable group of women for interviewing, the implication of which meant that I only had access to women who were considered by the organisation to be appropriate or suitable. Whilst this was not an

⁵⁹ Once arrived in Sri Lanka's capital Colombo, the British High Commission was contacted and they very kindly said it was not advisable for me to travel to Vanni (the LTTE held area) and referred me to their Health and Safety in Travelling web page; which unfortunately I had no access to, and when this information was passed back to them, they took the trouble to read out the web advice over the phone.

ideal selection method, I had to accept those that were offered, as it would have been difficult and extremely dangerous to interview combatant women without the implicit approval of the Gatekeeper (and therefore the LTTE). The combatant women participants were chosen by both the Head of the Political Wing and the Gatekeeper that are allocated for the interview may well be based on the qualities that the Gatekeeper and Head of the Political Wing view as necessary, and are likely to include the ability of the participant to offer a favourable image of the revolutionary organisation. However they did meet with my requested criteria that the women combatants represented a cross section of combatants from early recruits to later recruits. My civic participants were chosen through the contacts of the Gatekeeper and his wife according to my specifications for a cross-section of women, varying from the educated socially affluent to less educated working classes.

Once the selection process was completed it was clear that the research participants were chosen to meet with the requested criteria and any further assessment was avoided. Furthermore, it must be understood that when conducting research amongst revolutionary organisations or in conflict zones, the option to negotiate over the selected participants is limited. Whilst all of the interviewees met my requirements, I was still aware that I would have to work with the women (both civic and combatants) offered to me. The effect of the Gatekeeper in choosing the participants and the interpreter adds another dimension to the data analysis, as the interviews then had to be checked by a third party who was not involved in the research project for the usage of language and the accuracy of the translation.

The research consisted of in-depth interviews with a group of fifteen Tamil women. Seven of these were combatants, one was an ex-combatant, and seven were civic women. As detailed in the later section on participant safety, women combatants were given a new identity at the time of their recruitment, granting some form of anonymity to their consanguine families. I have decided not to use the names of the combatant women because of the current state of the conflict, despite the fact that they have given their consent to such usage. For the purpose of this thesis, the women combatants have been given pseudonyms that carry a related meaning but are not an exact match to the names that had been given to them by the LTTE. The names all of the civic women and the ex-combatant woman have been given an identity based on initials in preference to a pseudonym in order to separate them from the combatants. Further, I have withheld

detailed explanations of their occupations with a view to restricting their identity, but I have given an overview of the type of occupation that they were engaged in.

The seven women combatants from the LTTE were Arasi (aged 30) who is the most senior woman combatant in the LTTE⁶⁰; Kavitha (aged 30) who is the current Head of the Jaffna District office; Arulvili (aged 23) the previous Head of the Jaffna District; Yalini (aged 24) who is currently the LTTE Political Office translator and Aruna (aged 25), Roja (aged 22) and Mallika (aged 21) who are rank combatants. The ex-combatant AK (aged 34) is now married with a 5-year-old son but was a section leader and led teams to war. She had to leave active service due to the severe injuries she received during the Elephant Pass battle.

The civic women included both married women (with and without children) and unmarried women. BP, a middle-aged married former teacher with no children of her own, was the wife of the Gatekeeper and in this research she acted as an interpreter on many occasions. CH (aged 26) was the only Christian participant in the interview group, and the only one whose parents were of mixed race (Sinhalese and Tamil). CH died the following year at the age of 27 due to a misdiagnosis of cancer and lack of medical care. DK (aged 27) was a professional woman engaged in a highly masculine industry running her family business. GV and HA were both middle-aged professional women from wealthy middle-class backgrounds. HA is unmarried and GV was married during the war period. ES (aged 27) is an academic attached to the university, and FP (aged 40) is a married mother of two sons aged 10 and 11 years. A short description of each woman can be found in Appendix 6.

AK was connected to the Gatekeeper and his family through an action workshop based on theatre work. She was identified specifically because of her previous role as a combatant. The civic women were limited to those who were known to the Gatekeeper and his family through their extended social network. They all appear to be primarily from similar social backgrounds, with the exception of FP who was working class. It must also be noted that though the civic interview participants appeared at the outset to be independent of the LTTE, some later information revealed that their connections were closer to the revolutionary group than previously indicated. For example, DK was

⁶⁰ All ages are given as of 2003.

active in the reconstruction of an LTTE graveyard which was destroyed by the State Army; both BP and HA were prominent speakers at various LTTE ceremonies.

Interview format and issues of language

The key question of the thesis is to identify how gender is constructed within the revolutionary movement of the LTTE and tracking women's transformation through their engagement in the movement. I am aware of the implication that women talking about themselves expresses a female perspective only, but due to time restrictions it was not possible to engage with men. Hence the focus of the questions asked ascertained information pertaining to the lives of women combatants only. The questions asked were in a chronological order, e.g. starting with childhood experiences, progressing through their formative years, and ending with their adulthood, and were the same for all women (combatants and the civic women). However there were some questions that only applied to the combatant women (such as the type of training they had undertaken and the context in which the training was undertaken, i.e. single sex training or both men and women training together). The aims of the questions were to find similar or contested themes that could then be analysed further to form part of the thesis. Therefore the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format allowing the participants to discuss the subjects raised in full, which then developed into separate chapters of the thesis. At the end of each interview session, the participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions they wished of me. These questions ranged from trying to ascertain my view of them as women combatants, to predictions of their political future.

From the very start of the research planning stage as it was understood that knowledge of English language alone would not suffice in the field. My own Tamil language skills were not up to the level of conducting comprehensive interviews with native Tamil language speakers, even though I was aware that there would be a number of people in Jaffna who are able to speak in English and some who are able to understand what was said but not be able to respond comprehensively. Therefore the service of an interpreter was needed for the interviews. This issue was raised from the outset with the contact and assurances were given that language would not be a problem, even within the LTTE.

The interviews conducted in Jaffna with the women combatants were translated by three different people; the Gatekeeper, his wife BP and HA. The interviews conducted in Kilinochchi were translated by one of the combatant women, Yalini. Details of the translation and participants are given in Appendix 4. Although many in Jaffna understand the English language, the ability to communicate in English is mainly restricted to the educated middle-class, with a bilingual upbringing. This was evident in the interviews where a majority of civic women were able to communicate in the English medium whereas a majority of combatant women spoke in the Tamil medium only, which may be reflective of a class dimension to the decision to become a combatant.

The interviews were kept fluid to allow women combatants and civic women to speak freely, without hindering the path the conversation took, or their own thought processes relating to the conversation. On occasions in a group situation, someone else would answer the question asked, or a debate would ensue to define a word that does not translate easily into English language (such as *Ah-lu-mai*'s agreed meaning as 'empowerment'). As the interviews progressed the answers from combatants did not pursue some specific questions in detail. This did not affect the interview process, but did confirm the level of knowledge within the organisation that was restricted to senior ranks. For instance there appears to be a limited knowledge of the organisational structure amongst lower combatant ranks, in comparison to senior women combatants such as Arasi or Kavitha.

The interviews conducted were in two types of settings: those with individual participants with or without an interpreter, and those in a group setting with an interpreter. The translation process and the recording of the interviews was not a problem with any of the participants. Some, such as Arasi, were highly experienced in giving interviews and came across as confident and articulate public speakers in the Tamil language.

The translations of the interviews into English carried the nuances and the strengths expressed in Tamil language. The translations conducted in this way highlight the insider/outsider status between the researcher and the translators, who construct the questions in a way that they can understand and relate to. This is illustrated by Temple who states that "[t]hey construct the concepts used in the research and structure what can be said from it" (Temple 1997:610). It must also be understood that the translators

continue to live in the society once the researcher leaves the field (*ibid*). I was aware that the relationship between the interview participants, the translators and myself carried certain dynamics which are important to the research (also see Hatim and Mason 1994, Bauman 1987, Temple and Edwards 2002). These include the women combatants' reverence to the translators and their acceptance of me, and are extended to my expectations that the meanings of words should be familiar to the translator. This may have been a burden upon the translator who never complained. However it was interesting to notice at times that Arasi was adamant that the translator made sure I understood a certain point that she viewed as important and 'must' be understood in the way it was presented. For example it was of great importance to Arasi that I understood that war was 'forced' upon them, or that the use of suicide bombers was a mere tactical strategy.

It was interesting to note that the combatant women in a group, away from their rank hierarchy, were able to giggle and laugh when discussing certain topics raised with English words as 'boyfriends'. Amongst most of women combatants there was an initial shyness at the start of the interview. Often they soon lost this shyness and became eager to participate with Yalini as their interpreter. This was particularly visible in the group interview of Arulvili, Aruna and Yalini. This could be due to the fact that they were the same age and knew each other, which made it easier for them to laugh together. In contrast the two younger combatants (who were interviewed together) maintained their shyness throughout the interview, but they were still fully engaged in answering the questions asked. At this interview, it was BP who acted as an interpreter, thus bringing in an element of respect the younger women needed to pay to the older woman. It must also be noted that the conversation was still flowing during times of non-recording. There was a noticeable ease amongst the civic women, most of who were able to express themselves in English. All the interviews conducted had an atmosphere of friendliness and interviewees demonstrated a willingness to participate. The willingness amongst the combatant women may be due to Arasi ordering them to participate, but if that were the case, it was not shown in any tangible way as unhappiness at being part of the research. I got the distinct impression from GV, one of the civic women, that she was keen to tell me about events that affected her, in particular the issues of displacement that had forced her to re-evaluate her life in a completely new way in contrast to her conservative upbringing.

The interviews with the civic women were conducted in both Tamil and English. The questions were asked by me in English, translated into Tamil by the interpreter and responses then translated back into English. The translators varied from civic sympathisers of the LTTE to LTTE's own combatants. The use of a variety of translators and engaging in an exhausting process of translating back and forth caused some concern to me. There was also the issue of possible sanitized versions of answers being presented. Therefore, upon return to the UK, all the tapes were checked by a native Tamil language speaker, who confirmed that – despite the occasional incorrect usage of English – the meanings were accurately conveyed.

The transcripts

The transcripts were all translated into English and typed out by a native Tamil speaker to maintain a level of accuracy and any nuances intended in Tamil language. The involvement of the women ceased once the interviews were concluded, as it was not logistically possible to follow the accepted feminist methodological practices, which seek to involve participants in the research process through letting them, check their own transcripts or add additional comments. As well as potential safety concerns, there were also pragmatic issues to consider: if the interview transcripts were sent back to the country there was always a risk that these would never reach the participants, given that the safety of posted documents cannot be guaranteed even under normal conditions, let alone during times of trouble. These particular circumstances limit the extent to which participants can be involved in the post-interview process. This limitation heightens the requirement that researchers represent the Other to the best of their ability.

Though I intentionally stayed off the subject of self-disclosure, I did not discourage them to think of me other than as a young university student, who had spent most of my growing years in Britain⁶¹. The only self-disclosure was made the night before my departure on the second visit and only to the Gatekeeper's adopted daughters. I informed them of my relationship with my partner whom I felt was a safe subject to discuss, not only because he was English hence not a part of the conflict, but also being an academic he would be counted as a neutral party. The inter-racial relationship aspect

⁶¹ My physical appearance was often accepted as a younger person even though I was already heading for my 43rd year.

of my life appears to have fascinated them resulting in one of them stating that perhaps they should have asked more questions about me. Whilst feminist research debates about surrendering power to the participants, my personal reasons behind some self-disclosure (though limited) was a feeling of needing to part with something of myself and not to leave them under too many misapprehensions regarding my personal circumstances. On reflection this can be argued as a form of relinquishing my own power and passing control to the subject, however it can also be viewed as an effort on my part to alleviate the one-sidedness of the interview process whereby the subjects disclose much information about themselves but the researcher remains apart or unknown.

Access Process : Entering The Field Through The Gatekeepers

Fundamentally, access involves gaining permission to conduct research in a particular social setting. Far from being a straightforward procedure, it involves negotiation and renegotiation, influences the kind of investigation that can be completed, and occurs throughout the research process. It is, of course, an essential phase of the research process- a prerequisite, as it were for the research to be conducted.

(Shaffir and Stebbins 1991:25)

Many researchers (Van Maanen 1991, Burgess 1991, Shaffir and Stebbins 1991, Lee 1995 and 1999) have shown how vital the access process is when conducting field research. This importance is heightened when the chosen field involves violent political situations where conflict forms a part of daily existence.

Researchers invariably carry differing degrees of credibility into the field. Based on my own experience I would say that the key to the acceptance of the researcher (by the researched) depends primarily upon the researcher's ability to present themselves and the subjects of the research in a manner that is acceptable to those whose assistance is sought. As suggested by Fiedler (1978), the researcher's credibility is enhanced by the organisation or the sponsoring body to which the researcher is affiliated.

It is easiest to enter the community under the auspices of some known and respected institution. Students doing fieldwork will find it useful to operate under the sponsorship, or at least under the name, of their parent university
(Fiedler 1987:40).

In Jaffna I constantly carried a letter of introduction from the Head of the Gender Institute on my person. This letter became an invaluable tool both as a formal form of identification and as a validation of my research interest. It further became a highly valuable document to illustrate that there is a close relationship between the university and the research that is conducted, confirming Fiedler's observation that "such tokens carry a disproportionate weight in the field" (Fiedler 1978:42).

I was also aware of Fiedler's cautionary note that the group on which the researcher intends to conduct the research may not view the sponsoring authority or the organisation favourably. She suggests that when there is an issue of conflict it may be better to describe the research in such a way that the researched person will not be threatened by the sponsor's interests as "...it may be necessary to use terms that do not carry strong connotative associations" (Fiedler: 1978:41). Fiedler advocates a total disclosure of information prior to embarking on the research. However I made a conscious decision based on my own circumstances not to disclose my main funding body to the LTTE as I knew the funding given was for me to pursue further studies rather than to research the LTTE in particular. This decision was made after much deliberation over a number of ethical and safety issues⁶². It must be stressed that this decision was not made at the cost of other ethics, but by way of actively controlling any personal information exchanges.

The major hurdle within the access process was obtaining relevant data based on the level of access that was granted. I was granted a level of access that included the possibility of requesting the type of person I wished to interview and at the same time it also indirectly prohibited me from making direct contacts. I have no doubt that the level of access granted to me was due to the use of a highly respected intermediary (the Gatekeeper).

⁶² Even though the funding was not given to research the LTTE, the very fact that my sponsoring body was a law enforcement agency in Britain, would certainly have become problematic in the field. In addition, the LTTE has been outlawed in Britain since 2002 under the UK anti-terrorism legislation, further complicating matters.

The existing literature on dangerous and sensitive fieldwork emphasises the need to have a theoretical understanding of the social organisation that researchers are seeking to access. The specific nature of the organisation cannot be experienced in advance (Lee 1999:122) and I would add could only be gained through their own experiences. A number of researchers claim that the best way of gaining access is to be physically placed inside the setting in order to carry out the research, thus claiming it to be specific to that particular situation (Warren 1980, Hunt 1984, Adler and Adler 1987). Johnson (1975:50) describes this as, “seemingly unlimited contingencies...[...]...ranging from being gleefully accepted to being thrown out on one’s ear” (cited in Lee 1999:121). Johnson, like many others (including feminist researchers), argues that access is an on-going process that needs continuous re-negotiation. Johnson’s use of the term ‘freeze-out’ is particularly apt in depicting situations where a researcher is originally accepted but whose presence is then challenged or even rescinded. This concern is supported by Laslett and Rapoport’s (1975), described as the ‘inter-interview dynamic’ (Lee 1999:113), where the initial interview has raised anxieties in the participant causing resentment towards the researcher (also see Smyth et al 2005). Therefore gaining access is characterised by an unpredictable nature that all researchers have to confront.

I gained first-hand experience of this during my field research where access was denied due to a language misunderstanding. I was interested in gaining direct knowledge of the power structure within the LTTE and to ascertain the number of women who were in the Central Committee, believed to be their main decision-making body. This was a complicated question, which the civic translator found difficult to understand and consequently it was not translated into Tamil accurately, causing a misunderstanding and concern for the leader of the local sub-organisation whom I was interviewing at that time. Before we started the interview, she agreed to allow two of her female combatants to be interviewed by me, but the confusion that arose during the interview made her exceptionally wary of my intentions, and her agreement was withdrawn. This misunderstanding caused me a number of wasted days on a tight field research schedule and a deep concern as to what had taken place for this situation to occur, as I was not aware at that time as to the precise nature of this misunderstanding. Later it transpired that she was not familiar with academic researchers having previously only spoken to newspaper journalists, whom they (the LTTE) do not care for greatly, although they do give interviews in order to gain public support or promote awareness of their struggle. I was then in a situation of having to re-negotiate the research and the whole of the access

process all over again. These re-negotiations required careful handling and were emotionally draining and extremely time-consuming. They involved a number of phone calls and personal visits to the local leader of the sub-organisation by the Gatekeeper and his family to clarify my position in the interviews. I was fortunate at this time in having the Gatekeeper's wife as my interpreter, who was able to clarify the misunderstanding and to facilitate the re-negotiation of my position.

It is necessary to consider the opposite position where researchers are denied access to the field. The literature on access-denial is very limited. Lee (1999) argues that the reason may be continued pressure to move to where access can be obtained rather than spending valuable time analysing the reasons *why* access is denied. He further points out that the denial of access may be due to the possibility of the researcher raising unwelcome questions in the minds of Gatekeepers, who question whether the granting of access in the first instance was a wise decision. Finding proof of refusal is difficult as the whole of the access process is often shrouded in secrecy. Sometimes the researcher will be informed of the reasons for access denial, but at other times the reasons may not be clearly communicated. I view this as a serious point to bear in mind when posing questions, as I had no wish for my access to be withdrawn.

Asymmetric nature of power relations with the Gatekeeper

It is understood amongst researchers who enter the field through a Gatekeeper that this person invariably holds the power to grant or deny access at will, and that the relationship can prove to be either beneficial or a hindrance (Lee 1995, Jamieson 2000). This is enhanced when operating in a culture of political distrust. As a researcher from a western university, I had a different type of power and status in comparison to that held by the Gatekeeper, where access to those targeted by the researcher is achieved through bargaining and negotiation. I consider this not to be an equal power status but an asymmetric form of power that favours one party more than the other.

The asymmetric nature of the power relation was visible from the moment I met the Gatekeeper to obtain access. I was able to mention the name of my Contact (whom I have never met), who suggested I met the Gatekeeper. The Gatekeeper questioned,

quizzed and watched me keenly to ascertain where my sympathies lay in the conflict⁶³. The fact that the Gatekeeper was not aware of my visit gave me an advantage in the power relationship by having a space to locate myself directly face-to-face. I would argue that such direct social interactions have the ability to change the power settings leaving little room for misconceptions. At the same time the asymmetric nature of the power relation allowed the Gatekeeper to ask questions and observe my reactions prior to granting any form of access. This power is initially non-negotiable; perhaps the only occasion that it can be re-negotiated is when the researcher has 'earned' their trust.

The asymmetric nature of the power relation is also addressed by Lee's (1995:123) two categories of 'social access' and 'physical access'. He states that social access may depend on establishing an interpersonal trust with the Gatekeeper, but it is the Gatekeeper who controls the physical access and the levels of trust granted. I would say that the trust given or built with the organisation through the involvement of a Gatekeeper involves asymmetric power relations that are exacerbated by ethnicity and hegemonic identity. The Gatekeeper will only allow access to the research candidates that they think will be most suitable for the research and beneficial to the revolutionary organisation.

There are a number of Sri Lankan feminist academics (such as de Silva 1994, Coomaraswamy 1996 and 2002, de Alwis 1998b, de Mel 2001 and 2004) that have written about LTTE combatants. With the exception of Rajasingham-Senanayake (who had an opportunity to interview Dhanu without knowing that she was interviewing Rajiv Gandhi's future assassin), none appear to have conducted any fieldwork and most certainly not on the LTTE's own territory. Rajasingham-Senanayake's Tamil ethnicity and the fact that she attended a western university in part may have contributed to her being granted access. Other Sri Lankan feminist academics have published material that had offended the LTTE by the way in which the organisation was portrayed or by the way in which women combatants were described (suggesting for example, that the women's agency is non-existent in the movement and the movement is merely using the women for its own ends). It may also be far too dangerous for Sri Lankan women academics to enter an LTTE camp to conduct research and it is likely to remain so until peace is restored. It may also be a reason why foreign nationals such as Schalk (Swedish), Bloom (American) and Alison (New Zealand) and I (British though of

⁶³ At that instance I recall maintaining steady eye contact, and trying my best to look earnest. I remember thinking of all the interview techniques I had developed over the years, when in need of a new job.

Sinhalese origin) have managed to carry out field research where the Sri Lankan academics have been unsuccessful. I would argue that these failures to conduct field research in the organisation's own environment might limit results in the feminist work, given the issue of missing elements in knowledge not gathered first-hand. My own position of representing women combatants does contradict existing views, in that I present a picture of the women combatants as being empowered and regaining their lost agency. Having more of a British national identity than a Sinhalese identity I was more open minded in my approach to the revolutionary organisation and conducted research in the LTTE's territory without any preconceptions.

In addition to other difficulties in establishing such trust discussed elsewhere, the researcher must be able to spend a lengthy period in the field to earn trust. In the absence of such long periods, the researcher needs to focus on gaining the most out of the interviews conducted. When conducting research in violent political conflict areas, the researcher needs to be fully aware that research participants may not be willing to discuss their fears with a total stranger, especially if the stranger is residing with the Gatekeeper.

This Gatekeeper (as I found out) was in a position to provide their own interpreter. Though this is far from an ideal situation, as a researcher I was very aware that decision-making in this instance lay solely with the Gatekeeper. As stated previously the interpreter chosen by an organisation has the potential to act as a filter, to stop any undesirable comments from being translated. The field research in Jaffna showed the interpretation to be conducted by civic citizens who were LTTE sympathisers. The interpreters appeared at the time to carefully and considerately construct the language used by the participants (in response to my questions) to express a meaning nearest to the original statement.

Interview Settings : Single interview

Referring back to the early stage of planning the research, while there is no one strictly suitable method that can be applied to all interview settings, I was aware that single interviews would have been the best method for this particular research⁶⁴. Often with

⁶⁴ Based on experiences already gained with the women of the IRA

revolutionary organisations they will only put forward a member for research purposes once. This is not always due to issues of mistrust or lack of co-operation, but due to other demands on their time. With the LTTE I found that sometimes the interviews were expected to be conducted in groups of three or more, or in an open room where a number of others who were not directly involved could come and observe at their own leisure.

Single interviews are favoured by researchers such as Brannen (1988) who argues that anonymity is of great benefit in a single interview situation being less demanding on the participants and a necessary component in order to maintain a level of trust. This issue is of particular concern for researchers dealing with sensitive or dangerous research, providing a 'one-off character', which, as Lee clarifies, should "...in other words...[...]...be no fear on the parts of the respondent that the paths of interviewer and the interviewee will ever cross again" (Lee 1999:112). Oakley (1981:44) however disagrees and claims that single interviews encourage the 'ethic of detachment' (cited in Lee 1999:113), reasoning that single interviews will not develop into "a deep, lasting and genuinely collaborative research relationship" (*ibid*). Whilst noting Oakley's views, I would re-assert that the dynamics of research conducted in revolutionary movements are different to other forms of social research.

I acknowledge Oakley's contributions to feminist research and her claim that the absence of collaborative relationships hinders long-lasting relationships. However, I argue that my research gives rise to specific pragmatic and ethical issues, which counter these claims. The research I am conducting needs to be understood in the context of an uncertain political climate, where women are only available for 'one-off' interviews. This makes building relationships difficult at best, and maintaining them impossible at worst. Given issues of safety of both participants and the researcher, the fact that long and meaningful relationships may not take place should not be viewed as less than satisfactory but as a pragmatic and ethical response to a specific conflict situation. That said, until the recent development of the new wave of violence (the LTTE calls it the Final War) I have been able to maintain some contact (through email) with one of the key interview participants of the LTTE and continued contact was maintained with the Gatekeeper and his family. However in this kind of environment contact is only possible

if there are common tools for communication such as a shared language (English) and a global communications network in a stable environment⁶⁵.

Taboo topics not for discussion: sex and sexuality

Female sexuality (*sakti*) is highly valued in Tamil society with a cultural belief that it holds hidden powers. At the heart of that power lies female sexual purity, as discussed further in Chapter Six. Therefore I took a measured view that the sexuality and sexual needs of the women combatants would not be discussed in the research, with the exception of marriage within the LTTE organisation. The reasons for this decision were many and I must make it clear that is not due to "...interviewers [researchers] feeling uncomfortable about asking questions than with the interviewees being embarrassed" (Lee 1999:101). Arguably there may be an element of this that is based on an awareness of cultural understanding of how sexuality is constructed in civic society, which is extended to the revolutionary organisation. This issue is addressed by Farberow (1963:6) who states, "[t]he various kinds of taboos also involve personal, moral, or ethical questions in varying degrees. Investigations of sexuality arouse social reactions...". To put this into the context of the research, Tamil culture and the way it regards sex and sexual orientation (heterosexuality is only kind of sexual activity that is accepted in society) determines that this is a taboo topic to discuss in public⁶⁶.

Privacy was not possible when interviews were conducted through an interpreter, and even though they were of the same gender/sex, asking direct questions about sexuality might have violated the individual woman combatant's modesty, or undermined the researcher's ethical position, by placing interview participants in an awkward position. Furthermore, any inaccurate translation could create an antagonism and run the risk of being insulting to the individual combatant woman's sexual morality and virtuousness, which in turn would reflect negatively upon the revolutionary organisation.

⁶⁵ I have been unable to conduct any form of email communications since the beginning of the Final War c.2005 as all email addresses appear to be non-existent.

⁶⁶ Hooker (1963) in reference to conducting his/her own research in to the field of male homosexuality states that, "for the researcher to be trusted, he must demonstrate repeatedly and over time that he takes professional ethics seriously, that under no circumstances would he reveal to anyone what has been told him in confidence..."(Hooker 1963:47 in Farberow 1963:6/7).

As detailed in Chapter Four, marriage is not forbidden for the combatant women, but pre-marital sex is unacceptable and heterosexual sex is only accepted in a heteronormative context. With these factors taken into consideration, it appears to be an inappropriate subject based primarily on the understanding of Tamil culture and on my own Sinhalese identity, which gave me a similar perception and understanding of sex and sexual morality.

Venues

The interviews were conducted at three separate venues, which were the Gatekeeper's house, the office of HA (in Jaffna) and the LTTE Women's Political Wing Office (in Kilinochchi). The majority of the interviews were conducted at the Gatekeeper's house in various rooms such as the large open space sitting area, my bedroom and the middle courtyard. A second set of interviews was conducted at the Women's Political Wing office where I was allocated a private sitting room for this purpose. Though holding interviews in Jaffna was far easier and considerably safer, both environmentally and physically, than travelling to Kilinochchi to conduct the same, I opted for the invitation to conduct interviews in Kilinochchi. The main reason behind this decision was the notion of conducting interviews 'in their own space' with a view to granting the participants an equal stake in the power relationship (even though my own position was still based on a lack of / or limited power in these scenarios. The issue of relative power dynamics is addressed later in this chapter).

The visit⁶⁷ was rewarding as it gave me an opportunity to see the site, and meet other women combatants, including disabled women who were attending to their daily routine of assisting one another. This was particularly visible in tasks that many able-bodied women might take for granted, such as combing one's own hair. My visit also presented them with an opportunity to meet a woman from a Sinhalese/British background, bearing in mind that most had never met a Sinhalese woman before⁶⁸. Hospitality was also a key factor in the visit to Kilinochchi. The women of the LTTE take a great deal of

⁶⁷ The journey to Kilinochchi is detailed in Appendix 2.2

⁶⁸ Many months later in central London, I met a Tamil man from one of the Jaffna islands who told me that he had never met any Sinhalese people until he came to Colombo as an adult, and all his life he was told that Sinhalese are evil people. Hence, I perhaps was the face of the unknown evil they were curious to see.

trouble to be hospitable by offering food and drink from the time of my arrival in their space. The luncheons were always healthy and homely enabling me to partake in the food they ate during times of some political stability where food products were widely available. The conversations at such times were informative, including one about Prabhakaran insisting that women who sat at his table at meal times must be able to eat well. It was such a friendly and welcoming atmosphere and I even got an opportunity to meet the woman who did the cooking and watched LTTE recordings of various battles. During these periods of watching videos, the women combatants got very animated and were visibly happy in seeing their actions on the screen.

Analysis

There are many ways of analysing interview data (Brenner, Brown and Canter: 1985). I considered computer-based data analysing systems such as ALCEST and NuDIST, but opted instead for a colour coded paper-based method, as referred to by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003). I was already familiar with this process prior to training on the two computer packages.

The interview transcripts were separated and grouped into combatant and civic women, then each transcript was read and notes written on the side to identify any emerging themes. Similar and contrary views were identified and separated into thematic subject areas identified from the answers given by the participants. Common topics based on shared experiences such as displacement, the breakdown of family units, equality between men and women, and the death of combatants, about which every interviewee had responded were used to build the main chapters of the thesis. They were also equally rich in comparing and contrasting the two groups of women, based on their own perception of the other group.

Sensitivity and Safety

Dealing with Sensitive Topics

Some authors have written on the subject of sensitivity and danger in fieldwork (see Smyth 2005, Moreno 1996, Green 1995, Simons 1995, Nordstrom and Robben 1995, Schnabel 2005 and Albert 2005). However, it was Lee's texts (1990, 1995 and 1999) on sensitive and dangerous topics that I found most useful to my own work. Whilst acknowledging that sensitive issues can be life threatening for individuals who take part in the research as well as for the researcher, it must be recognised that researching sensitive topics is fraught with many difficulties.

“One difficulty in talking about ‘sensitive topics’ is that the phrase is often used in the literature as if it were self-explanatory. The term, in other words, is treated in a common-sense way without being defined.”

(Lee 1999:3).

Some researchers such as Farberrow (1963:1-7) look at sensitive topics through a definition based on themes that are considered to be taboo. Others such as Green (1995:105) views sensitive topics through elements of fear that merge the boundaries of subjective personal experiences to include collective social memory. She also claims that experiences of fear and terror are difficult to describe in words. Seiber and Stanley (1998) describe sensitive topics as being any socially sensitive research that may have consequences to either the researched or the group of individuals represented by the research (referred to in Lee 1999:3). Such attempts at defining sensitive research overlook a number of more specific problems that are embedded in conducting sensitive research and are deeply rooted in methodological issues (*ibid*), not least the risks to the researcher herself. As Lee states, “...sensitive topics present problems because research into them involves potential costs to those involved in the research, including on occasion, the researcher” (Lee 1999:4).

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of “sensitive” is derived from a personal perspective, based on the potential it has to create a physically dangerous situation for the individual participants and /or the researcher. This physical danger could be a direct result of actions or disclosures of information to the researcher by the participants, or the researcher's decision to withhold information that the State-run army or the

revolutionary group may consider important to their own purposes. It could simply be an assumption by either party that the researcher holds valuable or damaging information and is unwilling to pass it on to them. Sensitivity does not necessarily change with political or social changes, as a physical danger may continue to exist after the war has ended.

The ceasefires and peace negotiations seen in Sri Lanka is an example of this. It is naive to assume that such changes in the political climate or various presidencies and other ministerial levels would immediately eradicate the fears that have been built up over long periods. On a positive note the researched may be more accommodating over questions asked and answer with a greater degree of honesty if the research is conducted during periods of relative calm, as threats of personal retribution are to some extent removed due to political stability.

The women of the LTTE whom I met were willing to talk and had no fear of their true identities being disclosed. They had very strongly held beliefs that they had the ability to make a difference. This kind of behaviour has much to do with the times in which a researcher meets the researched. At the time of research the LTTE were conducting peace talks with the Sri Lankan government through the Norwegian SLMM as intermediaries. This whole research process would have been very different if it had been carried out under the hostile political climate that has existed since 2006.

War Stories: safety in field research

Field research into violent political conflict raises safety issues on three levels: the safety of the participants, the safety of the data gathered and the safety of the researcher. Any researcher undertaking research on political extremism and/or organisations is exposed to threats and dangers by the very nature of the problems that the research will examine. Researchers must therefore be aware of the physical dangers inherent in certain situations of violent political conflict or amongst organisations where violence is commonly practised. Lee (1995:3) argues that violence falls predominantly into two categories: 'presentational' and 'anonymous' (see also Brewer: 1990 and Yancey and Rainwater: 1970). Presentational danger emerges usually from the presence or actions conducted by the researcher, invoking aggression, hostility or violence from those within

the setting⁶⁹. Anonymous danger is an unavoidable danger that presents itself to the researcher when in a dangerous situation (in order to conduct research). As an example of this, he refers to Brewer (1991), who – before the time of the current Northern Ireland Agreement – had to regularly accompany police officers through streets where the officers were always potential targets for attack.

There were dangers faced in my field experience that can be described as ‘anonymous’. Here, the researcher (myself) is in a situation where the actions conducted by others whose company the researcher is in (the LTTE combatant women in this instance) put the researcher’s safety at risk. One example concerns a day trip to a nearby island arranged by the Gatekeeper. The group included Tamil civilian women who were sympathisers of the LTTE, LTTE combatant women and myself as the only outsider. In Sri Lanka’s conflict zone, photographing the armed forces is strictly prohibited, a policy that sometimes gets extended to border checkpoints. The aim of this policy is to protect the armed services personnel being identified at a later date and assassinated. This policy is not written overtly in any public place but is known by both parties in the conflict. Disregarding this accepted norm, one of the LTTE women decided to photograph a group of soldiers at the quayside. Before I was able to grasp the situation, some of the group was hurled out of the boat by the navy personnel, their film rolls ripped out of the cameras and a heated row then ensued. After the situation eventually calmed down, I was unsure whether the LTTE combatant women had apologised or what assurances were given but the boat was allowed to proceed. In this situation the rest of the passengers and I were totally powerless. The nagging questions I had were what *if* the army decided to arrest first? Or what *if* they opened fire? What can I do as a researcher, an outsider whose presence has the potential to be viewed as suspicious by the State as well as the revolutionary group? ⁷⁰ The issues of my role as a non-Tamil national conducting research in this field will be addressed further in section three of this chapter.

⁶⁹ For further information refer to Carey (1972) and Bourgois (1989).

⁷⁰ I was informed by one of the women in the group, who spoke Sinhalese, that when the Sri Lankan Navy at the quayside wrote down my passport details they had a discussion amongst themselves as to which “register” I should be placed. The issue here was a Sinhalese-British travelling with a group of revolutionary women.

Sluka states, “it is not enough to be innocent, one must be ‘seen’ to [be] so” (Sluka 1990:117 in Lee 1995:35). With the questioning of identity there lies a subliminal issue of loyalty and national allegiance. During the period of my research my national identity was questioned each time I crossed a State Army-run checkpoint. My *being seen* with the women combatants and residing with Tamil nationals (addresses of residency was recorded) raised questions amongst the Sri Lankan Army as to my intentions. Many researchers who have conducted fieldwork in Northern Ireland had to deal with the same issues of being *seen* with a group that the State considers a threat. There is a further disadvantage in this situation where the researcher has built up relationships and associations, developed in the field of conflict, that have the potential to indicate collaborations (Gilmore 1991 in Lee 1995).

Participant’s Safety

The safety of the participants (both civic and combatant) is of paramount importance when dealing with violent political groups. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000:1) argue “...threats to the researcher and to participants are shown to be connected.” Becoming involved with the researcher may have a detrimental effect upon the participants as the revolutionary group may view them as collaborators. The State-run security forces may see them as holding precious or sensitive information that could be of use to the State. In either case, the women’s physical safety could be at risk⁷¹. The issue of risk in interviewing both the LTTE combatant women and civic women was considered with pragmatism and without sentimentality as the discussion of sensitive or dangerous topics might place those who participated in the interview in a *possible* position of risk. Schnabel (2005) argues that “...the security of both researchers and their subjects may be at stake during research activities in societies marked by violence” (2005:33). As I was aware of the need to exercise caution in assessing the dangers, rather than relying on an assumption (see Smyth 2005, Schnabel 2005, Barnes 1979 and Becker 1964), I erred towards Becker’s (1964) view that potential harms need to be assessed as ‘direct’ and ‘tangible’ (Lee 1999:191). This criterion can be comfortably applied to both the combatant and civic women.

⁷¹ Though ‘lamp-posting’ executions (as described in of 31) are not carried out during peace negotiations, there is still the threat of ‘disappearances’.

In order to protect the participants from such risk, the researcher has a responsibility firstly to request the permission of the participants to use their names, and even if they do give their permission, weigh up the danger that they may then be exposed to. The women combatants of the LTTE were quite happy to give their names and be quoted. This openness may be due to the fact that once they join the revolutionary movement a new name is given to them that reflects the Tamil language and symbolises traditional Tamil culture. With the change of name, the women combatants also gain a new identity, a new birth and membership of the revolutionary family (Adele Ann 1993, Schalk 1992). The name change further guarantees a degree of safety to the combatants' biological family, as their family cannot then easily be traced. This is not viewed as severing familial ties but as protecting their consanguine family from persecution by the security forces.

The same form of protection is not available for the civic women who participate in research (being a small community it is easy to identify an individual simply by their surname). Those who specifically asked me to withhold their identity were easier to deal with as these participants had already taken a decision. However, the second, undecided group laid the responsibility for personal safety decisions upon the researcher. My chosen method at the time of conducting interviews was that first names (not full names) and ages (not dates of birth) were only to be recorded in my notebook which was kept with me at all times. Whilst accepting this is not a totally risk-free system I took the best precautions I could, by not recording the addresses of the participants, thus aiming to avoid any of the participants being identified and targeted. The interview tapes carried only the first names of the women and the dates of the interviews, which allowed me to refer to my notes on that day to identify the person in detail. If the occasion arose, this lack of recorded information would allow me to deny any knowledge (quite honestly) of the whereabouts of these participants. I had further decided for the purpose of the thesis to rely on pseudonyms for both the civic women and combatant women. I resolved to withhold full details of their occupation due to the ease of identification, but an outline of their employment was included to provide information on their background. I gave the combatant women pseudonyms (e.g. *Roja* is a name that means 'Rose'). By this action, I aim to provide some form of protection for the participants of the research. Especially in the light of current wave of violence, I feel greatly burdened to ensure anonymity.

Data Safety

Researchers need to protect the data that is gathered in military and politically sensitive areas as there are particular concerns for the safety of the material collected. Some researchers of political conflict (Lee 1995, Sluka 1990 and Jenkins 1984) discuss the problem of scientific data, gathered for academic reasons, falling into the hands of the State. An incident during the Iraqi war confirmed this widely held view (amongst field researchers) that government forces gather information systematically from academic journals as part of its intelligence gathering⁷².

Even though I would prefer to say that my research does not carry any great political secrets, or any of the LTTE's operational tactics, it none the less contains sensitive information from combatant and civic women regarding the LTTE, their support for and criticisms of the movement, and attitudes towards inflammatory topics such as suicide bombing or Tamil independence.

It is important that preventative action is taken prior to any information entering the public arena, as after it enters the public domain the researcher has little or no control over it. As discussed in the previous chapter the LTTE is an organisation that does not forgive Tamil people who are critical of the Tiger regime. Thus it becomes an issue of not simply gathering data but also protecting those who participate and help in the gathering of such data.

The reality that States do check academic research means that the researcher must try to ensure that any raw data gathered is not easily accessible by the intelligence services. There is also the potential for misinterpretation.

The researcher can take a number of preventative methods as discussed in the articles of Jenkins (1984) and in Sluka (1990 and 1989) relating to fieldwork. Jenkins (1984) advocates gathering data in a loose-leaf folder that contains only the day's work thus giving a small glimpse of the overall picture. Thus anytime one is searched by the authorities they will only gain access to that day's work. Sluka (1990) advocates sending research material out of the field but there is an argument that such a practice may

⁷² During the Iraqi war in 2003, the British Government relied on an obscure PhD thesis published in the USA to describe the political situation in Iraq. The British government plagiarised parts of the thesis and presented it as field intelligence report.

undermine the strength of ethnographic methods and a fluid relationship between collection and analysis of data (Galser and Strauss 1967). However that may be a penalty well worth accepting if it guarantees the safety of participants and the data.

The safe transportation of data out of the field environment concerned me sufficiently to take precautions with my interview tapes. The army has checkpoints linked to border crossings, including the jetty and the airport⁷³. At these women and men were searched separately, including body-checks as well as the entire luggage that was being carried. Motor vehicles were also subjected to rigorous checking. By travelling with LTTE sympathisers and LTTE combatant women, I discovered that my Sinhalese identity, my inability to speak Tamil and my unwillingness to speak Sinhalese proved to be a hindrance. I was often subjected to a more thorough search than the other women were. I may have presented the army with something of a puzzle, as I assume that the border checkpoint guards rarely meet Sinhalese people who have adopted a foreign nationality and are unable to speak either of Sri Lanka's main languages. I had a difficult time trying to persuade them that living overseas for a lengthy period does result in adopting the native language and there was nothing sinister about it. My unwillingness to speak Sinhalese maintained a British identity that would not be unexpectedly compromised if I inadvertently acknowledged the Sinhalese language. It was an active form of distancing myself from my ethnic hegemonic identity in order to be part of a more neutral and accepted identity (for the Tamil nationals and the LTTE) as a British national, but here it carried other dangers.

I decided to take further precautions with the LTTE women's interview tapes by making them appear as blank tapes. I deliberately did not record the full names of the civic women but made a note elsewhere, as if the army were to confiscate any of the tapes they would be unable to identify any individual. The security of luggage was another issue. In order to avoid any tapes disappearing from the luggage, I resolved to carry all the tapes by hand. As a form of distraction the LTTE's printed matter and posters of their martyred heroine Malathy were positioned inside the hand luggage to be seen as soon as it was opened. The notebooks with hand-written notes were folded amongst clothing somewhat casually so as not to draw any attention by appearing hidden. I found

⁷³ The LTTE too have checkpoint at the entrance to Vanni district, which is under the jurisdiction of the Tamil Tigers.

that it did work to carefully position LTTE printed material to draw attention away from the tapes and notebooks.

Personal Safety: Anxieties in the field

Conducting field research in conflict areas where the researcher's hegemonic identity makes her the enemy in the eyes of one side of the ongoing conflict gives rise to emotional and personal safety issues. It is considerably easier to reflect on situations away from field conditions, and from the safety of a few thousand miles away. The reality however is that in the field a researcher realises that their knowledge in fact does not prepare them to deal with all eventualities and there is much that they need to deal with on their own, reminiscent of Sander's (1980) metaphor of 'rope burns'. These 'rope' burns include the researcher's unawareness of when she is being watched or followed.

On my first day in the field I changed accommodation. As it was at dusk I was not in a position to inform anyone in Colombo that I was moving from the address given, which was a breach of my own security process, but travel fatigue and the need to find other suitable accommodation in a place where there are no hotels, prompted me to overlook the safety aspect. I was in possession of a list of possible homes that were able to accommodate the visitors who have been arriving in Jaffna since the ceasefire, mostly from the Tamil expatriate community or aid workers, with only a nominal number of Sinhalese. Within an hour of being at the new accommodation I was informed that I was to receive a visit from the LTTE. During the LTTE occupation of Jaffna householders had to report all visitors staying in accommodation to the LTTE. This was not the practice during my research period but I was aware that such practices were continuing during the period of ceasefire.

The impending visit caused me a great deal of concern and forced me to look at the accommodation in a very pragmatic way (I had paid no attention previously except for the size of the room, comfort of the bed, ceiling fan and a privacy of an attached bathroom). I considered many important issues such as entries and exits to the room, means of escape, the height of the window from the ground, the neighbourhood, the location of the nearest army camp (even though the army camp might not have been the

best option for a single female traveller regardless of ethnicity) and the SLMM⁷⁴ office. Upon confronting the possibility of an impending situation with unwanted guests I was able to recall information that was held in mind without being counted as important until that point in time, such as remembering that the Red Cross office compound was less than quarter of mile away. I also became aware of the tropical nights being very dark with inadequate streetlights. It made me realise my own limitations, inadequacies and vulnerabilities. The euphoric feeling from the great sense of achievement on arriving in the field and making contact with the Gatekeeper slowly ebbed away in the face of possible danger. My concern at this stage had less to do with my hegemonic identity but more to do with my work identity that had been kept out of the research project. On this occasion, with much trepidation, I slept fully clothed fully expecting a visit at anytime during the night. However due to another incident in Jaffna town I was not visited, making me realise that my credentials and motives for visiting Jaffna may have appeared to be of less importance than I felt the night before. The next day I was invited to stay at the Gatekeeper's home with his family, which I accepted even though they were unknown to me as the only alternatives I had was staying as an outsider in a stranger's house with limited room for social interaction. Moving to the Gatekeeper's accommodation also meant easier interactions with the women combatants and no threats of the LTTE nightly visits. The relationship issues that arose by moving to the Gatekeeper's family are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

The researcher's vulnerability in conflict zones is a key part of my own positionality in the research. Emotions that are traditionally overlooked in field research (Kleinman and Copp 1993:26-48, Lee-Treweek and Linkogle 2000:14 and Porter, Robinson et al: 2005) become key factors within conflict zones. Whilst there was no sense of danger present on a moment-to-moment basis, there was a continuous sense of being in a very different place where familiarity and unfamiliarity continuously merged. This changing position was mostly experienced when I travelled away from the relative security of Jaffna to the Kilinochchi district, which is held by the LTTE. The familiarity linked to emotions emanating from my own childhood memories of sunny tropical days gave way to a vastly unfamiliar landscape of partially destroyed houses, cement walls with bullet holes, and palm trees with their tops blown off in air raids. The skull and crossbones signs posted along the way warned of landmines. This was particularly poignant where the scenery

⁷⁴ Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission

was exceptionally beautiful along the causeway of Elephant Pass with the reminder of an abandoned shell of a tank where one of the major battles (named by the LTTE as ‘Never Ceasing Waves’) for control of Jaffna took place. Every so often I was able to make out a camouflaged female face in the undergrowth holding a gun.

Lee (1995:28) refers to Reinhartz’s (1979) experience in conducting field research in a border town in Israel. From the time of arriving in the field she was gripped by a sense of fear, “anxiety and over alertness (which) impaired her ability to think clearly” (ibid). Whilst my own positionality in the field was different to that of Reinhartz, I can fully empathise with her; even though I was conducting research during a relatively calm period, it was ‘only’ a ceasefire and not a time of peace.

Safety and escape routes are not an option away from Jaffna and its closest villages. There are landmines, no mobile phone signals, and my inability to speak Tamil fluently and lack of in-depth knowledge of geography of the island all gave rise to a series of negative thoughts. However, I took solace in the fact that I had a torch, a British Passport and my letter from the Director of the London School of Economics Gender Institute. Beyond those comfort blankets, I decided to leave the rest up to fate.

Whilst literature concerning dangerous fieldwork discusses issues such as access, Gatekeepers, being an outsider in the organisation and general safety, no one actually addresses the significant issue of clothing worn in field research. In comparison to many mundane tasks, dressing for the field appears to have been taken for granted, suggesting that all who enter the field must have an inbuilt knowledge of field dress code. Nevertheless, my research experience confirmed the importance of dress in many ways, as discussed below.

Leonard (1993) studied a working-class area of Belfast. Prior to her research she often walked, casually dressed, through the area without her presence being noticed. On beginning interviewing, she decided to dress formally by wearing a suit and carrying her papers in a folder. She recounts that, within a half hour, she was stoned by a group of children who took her “bureaucratic” dress to indicate that she was an outsider

(Lee 1995:17).

In Lee’s (1995) *Dangerous Fieldwork*, he places the above quote under the sub-heading of ‘Access’ to highlight the fact that children can act as alarm bells in the neighbourhood to warn of an outsider entering the community. For me the most significant fact in

Leonard's dressing was that she was unaware of both the danger and the unwanted attention (and aggression) she was attracting by dressing in a specific manner.

To put this into the personal context of my own research, the clothing worn in the field needs to be modest in order to blend in with others, non-offensive and practical. I also wanted to be similar in my appearance to that of other locals, yet still 'different', believing that a minor difference in appearance would allow me to be accepted as 'non-local' but not as an 'outsider'.

My own field experience in tropical areas shows that consideration should be given to clothing with multiple deep pockets that can hold survival essentials such as a small bottle of water, a torch, a map, travel documents and so on. Such trousers are invaluable if the researcher needs to leave the field suddenly, leaving behind bags and other equipment, and the logic of wearing trousers is clear from an ease of movement that could be hampered by skirts, and the additional protection provided from insect bites, cuts and grazes. Footwear, such as trainer type shoes, ought to be favoured over flip-flops, slippers or sandals even in the tropical heat. I would also say that any upper body covering must be modest, although showing the midriff, neck and arms were acceptable in this context, providing the rest of the body is not exposed. Tamil women do not cover their hair and have some form of freedom in dress but they must adhere to modesty which is the main quality expected of and accepted by Tamil women. As such, the decision of what to wear encapsulates the ethical and pragmatic issues that must be considered by the researcher conducting fieldwork in conflict situations.

CHAPTER 3

IDAMPEYATHA (FORCEFUL EXPULSION): CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO JOINING THE LTTE

Introduction

Idampeyatha is a word in the Tamil language that describes a ‘forceful expulsion from one’s home’⁷⁵. During the pre-war era this word was considered as a formal/academic word but it has now entered into the mainstream language of Tamil nationals. The actual scale of the displacement that occurred during the periods of war prior to 2006 is claimed to involve somewhere between 700,000 and 730,000 people, with an equal number migrating overseas over a 30 year period⁷⁶. Out of this total number more than 500,000 people from the Jaffna peninsula were displaced, and amongst them about 350,000 were forced to move to distant places such as Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu, Mannar and Vavuniya. The second battle that was fought over the Elephant Pass causeway (and won by the LTTE in April 2000) caused a further displacement of more than 160,000 people within the Jaffna peninsula. Between September 2000 and April 2001 there were more than 65,000 people displaced in Jaffna due to various operations conducted by the armed forces (UNHCR:7 March 2005).

⁷⁵ Brun (2005) uses the word as *Idampeyarntha* describe both displaced and displacement. However the Tamil language usage of the word is applied to an article rather than a person. Further Brun appears to pronounce the word marginally different to the way it is used by participants of my research; this however does not affect the overall meaning of the word.

⁷⁶ The FMO (access on 14.6.07) claims the figures to be 700,000 and the UNHCR IDP Working Group (access on 14.6.07) claims it to be 730,000. This difference may be due to the difficulties in gathering precise data under conflict conditions.

As in all internal conflicts, the heaviest casualties were civilians and since 1980 thousands upon thousands of Sri Lankans have been uprooted and forced to flee their homes. An estimated 200,000 have fled overseas while the majority has remained displaced within the country's borders. Many of the IDPs⁷⁷ have been displaced several times

(Gomez 2002 in UNHCR 2005:16).

With the renewed escalation of violence, the ceasefire brokered in 2002 subsequently failed in 2005 with the UNHCR (referred to in IDMC 16 November 2006:11) recording over 201,000 newly displaced in the month of April 2006, which rose to 240,000 by the beginning of September 2006. The figures published by the Internal-Displacement group in November 2006 show some 600,000 to 800,000 people as being displaced across the North and North East parts of the island⁷⁸. The current wave of violence in Jaffna has claimed some 48,500 displacements along with an unknown number displaced within the fighting zones.

The numbers that are given pre-2005 (which relates to the my research period) represents one in every two Tamil nationals being displaced and one in four Tamil nationals moving overseas as political refugees; this will give a much clearer indication of the scale of disruption encountered by the civic population that formed part of this thesis (FMO access 14.6.07)⁷⁹.

The literature has cited refugee camps as fertile recruitment grounds used by revolutionary groups (Stedman and Tanner 2003, Brownleese 2004), but has overlooked areas that are controlled by the revolutionary groups where displaced people go in search of safety. The revolutionary organisation invests in finding suitable

⁷⁷ The definition of IDP according to UN Commission on Human Rights (1988) is persons, "who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violation of human right or natural or human – made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border" (UNHCR 1988 cited in de Silva). This definition therefore includes civic citizens who were convinced or forced to move away from their homes by revolutionary movements such as the LTTE.

⁷⁸ A part of this number includes tsunami victims from December 2004.

⁷⁹ Muslim nationals were expelled from the Jaffna peninsula in 1990 by the LTTE as a move towards ethnically cleansing the Jaffna peninsula of all other races. It is also believed that Muslim nationals were ordered to leave by the LTTE due to their lack of sympathy for the Tamil cause and for taking sides with the Sri Lankan government. Schrijvers (1999) claims that some 75,000 Muslim nationals were ousted from Jaffna peninsula in 1990 by the LTTE and De Silva (2004) claims this figure to be one million.

combatants amongst both women and children who are displaced. In this section, I examine the link between displacements to Vanni, the LTTE controlled area and the decision by young girls to join the LTTE and become combatants.

My research suggests that displacement is a key phenomenon that can in part explain the recruitment of women fighters, although the way that displacement leads to recruitment is complex and diverse. In this chapter, I start by discussing the loss of home, which is the most important shared experience of displacement. In the following sections, I outline a number of different factors that can contribute to recruitment: helplessness and loss of agency; break-up of the family and overcrowding; the influence of a nationalist environment; the exclusion from schooling and the lack of alternatives. In the final sections, particularly important is the recruitment of children to the LTTE, both as a consequence of displacement and of a family context where families who are sympathetic to the LTTE may influence their children's decision to join the LTTE.

The spatial location of self

The home represents a symbolic space "... frequently articulated through nostalgia, a form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country" (de Alwis 2004:216). This is the basis from which GV explains her own self-discovery through an analogy of her relationship with her home. When GV explains that "the thing called 'Jaffna culture' is always kept in the house" she means that the cultural roles of women are linked to the house, which provides security, stability and modesty of women. As described by Porteous (1976:383) the "territorial core" provides "essential territorial satisfactions" including those of "identity, security and stimulation" (de Alwis 2004:45).

“I want you to tell [her] this. Tell her that for a Jaffna woman her house is her soul. The house could be a small hut. So for a woman who has been living like this to leave her home was a very difficult matter. Whether we had problems with our parents or had problems with our own thoughts, or if we loved someone or went out to do a job, we never left our homes we always came back to it and we wouldn’t do anything without our parent’s approval. We who were never able to break up our home were ordered to leave the house within an hour and break up the house that were never able to do before...[...]. At this time the rain that came down also played an important part. In that rain what can I carry and take. As far as I can remember I have tried to be a good example in the society and there is this house to which I was bound to and was never before able to break away from it and I have put all that I possessed in it. The sad part was that I was unable to get away from this house before all this happened... [...] All these years I could not break away from this house because of all that I have put in it my relationships, my happy memories, my softness, my possessions I couldn’t leave these things and go. Though there were many opportunities and many chances where I could have achieved more and never left the house. But now in a moment’s notice I had to leave this house for a small reason. To me it felt like a small reason because I missed out on achieving a lot in this world because of being unable to leave the house and when asked to leave it didn’t affect me at all. Even if I had to die I didn’t want to leave the house. I was in Nallur [home region] and I refuse to go. I told even if I die I don’t want to go. When I think back I was a typical Jaffna woman culturally bound to her house”

(GV).

The house as described by GV in essence is relevant to all participants of the research. The concept of the house is more than a mere building of bricks and mortar but in effect is a space of self-location. De Alwis (2004:215) views this self- positioning as giving the house a specific personality along with a gendered dimension⁸⁰. The house in Tamil culture represents female moral virtue, modesty and social respectability.

As discussed in Chapter One, from a historical perspective women were divided into categories based on the house (*Kula Makal* good women/*Vilai Makal* evil women) thus the links with the house for Tamil women are constructed in the gendered terms of space and place. De Alwis (2004:214) describes a space to be an ‘area of safety and security’ and a place to be an ‘area of uncertainty and unfamiliarity’. The act of leaving a known ‘space’ and moving into an unknown ‘place’ proves to be a deeply emotional experience as it is tied to the multiple positions that women occupy. Massey (1994), in de Alwis (2004), argues that ‘space’ is a ‘site of interaction’ and ‘place’ is a ‘site of enclosures’. That there are no ‘pure’ places and both the place and space are in essence

⁸⁰ Whilst there may be earlier reference to the origins of equating self with home, it was notably seen in the works of Bachelard (1969), followed by Cooper, (1974), both referred to in de Alwis 2004.

products of human interaction means that the gendered dimensions in the interaction make displacement a disruptive and life-changing experience. The conceptual notion held within the space of the house provided the same kind of respectable stability for civic women and combatant women alike. The continuous displacements forcing women into various “places” have eroded the security that is provided by the house (the space), and have damaged (irrevocably in some cases) the relationships contained within the boundaries of that space known as the house.

The women whom I interviewed and others I have met in the course of this research have spoken about the deep emotional impact of displacement. In order to gain a fuller understanding displacement needs to be seen in the context of the highly gendered traditional Tamil culture that identifies the home as a culturally confined and socially dictated personal space for women both young and old. The emotional and physical upheaval caused by displacement (by being uprooted from this space) is addressed by Brownlees (2004) as,

Disrupting traditional ways of life has dramatic consequences for young people. For example, patterns of learning and socialisation are interrupted and the artificial environments created in tradition's place can distort moral development.

(Brownlees 2004:114)

The “artificial environments” Brownlees describes above in effect contribute to the nature of displacement that makes women break away from the narrow confines of their traditional roles, whether by re-evaluating their own views or by being pushed into becoming armed combatants.

Changing Roles and Family Structures

Displacement can be easily linked to the LTTE's major wars with the State and ceased during the ceasefire agreement of 2002 until the current wave of violence. These were the First Eelam war on 27th November 1983 to 13 May 1987, the Second Eelam war 11 June 1990 to 13th October 1994 and the Third Eelam war 19th April 1995 (Smith 2003:11). Such displacement, whether it occurs once or many times, or is short or long term, causes a considerable amount of damage to intra-familial relationships.

My research reveals that the continual displacements that occurred in Jaffna have created circumstances that resulted in the deterioration of both the cultural norms and the social hierarchy of the family unit. “Before displacement there was a chance to join [the LTTE]” (Yalini* March 2003), but for many women in this research (except AK), it was an opportunity they did not take due to their strong familial ties. The prolonged war challenges the stability that forms the foundation of the family, where the father acts as both protector and provider as the ‘male’ head of household. There are also many families that are no longer headed by men shifting the gendered dimensions within the confines of the concept of home /house. The disrupted familial structure invariably leads to a social transformation, which under violent political conflicts means a constant contest for available social space. The boundaries of social interaction that are erected during non-war periods, such as respect for elders in the immediate family and /or the greater community, are obliterated when displacement takes place. The elders in the community find it hard to maintain discipline and authority as the stable structure within the set boundaries of home is no longer in existence (Brownlees 2004:117). Adults are often unable to articulate their feelings of helplessness due to depression, which in turn results in an inability to care for children, and thus they may lose their cultural and moral authority as an elder or head of a household (Brownlees 2004:119). The breakdown of the family unit extends to the relatives and decreases in particular the control men have over the unit, (which includes the women). When this formula is applied to the society as a whole it can be seen to produce an extensive reduction in social control over Tamil women as a collective (Schrijvers 1999).

Under the circumstances of displacement, the decline in importance of the head of household and in the control adults have over children in a domestic sphere makes these experiences equally hard to deal with for the young. This is particularly pertinent with young children who no longer see the family as a functioning unit.

“... My mother was very sad when Akka [elder sister] left home to join. But Akka was very unhappy with all the displacements and being at home without going to school must have made her join [the LTTE]. She was 12 years old.”

(Roja)

Roja raises three key points in this extract: one, her sister no longer viewed the family unit as a place she could be happy in; two, the unhappiness caused by being displaced could not be changed by the family and; three, the ability to leave the family

environment to attend a different school was no longer an option. The combination of all these appears to indicate that Roja's sister felt a sense of futility at being with her parents and a family that was unable to provide for her needs in the displaced environment.

The Vanni Influence: an ethno-nationalist revival?

I further suggest that there may be a high level of revival of ethno-nationalism in geographical locations controlled by the LTTE where women's roles are varied to include changes. Szczepanikova (2005) refers to this as the women taking "The essentialized role of biological reproducers and cultural cultivators of the boundaries of ethnic – national collectives and their ideologies" (2005:283). This is often reflected in literature where women who are displaced due to ethnic conflicts become the symbolic embodiment of the conflict (Korac 2004, Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1989, Szczepanikova 2005, Moser and Clerk 2001).

In the context of violent conflict over ethnically homogenous territories and states, uprooted women have become symbolic and strategic sites of nationalism and the quest for the destruction of a multiethnic-national society

(Korac 2004:252).

I would assert that displacement should be seen within the context of the war, in order to fully understand the women combatants' decision to join the LTTE. Through ethno-nationalism the women have been granted a new kind of gender identity, one that differs vastly from the socio-historical positions of pre-displacement times, when space and place were at odds with one another.

"I am from Alavetty. At the age of 12, I was displaced. We were displaced six times. First displaced from south Alavetty to North Alavetty. Then Innuvil, then Kondavil then Kaithady and then Vanni and then Jaffna. When I was in Vanni I joined the movement."

(Roja)

Whilst the age that Roja gave (12 years old) at the time of her initial displacement does not add up correctly with the subsequent events – a four year continuous displacement and joining the LTTE at the age of 14 (or younger) – it can none the less be said that she was rather young when her continuous displacements took place. Her four-year

continuous displacement ended when the family moved to Vanni, and she joined the LTTE as a child combatant.

In Jaffna, displaced women have emerged to play a very different social role to that traditionally expected of them, and articulate their interests beyond the confines of the family unit (see Schrijvers 1999, Zackariya and Shanmugaratnam 2002). In a culture where there have always been defined private and public spaces women find that “there are no family secrets anymore and there is no such thing as a private life” (Shanmugaratnam 2001:30). The impact of the lack of private life is reflected in the interviews of all participants but is particularly poignant in GV and Kavitha’s narratives. In Kavitha’s life displacement became an important influence on her decision-making process, and GV uses the displacement to re-evaluate her whole life and existence.

It is interesting to note that a pattern emerges, of those who were displaced to the Vanni area (which was under the LTTE control) joining the movement. The pattern of displacement to Vanni and subsequent enlisting in the LTTE is also reflective of Kavitha, Yalini, Aruna and Arulvili’s experiences. They all moved from various parts of Jaffna to Vanni for safety and security. The exception was Mallika who was a resident in Vanni and did not experience displacement but was acutely aware of the hardships of others through conversations heard at home. It was unclear from which particular geographical locality Arasi decided to join the LTTE; AK, due to her long-term role of a logistical supporter, joined the movement by invitation. In comparison none of the civic women who also encountered displacement joined the LTTE but interestingly neither were they displaced to the Vanni area. The connection between Vanni and the women’s recruitment is significant here. Due to the prolonged war there appears to be no research conducted on the connection between the Vanni region and women’s enrolment in the LTTE.

I would argue that the displacement to Vanni in effect combines space and place through a network of social interactions with a collective of displaced women. These interactions (with the collective of women) transcend the limited spatiality of secluded personal spaces that separate caste and class through the confines of home. By joining the LTTE the space changes to that of place. The place in this instance is Vanni, the heartland of the LTTE controlled area, which creates a definitive sense of safety, belonging, and above all some semblance of normalcy under violent conditions.

Although displacement is not the sole reason for women joining the LTTE it appears to be one of the more prominent ones. I put this to the test by asking Kavitha if she would still have joined the movement had she not been displaced, to which she answered,

“As with anything when you want to do [something] you need some inducement. So displacement was the final push. Maybe if I had lived here [in Jaffna] there would have been something else that happened here that would have induced me to join. Like the problem with Rajani⁸¹. Incidents like that would have made me want to join. I am sure if I had lived here some of the incidents that took place here with the army would have made me join the movement.”

(Kavitha)

As stated by Kavitha, her displacement acted as the final catalyst for her joining the revolutionary movement, along with other incidents she had witnessed over a period of time. Although in this narrative she did not herself admit to experiencing violence directly, she none the less recognises it as a similarly influential force. Therefore, it can be said that the experience of displacement is perceived in the same way as other forms of more direct violence.

The spatiality aspect of displacement further lends itself to the issue of having to live with others such as relatives, friends, or with total strangers for long periods of time. Though communal living (same as living with extended families) is accepted by the Tamil society, there are issues of class and caste that makes this unacceptable for many in this situation.

“Being displaced and living in somebody else’s house was a problem. Also this was our first time in Vanni and it was not comfortable and suitable to me. I felt that there was no point in living a life in fear which I didn’t like and it was better to have a good life without fear.”

(Kavitha)

Both civic and combatant women mentioned fear as part of their daily existence under war conditions. However in Kavitha’s narrative she ties fear to the displacement pushing her and her family towards homelessness and an uncertain future. Kavitha is not alone in making life-changing decisions based on displacement, as others also revealed similar examples such as Yalini and Aruna. They both were displaced many times, which

⁸¹ Rajani was a school girl who was raped and murdered, by the State army. The army also killed her mother, brother and a neighbour who came looking for her into the army camp.

resulted in their families being forced to find refuge under a tree in Vanni, away from Jaffna's war areas.

"I faced 3 displacements. During the Kilinochchi battle. [and] During Sothiya operation I faced another displacement. Our family, also I, live[ed] under the tree... we were unable to do anything. So I felt".

(Aruna)

"Yes. In Jaffna Fort and in 1995 the military occupied whole of Jaffna Peninsula. At that time we [were] displaced. Displaced to Vanni and we settled... not [that] we [were] settled... we had a home under the tree in Kilinochchi. Then we made a temporary cottage [mud hut] in Kilinochchi. Then I went to school in Kilinochchi only for ten days".

(Yalini*)

Both women describe being forced to live outside, under a tree, but Aruna in particular strikes a keynote in voicing the helplessness she felt. When taken together these examples create a picture of not only dissatisfaction, but also of fear, helplessness, and lack of agency and empowerment. These issues will be discussed later on in the thesis in Chapter Six with an analysis of the roles of equality. These emotions are strong during displacement especially when a considerable percentage of the people who disappear in Jaffna peninsula are children. Somasundaram (2002) claims that out of a total of 600 who disappeared in the peninsula 15% (90) were children (Sri-Jayantha 2002:7).

Positive aspects of displacement

Much research relating to displacement and refugee studies shows that it is women who are far more affected by wars and also that it is women on the whole who take positive steps to change their social positions in times of displacement (Brownlees 2004, Szczepanikova 2005, Kirk 2006, Gardner and El Bushra 2004, de Alwis and Hyndman 2002). The interviews reveals that a number of women have embraced the change as a positive move in their life rendering displacement as the catalyst to an alternative life which they might otherwise have only contemplated in passing. Being uprooted from their comfort zones of 'space' and being pushed into the 'place' has changed the gendered roles of women. This change was particularly visible amongst the financially affluent, educated middle class women such as GV and HA.

“I was so used to my life in my home enjoying the nature that surrounded it, the people and my own thoughts and I always thought there was no other life than this. But now because of this displacement I felt I could live anywhere and in anyway. I felt that had I lost my life earlier, I could have done all this [other activities] before all this [displacement] happened. I even started to cycle everyday. Before all this happened I had friends in other places, but I never went to see them [except] on a motorbike, or a car or a bus because they were far away places and I didn’t want to stay there. I had to come back to my own home as I didn’t like staying away from it....These are places that I never wanted to go but now I [can] tie things on the back of the bike and cycle to that place.”

(GV).

“Survival. So there are so many places to meet [people], things to discuss, so many things to face. I can’t worry now. I can ride bicycle even ten kilometres, I can carry so much. This is [the] main advantage of this war for Tamil woman.”

(HA*)

Removing the private space and opening the public place has resulted in these women reflecting on the social changes that have taken place due to displacement. In displacement the home is no longer represents the gendered values of previous times. GV and HA in particular were able to identify and relate to the positive aspects these changes brought to their lives.

Another notable positive aspect of change due to displacement was that women of high caste and/or the financially affluent middle classes were confronted with sharing their living spaces with other social classes and castes. This shared physical space was described by GV as ‘multi-culturalism’, even though there were no other ethnic groups apart from Tamil nationals present.

“At this time we had to go and live with four families a total of 25 people in a small house with two bedrooms and a veranda. Only here I came across the multi-culture society. All these days [previous to displacement] we lived an independent life in Jaffna and now we had to live with 25 other people. This is where my independent life broke.”

(GV).

The mixing of different social status, castes and classes caused GV to adjust to living with others in a communal way, thus merging the certainty of space with the uncertainty of place. For the first time in her privileged life, she realised that she had to learn to live with others and that she no longer held the same position of power as she had within her

own home. Displacement forces social groups to share personal / physical spaces that the traditions of caste and class would not have permitted before⁸².

Effects of displacement on education

School is recognised amongst displacement literature as being a stabilising factor in children's lives. Machel (2001) who compiled global evidence on child displacement as part of the impact of war on children, claimed education to be the "fourth pillar" in displacement along with food and water, shelter and healthcare. The breaking of routines such as attending school is often found to be destructive for young children in particular, who thrive on stability as suggested by many of the narratives discussed in this chapter.

Herringshaw (2000:1) states that education in displacement bears the same high level of need as food and water (referred to in Brownlees 2004:126). The young are keen to learn, but upon displacement, they are denied such an opportunity, as reflected in the discourse of both the civic and combatant women alike.

“ One of my dreams was to go to the university. The circumstances and the war environment that we were living at that time didn't permit us to study”

(Arasi).

“And in 1995 we [were] displaced. For six months we can't come to Jaffna. We are in the Thenmarachi area out of Jaffna. We have no books nothing for about six months we studied nothing. Stay like this in the house and playing games and like that. Even we can't study anything. ... That time was six months' waste. ...I think about if I can enter the medical faculty and I became a doctor no problem no...”

(ES*).

One main disruption in the displacement period is that many people sought refuge inside school buildings causing those schools to close for an indefinite period of time.

“Displaced people were [living] there [in the schools]...”

(Arulvili)

⁸² As discussed in Brownlees 2004:118, such mixing of social groups appears not to be unique to the Tamil displacement but happens in a global context.

The schools were not necessarily recognised as official refugee sites, but people often felt a sense of safety in being together during periods of violent army attacks, which included aerial bombardments of homes and villages, although in fact the schools often were the targets for bombardments.

“Here you can see. Many schools were destroyed by the Sri Lankan government. In Kilinochchi also lot of schools ...Not because school was not there but not function[ing]...”

(Yalini*).

The reasons for the non-functioning of schools are not limited simply to the occupation of schools by refugees or IDPs but also include the State’s armed forces occupation of the buildings for military purposes. During the period before the 2002 ceasefire agreement it was assessed that there were some 150 schools in the northern part of Sri Lanka that were used either as army camps or as sentry posts by the Sri Lankan State Army. This position changed after the ceasefire agreement as one of its conditions was for all public buildings that were occupied by the armed forces to be vacated immediately ⁸³(Sri-Jayantha 200:5). It is difficult to ascertain the precise number of schools that were operational during periods of conflict and displacement, however an overview of the situation just before the ceasefire period reveals that in the Jaffna district alone only some 85 out of 402 schools were functioning (Sri-Jayantha 2002:5-6). It has been noted by a World Bank official that there were 128,000 students in Jaffna with only 862 teachers (ibid).

The number of children walking many miles to a functioning school underlines the importance of education. One such person was Yalini, an academically bright student who was prepared to attend school whilst being forced to live under a tree, then in a temporary hut erected in the same place. Though the cost of sending a child to school becomes hard for displaced parents to bear, they often try to make adjustments to allow this to happen, with a strongly held belief in education being the only way out of their problems. The State provides free education and gives a form of allowances for school

⁸³ “The letter of this agreement has been followed in the main, yet in many cases the camps have been moved directly adjacent to the schools, so intimidation still occurs” (Sri-Jayantha 200:5). As stated in chapter 1, it must be recognised that it was not only the State that was monopolising public buildings such as schools, but the LTTE too were erecting their camps either amongst the village population or next door to a school as noticed in Kavitha and AK’s interviews. Thus each time the State attacks an LTTE camp it inevitably decimates the schools and houses nearby.

uniforms but the cost of textbooks and other material must be born by the parents. Also the displaced children who attend schools are outsiders in the community and tend to become stigmatised (Smith 2003:24-33).

Displacement can again be seen as a catalyst that pushed young people to pursue alternative lives.

“Already I know about the movement.... but I didn’t decide to join. After displacement...I cannot [attend school].... I was unable to continue my studies.... I decided to join the movement”.

(Aruna)

Education is seen as the sole route to a better life, which once denied, allows the LTTE to be seen as the only remaining pathway open to the young. It is clear that the State was either unaware or simply did not care to recognise the importance of schooling during the periods of conflict and of displacement. The complacency in regards to children’s education by the Sri Lankan government was pointed out by Sri-Jaynatha (2002:6) who states that the government was sending alcohol by ship to Jaffna (the only mode of transport to Jaffna other than by air) far more regularly than much needed textbooks for schools.

What is a child?

The precise definition of what or who is a child has been one of the difficult problems that have been encountered by academics. Many rely on the 1983 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child declaration, which states that ‘a child must be a human being below the age of 18 years’. On the surface this appears to be a sensible approach to a difficult problem of definition. However it overlooks cultural practices that are inherent in certain societies, along with the biological development of physical maturity and mental capacity that is in the 15 to 18 year old age group. Goodwin-Gill and Cohn (1997:6) argue that the identification of children between the ages of 15 to 18 perhaps needs to be referred to as ‘youth’ or ‘young adults’ rather than children. Breaking the age group down into these categories will allocate some leeway for the cultural norms and practices to be pursued within the greater definition. It also allows the young person to take some responsibility as dictated by their individual cultures (ibid).

There are some 300,000 children involved in 30 separate conflicts globally and many are under the age of 16 (Brownlees 2004, Machel 2001). It is interesting to note that during periods of violent conflict both lawgivers and politicians have an opportunity to utilise the lack of clear theoretical definition for the benefit of the state. For instance, Usher (1991:15) notes, “the Israel military’s definition of the legal criminal age had been remarkably fluid. In 1987, it was 16; by 1988, 14; more recently it has been 12” (cited in Cairn’s 1996:9) thus granting a space for the state to prosecute children as adults. In Sri Lanka criminal responsibility starts at the age of 8 years (although those who are between the ages of 8 and 12 have a defence of ‘maturity’ that will be taken under consideration by a court of law)⁸⁴.

The extensive research conducted by Goodwill-Gill and Cohn (1997) on the global use of children as soldiers by the State-run armed forces or in militia revealed that out of 185 countries only 103 had documentation on child soldiers. Seven countries⁸⁵ recruited from under 17 years of age and 24 others accepted volunteers from under 17 years of age but with parental consent⁸⁶.

Child soldiers of the LTTE

In a global setting displacement has been linked to children wanting to join revolutionary movements, as a result of the insecurities felt in their lives (Cairns 1996, Machel 2001, Stedman and Tanner 2003, Brownlees 2004). This however is not widely debated in the available literature focusing on the LTTE and its combatants. The literature does little to emphasise the issue of displacement being a catalyst for many children and young adults wanting to join the revolutionary movement as an alternative

⁸⁴ Only children under the age of 8 are considered as incapable of possessing “mens rea” (the ‘Lectric Law Library).

⁸⁵ Afghanistan, Iran, Lao Peoples Democratic Republic, Mexico, Namibia, Nicaragua and South Africa.

⁸⁶ These countries included many western states including the United States and the United Kingdom. However it is difficult to be precise which of the revolutionary groups started the recruitment of children to its ranks.

to the instability of continuous displacements and life in refugee camps, but discusses it under the theme of forced recruitments or abductions (Smith 2003, Schrijvers 1999)⁸⁷.

The recruitment of children into the LTTE can be traced back to around 1987 (Child Soldiers Global Report 2001:34), at a time when the LTTE suffered heavy losses, resulting in the deaths of many male fighters. This was a period when the immediate enemy was the IPKF and not the Sri Lankan armed forces⁸⁸. This drastic shortage of combatants forced the revolutionary movement to re-assess what alternative human resources were available to them (by this stage women had already started to join the movement). The recruitment of children as combatants is recognised as a low-cost and efficient way for revolutionary organisations to increase the strength of their force (Singer 2005:38). However there is literature (see Bandara 2002, Gunaratna 2001) that reveals the creation of a children's unit known as the *Bakuts*, meaning Baby Brigade, in 1984. Their training was limited to primary education and physical exercises as there was no need at that time to use children in combatant roles. By 1986 some of those children emerged as 16-year-old combatants (Gunaratna 2001:2).

The present situation regarding child combatants differs greatly from earlier times as illustrated by the National Child Protection Authority in Sri Lanka which claims that,

In 1994, I found that one in nineteenth child recruits was abducted. Now in 2004, the reverse is true and only one in nineteen is a volunteer.

(Human Rights Watch Report 2004:16)

There are a number of reports on the subject of forcible child recruitment by the LTTE prepared by the Human Rights Watch, UNICEF, the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, UTHR (Jaffna) and others, clearly indicating that such malpractice does happen in the LTTE.

The enrolment patterns have changed over the years with a notable decrease in children 'volunteering'. Whilst the cause for decreased enrolment is not specified in available

⁸⁷ The LTTE has been accused of going into refugee camps to recruit children who have been orphaned in the December 2004 tsunami (Human Rights Watch :14 January 2005, Refugees International : 21 March 2005, BBC News: 13 January 2005)

⁸⁸ *Child Soldiers Global Report*, 2001:34, Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, cited in Human Watch Report November 2004:5.

literature it can perhaps be attributed to a number of reasons, including the result of the children becoming less romanticised about the role played by combatants, and the families and children themselves being less naïve or innocent of the realities of war. This in turn has resulted in increased forced recruitment through abductions or demands made from households to provide a child for the cause⁸⁹. It must be said from the outset that this chapter is not actively seeking to address the issues of forcible child recruitment, as the women combatants of the research were willing participants⁹⁰.

The debate on child recruits continues with various agencies, such as the Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and UNICEF demanding an end to the practice. The LTTE has not openly claimed the use of child combatants but they have given assurances since 1998 that they will discontinue the practice and release all children engaged within the organisation⁹¹. Needless to say this has not happened in the way that was expected and only a handful of children were released⁹². It is also interesting to note that whilst the SLMM claims that child abduction figures have reduced since the ceasefire, UNICEF have claimed that the numbers have increased, and that between the beginning of ceasefire up to November 2004 there had been some 3,516 children recruited into the LTTE movement (Human Rights Watch November 2004).

The most comprehensive study that is currently available on the gendered aspect of child soldiering in the LTTE is by Keairns (2003). *The Voices of Girl Child Soldiers* was part of larger study that included four separate countries and twenty-three female child combatants. The part concerned with female child combatants in Sri Lanka reveals three contributing factors in a child's decision-making process to become a combatant; the first is personal circumstance and environments, the second is abduction and financial hardship, and the third is a means of contributing to something meaningful with their

⁸⁹ Each household was ordered to give one child to the cause. These instances have been detailed in Human Rights Watch, Amnesty, and UNICEF documents (various dates).

⁹⁰ That said I do recognise that international law has explicitly prohibited the use of children under the age of 18 being recruited into armed revolutionary groups and partaking in hostile activities. I also acknowledge that under the same law (since 1998) it is a war crime to recruit children under the age of 15 years (see www.humanrightswatch.org or UN Document A/CONF.183/2/Add.1 for fuller details).

⁹¹ In 2003, the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE signed a formal document titled Action Plan for Children Affected by War, which gave assurances to end child recruitment and release of existing children from the organisation.

⁹² Human Rights Watch report November 2004 states, those who were released in fact were of no use to the LTTE due to their physical conditions.

own lives. There is also a perceived assumption that respect will be granted by the civil society to those who become combatants of the LTTE.

Some authors, such as Gunaratna (2001), argues that it is the uniforms of the combatants that attract children into the movement.

Interestingly, the appearance of the young recruits was a strong factor in attracting youngsters to the movement. Tiger-striped uniforms, polished boots and automatic weapons acted as magnets to the children.

(Gunaratna 2001:3)

The exact numbers of child combatants recruited by the LTTE are unknown. In 2002 President Kumaratunga stated in an interview to CNN television that there were 1,000 child combatants serving in the LTTE⁹³. Sri-Jayantha (2002) argues that if this figure is compared against the estimate of 10,000 total LTTE combatants it reveals that one out of every ten combatants is under the age of 18 years. Basu (2005) claims the total numbers of children in the LTTE to be 40 percent. As with all data relating to the LTTE this too is an area where there are no means to obtain accurate data. Therefore a crude method had been devised by the State that involved counting the number of dead bodies of children found after various battles. The Sri Lankan Government's Directorate of Military Intelligence claims that a figure of 60% of combatants killed were under the age of 18 years (Gunaratna 2001:1). Gunaratna argues that even if the state's intelligence have over-estimated the number of child recruits, the battlefield deaths show a figure of 40% being children between the ages of 9 years and 18 years of age of both sexes, and a notable number of whom is between the ages of 10 years and 16 years (*ibid*).

Whilst acknowledging that many publications by various international organisations collate and publish details on child recruitment, it is only a very limited number that discuss the role of female children that have either been forced into the LTTE movement or become willing 'volunteers'. The numbers involved vary between authors and their sources, often with a gender-blindness that fails to distinguish male children from female children, although Gunaratna does acknowledge that both male and female children's bodies were included. One exception to this has been Smith (2003:23) who added to the debate by focusing on the battle at Ampkamam (in the northern part of the

⁹³ CNN television 16 May 2002.

island) where 140 LTTE combatants' bodies were recovered, out of which 49 were children, and 32 out of those were female children between the ages of 11 years and 15 years old.

All of the female combatants in my research state that they were volunteers. The majority of them were at least 18 years of age at the time of joining the LTTE. The exceptions are Arulvili who had just turned 17 (she joined after her 17th birthday), while Mallika and Roja claim to have been 15 years of age at the time of their recruitment. However there is a one-year age gap between them, which indicates that either Roja was 15 and Mallika 14 years or they were both younger than they stated. During this research it proved very difficult to obtain precise age of combatant women at the time of joining the LTTE. Therefore the ages were ascertained by linking their recruitment to a time of a major event in their lives, such as during key exam times (e.g. ordinary level and advance level exams). Whilst I would not say it was a deliberate ploy to confuse the researcher, it does go some way to suggesting that the LTTE may have instructed those who joined under the age of 18 to be economical with precise details of their age at the time of recruitment. It none the less confirmed that they were young enough to be classified as children based on the United Nations Convention Declaration definition of a child being under the age of 18.

It must also be noted that, as with many other revolutionary groups that use children as combatants, the LTTE openly values parents who have sacrificed their children to the movement by granting them material advantages. Afshar's (2004) states in relation to mothers of Iranian child combatants who died in battle as,

[w]omen who had many martyred sons were offered pensions for their achievements, given prizes, hauled up at Friday prayers, and praised for offering their sons to the war and helping them achieve martyrdom.

(Afshar 2004:53)

This is reflected in the LTTE as stated by Singer (2005),

In Sri Lanka, parents within LTTE-controlled zones who lose a child are treated with special status as "great hero families." They pay no taxes, receive job preferences, and are allocated special seats at all public events.

(Singer 2005:63-64)

Whilst Singer does not reflect upon the implications of the above paragraph, I would argue that there are a number of reasons why the LTTE use this tactic. On one level, a clear message is sent out to the community that all is not lost due to the death of a child in a family, as the family will be cared for by the LTTE. On another level, it sends a message to the child that their demise will mean that their family will not endure hardships in the future, with no one to care for them. It also encourages the children to join and the parents not to discourage such interests in children. Further it also publicly overlooks Tamil society's deeply ingrained caste and class system by promoting such families to a socially elevated position, so bypassing their caste and class. This in itself is an interesting phenomenon as class can be changed to a degree by education and wealth, but caste usually remains with a person from the time of their birth until their death. Thus being recognised as a 'great hero family' is an honour that a low caste family would never encounter under normal conditions.

There is one aspect that makes the LTTE very distinctive from other revolutionary groups, which is their issue of cyanide capsules to *all* combatants *regardless* of age or sex, as mentioned in chapter one (see Keairns 2003, Schalk 1992, Narayan-Swamy 2002, Bose 1994).

The day I was given the cyanide (capsule) I was very happy because no one would catch me alive – abuse or harass me. This was for *my safety*. I felt good to carry this round my neck.

(Keairns 2003:15 in reference to a female child combatant).

By issuing child combatants with cyanide capsules, the LTTE instils a sense of confidence amongst the child combatants that the enemy will not be able to capture them alive. The LTTE tell the children that death by cyanide is considerably better than being captured and tortured by the Sri Lankan armed forces (Keairns 2003:15), so the children believe that the cyanide capsule is for 'their' own safety, issued by a caring revolutionary organisation.

The politicisation of children

The position in the current literature is that the family is a stronger influence over the development of a child's political conscience than was previously recognised, mostly amongst families in divided ethno-nationalist societies, where ethnic identity is re-created to fit in with the political situation. These views can be divided into three main areas that implicate parental influences, namely: parents sharing the same political ideology, eliminating any political confusion; the importance of politics to both of the child's parents; and the child's own perception of the importance of politics to the parents (Cairns 1996:124).

During my research it transpired that the women combatants developed their initial relationships with the LTTE combatants whilst still living at home. "Through my father I came to know more of Prabhakaran and the Tigers." (AK October: 2003). Thus AK's view of Prabhakaran and the Tigers was formulated by her father and quite unconsciously and unquestionably adopted by her. Cairns observes this to be an indirect way of parents politicising the children:

This is of course not to suggest that parents necessarily give direct political instructions to their children. Instead, what probably happens is that children overhear parental conversations or that they informally learn of their parents' political views. Also, parents are required to answer questions about politics 'just as they are asked to answer a thousand and one other questions as children grow up.

(Cairn 1996:125)

In keeping with the above literature, Arasi describes the influence of the family in a child's political awareness:

"During this time, at night my parents, my uncle and neighbours will sit and talk about these things [LTTE activities] very softly... After that only I started reading the newspapers that were in the house. I read about the problems that were going on here and there. Sometimes I used to ask my mother about all what was happening and my mother would explain things to me."

(Arasi)

As with AK, Arasi's political awareness was directly gained through listening to parental views and thoughts, which in turn influenced her to choose the same political views. These views and thoughts were additionally confirmed as the 'correct' thinking, in an external environment of school.

“Also I heard stories [at school] about the fighters who were fighting for us. We have heard it at school. And also we have seen our parents giving them food and treating them kindly when they came home in the night. When we went to school the next day we found that all my friends’ parents were also doing the same thing and we discussed it amongst ourselves. Then we [school children] began to like them.”

(Arasi)

As can be seen in Arasi’s narrative, whilst at school, children discuss the issue of the LTTE and its combatants. They then realise that not only their own family, but also many others, hold the LTTE in high regard. These views were reinforced by her school (both by her teachers and fellow pupils – her peer group), formalising a righteous belief. Further, the discussions conducted at school about the LTTE and the political situation meant that LTTE combatants were seen as fighting on behalf of others, thus creating a certain admiration for acts of selfless bravery.

The combatants’ active visiting of the homes of civic citizens, to collect food and/or medicine, also allows them to get closer to families that are sympathetic to them as individuals.

“Even before the IPKF came all of us liked the Tigers very much.... I liked the Tigers very very much... My family also liked them very much. Because they go through a lot hardships, and go on without food. At times they come to our house in the middle of the night asking for food... When ever they came, even if it was in the middle of the night we would get up and cook for them and feed them. At home, when our mother ask us to do some work around the house we will give excuses not to do, but when the Tigers came at any time of the day we will do everything very eagerly. At home everyone will say that you are ever ready to do things for them. When you see them you don’t mind doing any work for them. Whenever there is a celebration or festivities at home and when we prepare nice food and eat we think of the tigers and wonder what hardships they are going through at this moment and whether they had any food to eat. They are people who are fighting for us. The thought that army might be hurting them upsets us”

(Arasi).

Arasi, who sees the combatants through the eye of a child captivated by the tales of hardships, appears to have a sense of guilt that she articulates as “they are people who are fighting for us”. As a child with few resources available to her, she was able to express her admiration to the combatants by eagerly awaiting the combatant’s nightly visits to her home, where she could actively take part in the preparation of food for the

combatants. Further, the concerns expressed illustrate that the LTTE combatants were no longer seen as outsiders but as an extension of the family.

The fact that Arasi was 'ever ready' to assist the LTTE goes far deeper into the personal fears she felt as a child. She stated,

"...because with the army they will just come and shoot people at random without saying anything. Then I realised that they [LTTE] are the only people who can save us from the army. Then as we were growing up we began to like them [LTTE combatants] very much and wanted to talk to them [the combatants]. We felt that we would be safer if we go with them [the LTTE combatants] and was scared to stay at home"

(Arasi).

Arasi's narrative highlighted children as being shifted from one safe space to another. Her description described a shift from home to the LTTE as a safe space when the home is threatened. In effect the shift in perceived safe spaces (home and the LTTE) feeds the childhood fantasy of the LTTE as a safe space, but in reality recruitment is a clear path to danger. Therefore the LTTE combatants were inevitably seen as selfless beings that were not only committed to the cause, but also to the community and especially to the young, seen as the future of the nation.

"So at times I have asked them take me with them. But they always told us 'you must study well and be good, then only you can look after our people later on'. 'If tomorrow we get our land you are the people who are going to be in charge, so don't come with us but study well'. They emphasised on us studying well. We were very much inspired by them so we studied hard to please them. And it was like our goal to study well."

(Arasi)

As illustrated above, Arasi accepted their advice, which was given before the LTTE started to recruit children into their ranks. It was also a time when parents still welcomed the combatants, and children openly admired them. Quite often, they were also seen as part of the family. In a culture that is known as accepting and obeying parental views unquestioningly, it is easy to see how the older combatants became heroes in the eyes of the desperate young adolescents.

“When we started helping the Tigers he [father] never stopped us. So by that time I started to help in projects, which the Tigers had started. Also I used to go and collect food parcels for the LTTE and take care of the wounded. He [father] allowed us to go and do all these work without any objections.”

(AK)

AK’s father was known to be a strict man with an authoritative parenting style who saw no need to curb AK’s movements with the LTTE, or the time she spent with them. By this token, her father conveyed his acceptance of her involvement with the LTTE. Along with such admiration there was also an inevitable obligation felt by the individual child and their family, as a perception and a belief of basing their safety upon the selflessness of the LTTE combatants. Singer (2005:64) claims, “Parents may also drive children into war indirectly” by their own admirations of combatants. This was highlighted in Yalini’s family, when her father pointed out that her freedom depended upon the sacrifices made by the combatants.

“My father told us they are fighting for us they are fighting in the jungle without having food like that my father will talk [to] us, you studying, you are living freely because the Tigers are fighting for us. My father will talk with us.”

(Yalini*)

Such parental statements often made a child feel they were indebted to the LTTE. The child ‘owed’ her life and daily existence to the non-selfish commitment and self-sacrifice made by the LTTE, on behalf of the child and her family. Many authors (such as Singer 2005, Gunaratne 2001 and Smith 2003) overlook the cultural context, in which children accept these parental ideologies unquestioningly, as the ‘correct’ belief. However, based on my own findings, I agree with Cairns that there is strong evidence to suggest that the parent’s political views do foster the child’s own political socialisation.

It must also be noted that the civic women did not discuss the same type of admiration and appreciation as seen amongst combatant women’s families. The civic women supporters of the LTTE in their adult years did not get involved with the combatants that visited them, although their parents offered food and medicine and at times monetary contributions, so ensuring they did not antagonise or be noted in any way.

Whilst acknowledging the feelings of admiration the women felt as children for the LTTE through parental influence, there are also non-parental influences that instil or

reinforce these feelings of admiration. One such influence that encourages women to join the LTTE is the visual imagery of the billboards along main roads that depicts the glamour and excitement of being a combatant. During the research, I noticed a number of billboards depicting many 'storyboards'. One such board illustrated a group of girls in school uniform, talking with a group of women in combatant uniform (Figure 7). There were also other storyboard sketches, clearly aimed at girls, illustrating the violence committed by the army upon civilians, and how young girls were retaliating, by becoming combatants and confronting the injustices committed (Figure 8). In a society where age, caste, class and gender identity all play a recognisable role, continuous environmental imagery can be powerful, and form an added incentive to be part of a revolutionary movement.

Power relations in the family

During the times of displacement the amount of control able to be exerted by the parents is reduced and the children are often exposed to a harsh and cruel environment where they have to learn to survive. The displacement camps became fertile grounds for finding new recruits for the LTTE⁹⁴, as inadequate facilities (including lack of educational facilities) in camps made the LTTE appear as a very alluring alternative (Goodwin-Gill and Cohn 1997:34). Brownlees (2004:119) and Cairns (1996) both argue that in such environments children begin to develop an additional political conscience, which may have some of its roots in parental political ideologies, but could also have a stronger influence based on own feelings of "having nothing to lose". This in itself is a direct result of the "desperation and dispossession" that is generally felt in displacement⁹⁵. On such occasions, armed resistance is viewed by the young people as granting them some form of "empowerment" (Goodwin- Gill and Cohen 1997:41). The LTTE offers such an empowerment to these young people thus enabling them to regain a certain level of control that was lost to them.

⁹⁴ News reports covering the tsunami disaster in December 2004 had claimed a number of young children at refugee camps have been approached by the LTTE for recruitment purposes.

⁹⁵ This is an agreed view amongst psychologist and child care workers who work amongst Palestinian displaced children (Goodwin-Gill and Cohen 1997:41).

This was reflected in my interviews with Roja and Mallika who revealed that once a child recruit reached the age of 18 years⁹⁶ (not 16 years as stated in Gunaratna 2001) they are given an option to remain with the organisation or to return home.

Mallika: Her sister [referring to Roja's older sister] studied for nearly five years. And we studied for three years. According to LTTE rules only after you are 18 years old you are allowed to go for fighting. But the youngsters were all the time wanting to go into fighting.

Translator: After the age of 18 they will ask again [whether they still wants to be with the LTTE and do battle]. They can decide if they want to go home they can go home. Isn't it so?

Roja: Yes. We can go home. But not many go home like that."

(Mallika, Roja and the Translator)

The analyses of the narrative indicated there was a strong sense of voluntarism than coercion felt by young combatants. It may be that many young combatant women do not return home because of the empowerment they gain, or the alternative family they create, within the revolutionary movement. The argument of many children deciding to stay with the LTTE rather than return home is discussed in Chapter Four under kinship in friendship.

Research relating to relationship interactions within families during periods of violent political conflict is riddled with contradictions (Cairns 1996). Parenting styles tend to change during conflicts due to reasons that include displacement, financial and domicile instability, and a heightened sense of parental responsibility. There is a tendency to develop an authoritative style of parenting, to compensate for the fear of being unable to protect the children (*ibid*), as is seen amongst those that are displaced.

However during the interviews it became quite clear that the relationship parents had with the LTTE combatants, which was both cultivated and developed by the combatants, was in fact strained when the women (as young adults) decided to join the movement. It appears that though the parents were fully prepared to openly admire the combatants and their endeavours, they were wholly unprepared to face their children's desire to become combatants. There is a notable distinction between children discussing their desire to join the revolutionary movement with their parents from actually obtaining

⁹⁶ UNICEF defines a child as 18 years and under, which is accepted by Sri Lankan government.

parental blessings. The children's own desire to join may stem from their desire to be accepted in the same way as combatants, having seen their parents' admiration for them. Or the children may think that by becoming combatants they are actively protecting their parents.

However the relationship between the women combatants and their parents is not as clearly defined as it first appears to be. The cultural normative together with gender dimension has created a highly complex social interaction within the family unit during times of war, displacement and violence. There are new forms of power relation being born within the family unit itself. The power used by the children to negotiate their own position and determine their own views (based on the internal domestic sphere as politics discussed by the parents or/and the external sphere of school, peer groups and the greater society) have in effect distanced them from their parents.

Most of the combatant women who took part in this research have admitted to their parents' grief when they discovered their child had joined the LTTE. None of the participants in this research had informed their parents prior to leaving home to join the LTTE. The excuses given by the women combatants in order to leave the house without raising their parents' suspicions are wide and varied.

“I told them [parents] I was going to the temple.” (Roja)

“I told my mother I was going for tuition.” (Mallika)

“....as we were going we passed the school in which our younger brother and sister were studying and they were just coming out of school. They asked us where we were going. They knew that we often went to Morris's [local LTTE leader's] meetings so we told them that we were going to the meeting and we went.”

(AK)

None of the women combatants viewed these excuses to be significant deceptions. They simply viewed the excuses as a means of getting themselves out of the home with the least resistance from their parents. If the parents did discover what they were doing then it was very likely that they would prevent their daughter(s) from leaving home. AK related the story of her friend 'Navamany' who was active with AK in providing logistical support to the LTTE until they were both invited to join the movement. When

Navamany went home to gather her belongings, her mother became suspicious, locked her in the house, and prevented her from leaving with AK. However the action taken by her mother did not prevent Navamany from joining the movement on a later date⁹⁷.

Yalini sums up the emotional anxiety that is felt by her parents upon her enrolment in the LTTE. It also shows a definitive decision being made by Yalini to join the revolutionary movement.

“Many times I talked with my mother about joining LTTE. Everyday I will tell. My mother tells me that if you go to LTTE you have to face many difficulties. You will be without food. How can you survive? I told my mother yeah there are lot of cadres in the movement and they are fighting, why cannot I also fighting. My mother didn’t believe. Only I am saying but not joining. But one day I have joined. [going for tuition] I went to a LTTE men cadre then he left me in a women’s cadre base. In the women’s cadre base I was for 5 days and then I went to the training. So now when I meet the man cadre, he will talk with me about my mother. My mother went to that cadre’s place and my mother was crying and lying down and my mother said I will not go back to my home without my daughter and just lied down and that’s it and refusing to get up again. Then my father came to that place. And my father talk with my mother and both of them came back to home. After 5 months I saw my mother. They came to my base”.

(Yalini*)

Once the parents overcame the initial shock and disappointment, they eventually came to accept their child’s choice to join the LTTE. In this situation the child has altered the power relationship she has with her parents to gain her own wishes. The fact that the child is not going to leave the organisation, regardless of the emotional trauma caused to the parents, is a new kind of relationship dynamic that was not seen to the same extent before in Tamil culture. Parents have less agency within the changing relationship dynamics and are then left to deal with the situation in an alternative to the traditional way they have been accustomed to.

⁹⁷ Navamany subsequently died in battle.

“At the beginning any parents find it difficult to see their child leave. Our culture is that always the family stays together. Usually we don’t leave the parents until we get married and go. But as time went by when they too experienced lot of difficulties during the war and they felt that it was ok for one to join the movement and fight for the cause...Until they met me for the first time after I joined they were not happy. There was a certain period of time when we were under training I couldn’t meet them. But once they saw me after the initial parting they were happy.”

(Kavitha)

The word ‘happy’ is used by Kavitha to describe her parent’s acceptance of her into the revolutionary movement, but this needs to be looked at in a broader sense of the word as it is used to describe a situation where parents had neither power nor control. The usage of the word also makes the situation a lot more congenial and devoid of conflict. Kavitha’s description is without any of the sentiments attached to that of Arulvili (below).

“At first when we say we are going to join they [parents] *don’t like* it but after we joined they [parents] *accepted* it.”

(Arulvili)

This statement also illustrates the disempowerment of the parental authority practiced in Tamil culture. The acceptance of a female child’s action as irreversible by disempowered parents challenges the gender normative in a society that grants more freedom of choice to a male child than a female child. The male child is viewed from the beginning of his life to be part of the world outside, spending his adult life in the public places and making his mark. The female child on the other hand is seen from the time of her birth to be a part of a family, confined to the domestic spaces, away from anything that is public. Thus the only time she can truly *leave home* is when she is married. If she does not get married then she will *always* live within the confines of the parental home as discussed in Chapter Six.

Summary

There is a universal acceptance that children have no place in wars, either as victims or as perpetrators. Whilst the LTTE use children, justifying it as an operational need, the children themselves are driven by circumstances towards the revolutionary organisation, which of course welcomes them with open arms. Within these circumstances, displacement is one of the key factors.

The claim made in the Human Rights Watch report that there were more child volunteers in 1994 indicates that during the first decade of war, with multiple - displacements, children have actively sought an alternative life with the LTTE.

Education in displacement is recognised as a key factor that provides a certain sense of stability and normalcy for a young person. Education is disrupted during displacement with many school buildings closed because of people seeking refuge, or being the targets for bombardments due to the proximity of LTTE camps, or occupied for military purposes by the armed forces. It also gives hope as a central factor in every day existence linked to the longer-term betterment of an individual's life that extends beyond the times of displacement. Therefore education is seen not only as a short-term means of providing immediate stability, but also as a form of providing long-term opportunities for the future where none can be seen.

Children's roles are generally moulded under the watchful authority of the consanguine relationships of elders. However the role of the elders gets obliterated under displacement when the revolutionary group can step in and take control under the same cultural normative of a 'watchful' elder. The involvement of the revolutionary group as the nominated elder in time will restore the disempowerment felt by the young person as the new kinship develops and becomes stronger than the consanguine genealogical relationships.

The prolonged war challenges the stability that forms the foundation of the family and together with displacement causes further damage to intra-familial relationships, especially affecting the male roles (including that of head of the household), which alters the traditionally gendered dimensions of the concept of home.

The combatants were seen as a righteous group of people with no moral corruption, and their reputation was such that parents openly encouraged their children to associate with the LTTE. Thus the admiration of the young person towards a serving older combatant is often fuelled by parental involvement and support for the rebel group in the presence of that young person. By joining the LTTE the young women gain a powerful protector whom they have admired for a period of time based on the politicisation they received at home under the guidance of parents or from non-parental influences without the knowledge of their parents. The exercising of agency by young Tamil women needs to be recognised in a cultural context as a challenge to the parental

authority within a patriarchal culture where women (regardless of age) do not usually take the main decisions that effect their lives and do not leave home other than in marriage.

Displacement both contradicts and questions an individual's agency and the control they are able to exert over their lives. It raises questions on traditional values of caste and class. The displacement allows an individual to break away from traditional holds that keeps them subjected to set roles in society. They are able to make some decisions regarding their lives and those of their families but are unable to carry out the decisions made thus creating a paradoxical position in their lives.

Those displaced to LTTE controlled areas felt a sense of safety, and a stronger sense of ethnic identity, even without proper accommodation. From their perspective, it was better to stay under a tree in Vanni, with some degree of safety, than to live in an area with comfort but no safety. The LTTE steps in where the family has failed to provide stability or address the insecurity that is felt within the immediate biological family.

I would argue that displacement cannot be dismissed as a mere oddity in the women's decision-making process, and when combined with the safety and security felt when under the protection of the LTTE in the Vanni district, is a common theme that appears to have attracted women to the movement. Again, as with the issues of lack of control and empowerment, this is indicative of the LTTE replacing the lost agency of the individual that is lost to victims of displacement.

CHAPTER 4

THE TIGER FAMILY: KIN IDENTITY AMONGST WOMEN COMBATANTS OF THE LTTE

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter the family unit and its loyalties are tested to the full under conditions of war. The effects of displacement create instability for some women and leave many of them with no alternative but to break away from their culturally defined roles of womanhood. Such acts can be seen as an attempt at re-establishing an individual's sense of lost agency and a need to be in an environment where they feel they have some control. In order to feel a sense of empowerment some women have actively sought out and joined the LTTE movement, which has embraced them as a part of a substitute family unit.

The definition of kinship according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1980) is a “blood relationship; similarity or alliance in character.” Within the anthropologically defined social understanding of kinship the term breaks down to describe three forms of kinship. A strong bond created within the ‘consanguine’ (blood-related) social groups; the ‘affinal’ kinships that extend to include familial ties made through marriages to non-consanguine others in the society; and finally ‘fictive’ kinships that include those who are attached to a family unit that are neither connected through blood line nor through marriage. Kinship terminology in this chapter is used in reference to the Tamil culture to describe the relationships that traditionally exist in a consanguine family. In this chapter I have taken the word kinship away from its consanguine roots (to a great extent) and have used it to describe the alternative family unit recreated by the LTTE. This family unit can be described as a fictive family unit founded upon friendships that in turn imitate or replace the kinships of a consanguine family.

The word friendship is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1980) as “being friends, relation between friends; friendly disposition felt or shown.” It also describes the word ‘friend’ as “one joined to another in intimacy and mutual benevolence independently of sexual or family love.” In this chapter fictive kinship is based on the friendship that occurs among the women in the revolutionary movement. My argument that friendships form a major part of the fictive kin family will assist in using the words ‘kinship’ and ‘friendship’ as analytical tools to explore the use of familial ties that are idealised, built and maintained within the confines of the substituted LTTE family. The moral economy (Sayer 2004) of this situation identifies that both the reasons why women join the movement, and their bonds with each other in kinship, arise through a moral obligation to both the LTTE and the Tamil nation as a whole. The moral economics of kinship that regulates relationships changes the views on traditional roles. In this chapter, I look in detail at how the LTTE has succeeded in constructing a sustainable fictive kinship through the friendships amongst women combatants who are effectively from various socio-economical, religious and caste backgrounds.

The Concept of kinship

Schneider (1984) challenged extant assumptions about the measurement of kinship through consanguine ties, arguing that relationships are practiced in socio-cultural groups. In his seminal text *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), he states that biological relatedness is not the sole factor in forming kinships in society. While consanguine ties are an important factor in determining relationships, there are other influences that need to be acknowledged as key considerations in kin relationships, such as socio-cultural influences. However, the literature that addresses the issue of developing friendships as part of solidarity between consanguine kin members is limited (Contarello and Volpato 1991 referred to in O'Connor 1992). Many kinship studies were conducted primarily from a Western point of view, focusing on the formation and social interaction of consanguine relationships at a cost of overlooking valuable cultural practices (Schneider 1984, Bell and Coleman 1999, Carsten 2004 also see Collier and Yanagisako 1992).

Carsten's research, published in 1997, addresses the issues of consanguine and socialisation in kin groups, which she further explores in *Culture of Relatedness* (2000). She argues that cultural practices external to conventional anthropological research

must be taken into consideration when trying to understand kin relationships. An awareness of cultural practices may distinguish fictive kinship from the real thing. However, a recognisable change did occur in kinship studies with the rise of feminism that challenged the way in which kinship is depicted in anthropology, where it is often difficult to separate or identify metaphorical kinship from other forms (Carsten 2004, O'Conner 1992). An example of this can be seen in White (2004) where fictive kin relationships are created through the economic circumstances that women find themselves in ("webs of indebtedness"), who refer to one another using consanguine kin terminology. It must also be noted that amongst the literature on friendship, there is no direct link to kin relationships, except under sexual orientation (see Carsten 2004).

The focal point of the LTTE's kin relationships appears to promote metaphorical kinship as a temporary substitute for consanguine kinship. As the women of the LTTE face many difficulties in their lives, the notion of kinship is significant to the understanding of their relationships that are formed with one another. The success of the LTTE's newly (re)created family and the security and stability that the LTTE family provides is very much dependent on the promotion of a fictive kin identity that is devoid of blood ties (see Weston 1991, Carsten 2004).

Though feminism has changed the way in which Western thinking affects traditional kinship studies, the research conducted amongst combatant women on a global scale is also limited. Within this limited literature the relationships that women combatants have with each other are neither discussed at length nor critically analysed or debated, but inferred as part of the text that discusses the women's involvement in various armed revolutionary struggles. Often these discussions emanate from a strong gender perspective based on changing social roles for women, with occasional references to the metaphorical kinships within the individual revolutionary group (see Taillion 1999, Ward 1983, and 2001, Hillyar and McDermot 2000, Kampwirth 2002, Young 2001, Young 1998, Wilson 1991, Eisen-Bergman 1975, Turner and Hao 1998⁹⁸). This is also

⁹⁸ Taillion(1999), Ward (1983 and 2001), both wrote about women revolutionaries in the Irish struggle in the 1900s. Hillyar and McDermot (2000) focused on women revolutionaries in Russia during 1870-1917. Kampwirth (2002) wrote about women guerrilla fighters in South America. Young (2001) and Young (1998) concentrated on women's involvement in the Chinese Cultural Revolution, including women's active participation in the Long March. Wilson(1991) wrote about the women fighters in the Eritrean conflict. Eisen-Bergman (1975), and Turner and Hao (1998) discuss the role of women combatants in the Vietnam war.

reflected amongst authors who focus on the LTTE such as de Mel (2001), Rajasingham-Senanayake (2004), Coomaraswamy (1996), Maunaguru (1995), who have written about the LTTE and the women's involvement in the organisation, but have overlooked the positive development of familial identity encouraged within the movement. The exceptions to this are Balasingham (1993 and 2003) and Schalk(1992) who do discuss to some degree the combatant women's involvement with the LTTE from a perspective of a friendship. These discussions are referred to throughout this chapter.

This minimal recognition regarding women combatants' relationships has resulted in a shortfall of documentary evidence supporting women's kin identity during conflicts. Young (2001:5) defines her work as "historical narratives based on oral interviews" and writes extensively on women's involvement and participation in the Chinese Revolution's Long March. However, together with other authors, she has failed to examine in depth the very strong bonds built up amongst the women, and only provides a glimpse of the kind of kin identity the women combatants may have had with one another.

We women cooperated very well, we were united, all of us were one heart. At the time, we women had to be united. We couldn't quarrel or fight. At that time we shared everything from food to clothes – we suffered together, enjoyed together.

(Young 2001: 246).

One may speculate that, although there is a lack of documented evidence, a considerable amount of emotional support must have been given to women revolutionaries by their fellow women within different revolutionary contexts. The above narrative may infer that there were strong relationships, which outlasted a very difficult time for the women as revolutionaries who fought and endured hardship together. The suffering of women is further seen amongst the women guerrillas of various South American revolutionary groups (Kampwirth 2001 and 2002, Rovira 2000) as well as in the Vietnam War (Turner and Hao 1998). The recognition of the relationships that are built between women combatants has never been at the forefront of the literature, as opposed to masculine-dominated literature, which discusses male identity, comradeship, and

friendships relating to kinship at length (see Leon 2001, Davis 1985, Graves 1981, and Richter 1997)⁹⁹.

Kin the chosen family

When the LTTE created the revolutionary family, it was required to maintain a respectable and socially accepted format, which was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, the LTTE adheres to the strict moral code expected by both civic society and the women combatants themselves. Although the LTTE enforces the authority and responsibility of a consanguine family they also provide opportunities for women combatants to re-negotiate and challenge their gender roles, as discussed in later sections. Secondly, by using linguistic expressions that suggest familial ties, the male and female combatants avoid any sexual connotations that could be misconstrued when addressing one another. This in turn introduces a form of respect that is shown by a consanguine family unit through a trusted and familial set of kin terminology. Lastly, the women are given a sense of belonging to a family through both consanguine and non-consanguine ties, along with a sense of loyalty to the family unit, and especially to its patriarchal head of family, Prabhakaran. The LTTE tends to rely on the loyalties of the combatants to a higher degree as illustrated by the combatant's oath, where they pledge allegiance not just to the LTTE but also to Prabhakaran directly.

“The movement has high moral values and is a *very sweet family*”.

(Arasi)

The above statement by Arasi is reflective of the view held by combatant women regarding the LTTE and its re-constructed family unit. The high moral values are often seen as part of the LTTE's strength that grants them a great deal of respect from those in civic society where women's behaviour is often critically observed. The 'family' that is actively promoted within the LTTE reproduces many of the social values of the broader patriarchal society. The gender-based social controls amongst civic society, which

⁹⁹ Leon (2001) discusses Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista movement; Davis (1985) discusses the second world war fought in Burma, Robert Graves a seminal autobiographical text on the First World War; Lionel Sotheby's diaries and letters from the Western Front during the first world war.

restrain women's social interaction with men, are seen in an alternative guise, which do not necessarily restrict but expect conformity¹⁰⁰. As Balasingham (2003) suggests,

[t]he LTTE upheld a rigid code of moral conduct amongst the cadres. Premarital separation between the sexes is a well-entrenched cultural norm amongst the conservative section of the Hindu Jaffna society and Mr Pirabakaran [Prabhakaran] was sensitive to the importance of this sensibility amongst the Tamil people. He demonstrated considerable political acumen by identifying this socio-cultural factor as critical if he was to continue to enjoy the widespread support of the people that the LTTE did at this stage and sustain the recruitment level into the organisation.

(Balasingham 2003:79)

The organisation was aware that women's acceptance into the LTTE family meant that there must be a way to include them, along with the men, without being criticised by the civic society as being morally decadent. This is an important factor as the LTTE relies heavily upon the support of the civic community, not just for its logistical support but also for new recruits.

"Just like the normal women we are also working with men in the movement. We are with them together everyday but we don't think like that. *We think we are all brothers and sisters of one family*".

(Arulvili)

A great emphasis is placed on the kinship aspect of the revolutionary family even though the combatant women see parallels between themselves and the women working in the greater civic community. The emphasis on the kinship aspects works to allay the fears derived from the social taboos concerning women's close association with men. This will also distance the notional view of women who spend time with men as having a bad character as pointed out by Balasingham (2003) who claims that,

¹⁰⁰ When the LTTE have celebrations it is noticeable that there are no male /female mixed dancing. The men dance in their own group and women within their own group.

... aspersions cast on the moral character of women is a death knell to her maintaining or establishing any kind of credible friendships and respect amongst people in the community. Once a woman is labelled as a 'bad' character in the Tamil society she loses her moral authority.... [...]... The concept of 'bad' character is loosely used and is broad in its application. The social perimeters around which a woman can operate before she is considered as 'bad' character are indeed narrow by western standards. For example, an unmarried girl seen frequently talking to boys runs the risk of being considered a 'bad' character

(Balasingham 2003:85)

With a strong understanding of how society constructs women's character, the women combatants maintain a familial kin identity and an intimacy that is never displayed publicly other than with a well-trained and completely composed interaction between each other. The very nature of being in a revolutionary organisation means that women combatants need to be both private and secretive, which in turn forms part of the cultural constellation of friendship in the LTTE.

A closer examination of the family unit reveals that when women from civic society join the LTTE movement they are in fact joining a group of people they have already had some contact with over a period of time and have become friendly with although they may not be friends. As discussed in Chapter Three, all the women combatants in the research knew a number of active combatants in the LTTE prior to their enrolment. The significance of this information is that when they leave home and take up residence with the LTTE they are not considered to be amongst 'complete strangers', but are with known people whom they are already used to calling *Annay* (older brother) or *Akka* (older sister). This type of address forms the basis of the LTTE's (re)construction of a non-caste based family unit, which is reflective of a consanguine family unit using familial references.

From a cultural perspective, it is respectful to refer to one another as older brother *Annay* and older sister *Akka*, or younger sister *Thangachchi* and younger brother *Thambi*. This usage of kin terminology amongst the combatants encourages both men and women to overlook to some degree the power relations that exist between the sexes by focusing directly on the relationship aspects. (The issue of gender and power relations will be looked at in more depth in Chapter Six). The relationship aspects create levels of authority that an older sister (*Akka*), would gain over a younger sister (*Thangachchi*) by recreating the natural hierarchy of a family unit. The socio-familial

interaction is further discussed by Balasingham (2003) upon her first meeting with Prabhakaran in 1979 at Chennai¹⁰¹, South India:

He was obviously concerned as to how to address me. In Tamil culture the titles Mr. and Mrs. are not generally used to address people. Titles of address are linked to social hierarchy and social and familial relationships. Since our relations were not familial or familiar he couldn't address me as 'akka' (older sister) and at the same time he couldn't be so formal as to address me as Mrs. Balasingham. Since I was older than he was it would not be culturally correct to address me as an equal by using my Christian name either. 'Thamby' [Prabhakaran's familial name given to mean younger brother] found a solution to his dilemma by christening me with the affectionate compromise and comprehensive title 'Auntie'. Apart from Bala [husband] and one or two others, Tamil people of all ages have come to know and address me as 'Auntie' many, I think, unaware of my real name (43-44).

What is particularly interesting in the description given by Balasingham is the fact that the English language word *Auntie* in reality makes her an outsider inside the family unit of the organisation. The English language words *Auntie* and *Uncle* are generally given to outsiders who are older to denote a mark of respect. As stated by Balasingham it is not acceptable for younger people to call older people by their given (Christian/forename) names. The word *Auntie* carries both an external distance and a closer kin identity within a context of friendship that Balasingham was part of for many years and still is.

On extremely rare occasions the familial hierarchy of a younger brother may change, to accommodate him as an older brother based on his merits, if they are perceived to go beyond those of a younger person. For instance, Prabhakaran was referred to as *Thamby* during the early stages of the revolutionary struggle when he was based in Chennai. The affectionate form of addressing him as a younger brother changed to a respectful older brother *Annay* with the battle of Elephant Pass in 10th July 1990¹⁰². Though Prabhakaran lost the battle, he none the less proved to the world that he was a formidable combatant and a revolutionary leader of considerable standing.

¹⁰¹ Chennai was formally known as Madras.

¹⁰² The Elephant Pass battle was of great significance as a vast number of combatants were killed in a short period of 3 weeks. It is estimated that over 600 LTTE combatants died in this battle in comparison to the 800 combatants who died in a period of two and half years battle with the IPKF. (Pratap 2001:90-92)

It was a crushing military blow to the LTTE. But Pirabhakaran's [Prabhakaran] spirit was far from crushed by the debacle. It actually blossomed and crystallised into a new persona. Gone was the boyish guerrilla. Instead, there was a man who moved and behaved like the Big Boss... [...] ... nobody called him Thambi anymore. Everybody now referred to him as Annai, or elder brother...

(Pratap 2001:92-93)

Added to the created kin terminology practices, Tamil culture views the extended family as part of the greater familial system. This reaches beyond the immediate family of elderly parents and other relatives to those of distant blood relatives and also to friends and neighbours. Though Balasingham (2001:47) discusses social relationships and interactions in the daily offering and sharing of food from one household to another, or amongst neighbours and friends, she fails to mention the caste boundaries that operate within Tamil culture and particularly in the Jaffna province. Skjonsberg (1982) illustrates ways in which the caste system is perpetuated and legitimised by the community itself; which I would argue does not apply in the same way to a non-Tamil national. (Adele) Balasingham, being a white Australian, is an outsider; hence the customary practices of caste-related prejudices within the greater Tamil community would not affect her in the same way. Her marriage to Anton Balasingham, the highly respected theoretician of the LTTE, granted her a certain trusted, respected and secure position amongst the combatants and amongst the Tamil civic community in Jaffna. Further she was not looking for an alternative nor for a substitute family unit, hence she was not dependent on cultivating the same level of kin identity as others. Therefore I would argue that from the very beginning her kin identity with the LTTE revolutionary family is somewhat different, but she was nonetheless tied to the familial relationships of the extended LTTE family.

From a global perspective, revolutionary families often offer women a sense of belonging. "For almost all, participating in the revolution meant finding a place to belong... [...] ...The Party was my family" (Young 2001:132-133). This sense of belonging takes on a different meaning when part of the revolutionary group may already be related to each other through consanguine ties. As the LTTE is founded amongst a small community having some consanguine kin amongst the combatants is inevitable. For instance, Arasi, Roja and AK all have sisters in the movement, some of whom joined up at the same time as they did. Both CH and Aruna have brothers in the movement. In addition to the immediate family members in the movement, both Roja and Kavitha

have cousins enlisted in the movement. Thus connections include both close consanguine kin members and extended family members within the LTTE organisation.

Knowledge of blood relatives within the organisation was not necessarily disclosed to me until I directly posed the question.

Aruna: my brother joined

Me: He has joined as well?. How old is he?

Aruna: Same age.

Arulvili: [shouts] Twins

Me: oh really! Identical?...do you look alike?

Aruna: yes...yes

Arulvili: A little bit different. He's got a beard.

[Laughter]¹⁰³

The conversation at that moment appears to be light-hearted with a close knowledge of one another's family. Allan (1979) claims that being a friend "...involves some degree of personal knowledge and mutual communion..." (36) as opposed to being friendly, which Burns (1953) calls 'polite fiction' (referred to in Allen 1979:36) meaning a polite interaction, which can happen between individuals even with a dislike of one another. I was aware of the usage of the word 'friend' amongst the women combatants with its primary variable of socio-cultural construction and the secondary variable of nuances. Clear examples of the two variables are seen within the revolutionary group's kin relationship with Adele Balasingham and the titled reference of 'Aunt' (as discussed previously).

Kinship in Friendship

In addition to consanguine relationships the women combatants often have a large number of peers who have joined the revolutionary organisation. Updergraff et al (2002) acknowledge that friends in this context offer the same emotional support and intimacy as siblings do in adolescent years, meaning that women who joined at a young age formed their kin relationships with more ease. This was seen in the relationship

¹⁰³ This was a group interview conducted with Yalini acting as the main interpreter as well as a participant. However both Kavitha and Aruna were able to understand some English and to give some responses in English without the assistance of Yalini. This particular piece relates to such an occasion.

between Roja and Mallika. They were approximately of the same age (as discussed previously in Chapter Three) when joining the revolutionary movement and undertook their training together. During periods of training they endured many physical hardships. Once training was completed they went in different directions, Roja becoming part of the ceremonial musical band and Mallika an active front-line combatant. They were reunited during the ceasefire period when these interviews were being conducted. This kind of friendship based kin bonding is seen amongst other revolutionary groups too. For example amongst the Zapatista women where young combatant women start a very different life from their previous existences in the community discuss as thus,

It gets easier with time, you have to forget the things you left behind. The *companeros* teach you, we talk together; it is like a family again, we learn to love each other because our brothers and sisters stayed on the other side and that brings us together.

(Rovira 2000:41)

This discourse in effect illustrates the transference of consanguine familial affections to the non-consanguine relationships made in the revolutionary family. The relationship identity of the strength of kin relationship was recognised by Reed-Danahay's (1999) who observed kin relations,

...in peer socialisation, and in the formation of social bonds that persists throughout adulthood, cutting across household ties. Moreover, the strength of peer friendship is connected to the adaptation of the community to social change, in that age -mates provide forms of social support for new adaptations and changes.

(Reed-Danahay 1999-138)

The 'new adaptations and change' discussed by Reed-Danahay (1999) are seen amongst the close bonds built between women combatants. Within the LTTE there is a definitive peer friendship that replaces blood ties. This adolescent familial support is received unconditionally from peers who have had similar life experiences since joining the revolutionary movement.

LTTE in a parental role

During the interviews with the combatant women it became apparent that there is a great significance attached to friendship that is understood as part of the acceptance into the LTTE kin family. The individual's personal differences are not held against them as an obstacle but accepted as part of their personal disclosure of 'true' self. The diverse upbringing may be revealed to chosen friends within the kin family of the LTTE. The similarities identified may be of schooling or home life prior to joining the revolutionary organisation.

Kondo (1990) referred to in Rezende (1999:91) argues that the narratives and the reality in a friendship relationship may vary due to the values and ideals it expresses. She further claims that these ideals are constantly reviewed due to the power they hold in directing an individual's behaviour towards others. Based on this argument I examined the power relations within the LTTE family and its negotiations which from the first instance were revealed to be set in a (somewhat) complex format. The relationships are conducted through a set style of familial structure as well as the disciplined hierarchical militaristic structure of the revolutionary organisation. In other words, the LTTE family uses both the familial hierarchical powers of an older sister (or an older brother) in combination with the militaristic seniority style of senior combatants directing those under their command. Employing both these methods would grant them a certain position of power to negotiate both an authoritative kinship along with a (somewhat) complex friendship within the overall relationship. This would identify kinship through a friendship structure based on the traditional familial structure and through the militaristic structure. However it must also be recognised that both these relationships (kinship and friendship) are also tied to a highly disciplined structure that supersedes all the other relationships within the organisation. The exclusivity of these kinships forms a tighter relationship within the kin group. Also it must be noted that the exclusion of women combatants from the wider society, both socially as well as physically, makes them dependent on one another for safety and well-being along with other daily demands during times of war and conflict. Therefore, the kin and friendships are both subordinate to, and a facilitating factor in, the militaristic frame that supersedes them.

The younger women combatants who have grown up in the revolutionary group place an implicit trust in the organisation to attend to their needs justly, in the same way that

they might expect a consanguine parent would. This is reflected amongst the women combatants by their view of the organisation as the 'mother', one who will not only protect them but will do their best for the combatant women which extends to decisions that are made on behalf of the young women combatants, and which encompass their future and welfare.

"I will work for the Political side. But in the movement they know which skills we have and what we are good at. *Just like a mother knows her child is good at something* they [the LTTE movement] also know and give us work according to our skills".

(Roja)

In this discourse, Roja has placed the LTTE family in a position of a mother, a person who cares, provides and protects those that are born of her. She also places herself as a child who depends on all that is given by a mother in order to survive. The familial relationship shown in this instance is a strong bond between a mother and a child. The individualised knowledge that is akin to that of a parent generates a belief in Roja that the organisation is able to recognise the skills and qualities that the combatant woman possesses. This belief gives rise to a form of symbolic trust, built between the individual combatant woman and the organisation. This trust is metaphor for the relationship between a mother and child.

The strong parental role is particularly visible amongst the combatants whose kin roots have been in the LTTE maintained children's homes. My research revealed that the LTTE actively avoid using the word 'orphanage' and instead use the word 'home' which reframes the residence as a space where the LTTE representatives take a parent role rather than being 'parentless'. This is reflected in the kinship that is formed between Prabhakaran and the children which is also steeped in the familial structure of a father and sons/daughters.

Prabhakaran regularly visits the two main children's homes *San Cholai* (meaning beautiful garden filled with trees and flowers) mainly houses female children, and *Kantha Ruban* (meaning of *Kantham* is magnetic and *Ruban* may have been given in memory of a dead combatant closed to Prabhakaran) houses male children. His visits develop the contact with the orphaned children so that he becomes an alternative father figure to them. Members of the elite squad *Siruthai Padai* are mainly recruited from

these children's homes ¹⁰⁴ (Gunaratna: 2001, Bandara 2002:547). There is however insufficient information to identify if the children were voluntary recruits or were compulsory conscripts. The squad is known for their fierce fighting ability as well as their unwavering loyalty to Prabhakaran. The position of Prabhakaran as the substitute or kin father identity replacing the biological father results in an enhanced loyalty that reaffirms the relationship built on the familial kinship developed in childhood. "Most see him [Prabhakaran] as a father figure and equate a request from him to a directive from heaven" (Gunaratna 2001:6), meaning that Prabhakaran's non-consanguine paternal role has in fact risen to a level of patri-centric veneration of godliness in the eyes of many young combatants. This veneration can be seen as a part of the nationalist patriarchal cosmology of the LTTE. However it none the less illustrates Prabhakaran's close interactions with the young confirming a systematically cultivated kin identity. It must also be noted that whilst Prabhakaran is actively involved with the children of the LTTE, the rest of his family are not. His wife, sons and daughter are never brought into the organisation to be part of the kin family or involved in the LTTE movement and are widely believed to reside in an unknown location somewhere in Europe rather than live in the LTTE controlled parts of Sri Lanka¹⁰⁵.

Marriages

Marriages in many revolutionary groups appear to challenge existing social customs and suggest progress in gender roles for women, and include allowing them to choose their own partners. For instance, women combatants on the Long March in China married male colleagues of their choice with no ceremonies, which was contrary to the Chinese customs of the time¹⁰⁶ (Young 2001:74). Also women combatants in marriages arranged prior to the Long March were allowed to dissolve these and find new partners of their

¹⁰⁴ *Siruthai* is pronounced as 'si-ru-thai' meaning leopard and *Padai* means brigade. Gunaratne:2001 has spelt the word Leopard brigade as *Sirasu Pali*, this may be due to phonetically spelling.

¹⁰⁵ His wife is Mathivathani (known as Mathy), his eldest son Charles Anthony (named after his friend who died in battle), his youngest son Balachandran (named after Mathy's younger brother killed in combat with the Indian army), and his daughter, Dwaraka (named after one of Mathy's bodyguards who died in battle). This indicates that within Prabhakaran's family they have adopted the same custom as practised within the LTTE of naming the children after dead combatants as a means to keep the names alive (Balasingham 2003 :89)

¹⁰⁶ The women combatants merely reported their marriage and subsequent cohabitation to the Communist Party (Young 2001:74).

own choice (ibid:200). In the Eritrean conflict, marriage was forbidden for both male and female combatants during the first eight years of their recruitment into the EPLE. The EPLE believed that celibacy would maintain good order, which started at the training centres that separated female and male combatants. By the time they arrived at the battlefields they were expected to have developed a sufficient asexual body language that would not interfere with their tasks¹⁰⁷ (Wilson 1991:13). However after a period of time these views were abandoned as being too oppressive and replaced by laws that were guaranteed equality to both parties in marriage, as well making marriages monogamous (ibid:135-6).

In the Zapatista movement, the role of women combatants challenged marriages imposed by the patriarchy, where women had no choice but to marry the men who obtained permission from their fathers (generally by offering them a bottle of rum). Within the movement, the combatants (both male and female) had to seek permission from their commanding officers. Whilst it can be argued that this is the same as practiced in society (seeking permission from the father), there is a notable difference that grants both female and male combatants an autonomy to agree or disagree to the marriage proposal. The justification given for a continuation of a civic practice is that the Commander will be in a position to know if the woman combatant is already engaged and so avoid any unnecessary complications (Rovira 2000:51). There is also a free-will-practice that informalises the process of marriage by simply allowing a combatant woman to get together with a combatant man and celebrating publicly their union. The other option is for the couple to prepare an agreement stipulating that they are entering into the marriage with their own freewill and the “most important thing in their relationship is their work and not their partners” (ibid:52). The emphasis on the commitment to ‘work’ rather than to ‘each other’ is also reflected in the wedding ritual that carries significant support of the movement. The married couple walks under a row of crossed rifles, which is viewed by the Zapatista combatants as the organisational commitment to defend their marriage and consent to have them as comrades in a fighting unit.

¹⁰⁷ To aid an image of asexuality women combatants of EPLF were given loose fitting clothing which included shirts that button up at the neck worn with baggy trousers (Wilson 1991).

The LTTE also were initially against combatants having romantic relationships which were strictly forbidden on the basis that they would be a distraction from achieving the key aims of the revolutionary organisation.

When Prabhakaran drew up the LTTE constitution, he had made it very clear that he considered family life [marital] and love affairs as an impediment to revolutionary politics

(Narayan-Swamy 2002:66).

This led to internal differences in the LTTE between Prabhakaran and Uma Maheshwaran, the chair of the LTTE's nine member Central Committee, based on a breach of the LTTE's constitution that excluded marriage and romance as distractions to the focus of the revolution¹⁰⁸. Eventually Maheshwaran left the LTTE and a few years later Prabhakaran stated,

I am no way responsible for the problem. It was Maheshwaran who created the issue. A leader of a revolutionary movement should commit himself *totally* to the discipline of the organisation. If a leader violates the basic rules and principles, then there will be chaos and the organisation will crumble.

(Narayan-Swamy 2002:67- my italics)

These restrictions on marriages between combatants changed with Prabhakaran's own marriage on 1st October 1984 when he fell in love with a Jaffna university student he arranged to kidnap (along with eight other students) in order to prevent her from fasting to death in protest at the government's injustices on education¹⁰⁹. Prabhakaran's intention to marry caused a considerable ruction within the movement that had up to that point been extremely inflexible in regards to romantic relationships and marriages, especially in reference to the previous bitter separation between Prabhakaran and Uma

¹⁰⁸ Uma Maheshwaran was rumoured to have been having a sexual relationship with his cousin Urmila, one of the women supporters of the LTTE. Prabhakaran is loyal and at first disbelief but upon being convinced requested Maheshwaran leave the LTTE, which he refused to do (Narayan-Swamy 2002:66). In early 1980s the situation between Prabhakaran and Maheshwaran became intense as Prabhakaran demanded Maheshwaran leave the organisation due to his break of the constitution and accused him of being "unworthy of the Eelam cause" (Narayan-Swamy 2002:67). It became a bitter struggle that eventually ended in 1979 when the LTTE organisation in London intervened to limit the damage done to the movement by introducing Balasingham as the LTTE theoretician.

¹⁰⁹ Prabhakaran kidnapped her and 8 others who were fasting stating that fasting and other peaceful methods of protest are long over. The kidnapped students were taken to Tamil Nadu and the four girls of the group were kept at Balasingham's residence as the LTTE women's wing during it's early stage of creation.

Maheshwaran, (the former Chairman of the LTTE). Adele Balasingham wrote, “we were never comfortable with the lack of flexibility of the [LTTE] rules” in regards to love and marriage as practiced in the LTTE (Balasingham 2003:80).

If Mr Pirabakaran [Prabhakaran] had retained his chaste status he would have had to live up to the image of a saint and all the cadres then and now, would have been condemned to emotional sterility and frustration.

(Ibid).

Balasingham’s introduction of a human element into Prabhakaran’s desire to marry Mathivathani (Mathy) in effect paved the way for a great deal of change within the movement. Interestingly Balasingham placated the bitter combatants who had renounced their own love interests due to the commitment they had made to the LTTE. Balasingham brought in an argument that the former moral code needed changing in order to keep up with changing times. He further claimed that “romance and heroism were values upheld in Tamil culture” (Balasingham 2003:81). He convinced the combatants that this was a positive move needed to improve the image of the movement (ibid).

In political terms Mr Pirabakaran’s relationship with Mathy was crucial, healthy and progressive element in perceiving as a leader. The Tamil community, which views unmarried people as not fully mature adults, would be more confident in the judgement of a leader who has been mellowed and matured by the profound emotional experience and responsibility of marriage and family life.

(Balasingham 2003:80)

Marriage is seen as having its rightful place in society and as such, those in the LTTE have a set format that they need to follow in order to achieve this end. Though the rules were changed granting combatants the right to marriage, they still contain a prescriptive formula for an accepted minimum age for marriage. For women combatants the minimum age of marriage is 25 years and for a male combatant it is 30 years.

“Once we are over 25 if a man and woman like each other they have no restrictions in getting married”.

(Arulvili)

There is also a minimum service caveat that requires a five-year minimum period of service prior to being considered as eligible for marriage. The women combatants

informed me that there are dispensations for those who have served less than five years, but the minimum age for marriage is generally upheld and those who are under 18 years of age and wish to get married are actively discouraged.

The change brought in to the LTTE by Prabhakaran's marriage was still based on a similar system to that practiced in civic society, with a notable difference of women having a say in the choice of the proposed marital partner. By being able to contribute their own view about whom they wish to marry, the women combatants control if they wish to accept the proposal that was brought to them. When a man (either from civic society or from the ranks of the LTTE) is interested in marrying a combatant woman or vice versa, a proposal of marriage is sent to the leader of the woman combatant's unit, seeking the woman's views.

"The boy will approach the [team] leader in charge of the girl. She [woman combatant] will make her own decision. It is not for her [the team leader] to decide whether they should get married or not but when the marriage can take place. She [the team leader] will ask the girl whether she wants to get married to this particular person and if the girl says yes, she will decide on the date etc. The [team] leader will come to the Central Committee and then they decide on the date".

(Kavitha)

The woman combatant has the option to accept or reject the proposal (unlike in civic society) and is not compelled to marry by a certain age or constrained within caste and class. If the woman combatant is unwilling to accept the proposal sent,

"Then of course the leader will tell the man 'I am sorry but the girl is not interested in marrying you'"

(Kavitha).

Within the LTTE's revolutionary family the leader of the team acts in place of a consanguine parent who is responsible for the welfare and the future of the women combatants under her care. The Central Committee acts in place of the greater family that is traditionally involved in the planning of the marriage and attending to the ceremony.

Combatant women are also allowed to marry men from civic society as seen with AK. Within the LTTE romantic relationships and courting rituals are not practised. Pre-marital relationships, especially those of a sexual nature, are strictly forbidden. It must

also be recognised that within the cultural parameters, sex is always seen within a hetero-normative framework, with sexual connections between a man and a woman and only after marriage. Any other forms of sexual activity (may it be pre-marital or extra-marital sexual liaisons) are unacceptable for women both within civic society and amongst the revolutionary group¹¹⁰.

“It is the same as how the society treats pre-marital sex, it is the same in the movement”.

(Arasi)

As stated in Arasi’s discourse the LTTE movement reflects the moral values of civic society and their cultural expectations when she states that,

“We didn’t not have any problems regarding sex. Our women’s leadership and male and female leadership made sure that we didn’t have to face any such problems. Also [have] very strict moral codes. But we had the permission to love some one and get married. Say for instance I love someone and he also loves me then we let the leadership know about it. There are many cases like that. Then they [are] allowed to get married. Oh yes. They are given separate home and monthly allowances. But they can have sexual relationship only after marriage. Before that if they love each other they can talk to each other with the permission of their leaders, they can write to each other but they are barred from going out alone together”.

(Arasi)

The inference made in Arasi’s discourse suggests that women combatants did not have to face any predatory sexual approaches within the movement. She clearly indicates that both men and women in leadership roles are entrusted with ensuring that women combatants are not sexually violated within the organisation and a high level of sexual morality is preserved within the movement (it is also noteworthy that the LTTE is not known for any sexual aggression /violence against any Sinhalese women). The preservation of female sexual morality is in effect a mirror of a consanguine family protecting its females in the family unit.

¹¹⁰ Conversation with Tamil nationals in Sri Lanka and in London reveal that the men in civic society have some sexual freedom that does not involve homosexuality or freedom to engage in such activities. The kind of sexual freedom I mention here may be limited to visiting brothels, however this is not publicised. Furthermore, brothels in town were closed during the period of LTTE control in Jaffna. The interview participants (both combatant and civic) informed me that in the LTTE the male combatants are tied to the same sexual and moral code of conduct as the women combatants.

The relationships that develop between men and women are also continued under the watchful eyes of the leaders, who 'grant' permission for the couple to communicate with one another. It is interesting to note that though the combatants are trained extensively in codes of conduct which include modes of behaviour, and are sent on missions together (un-chaperoned by the leaders), the leadership will not allow a female combatant and a male combatant to meet each other if they are romantically linked. The restrictions on male and female association have intrigued many authors, play writers, novelists and academics¹¹¹. The lack of freedom to associate each other is argued by Coomaraswamy as "...sexuality is seen [within the LTTE] as an evil debilitating force" (1996:10).

Within the LTTE the combatants who are engaged in pre-marital relationships are expected to behave in the same way as they would in the civic society. The women combatants are upheld for their sexual morality and overall good behaviour in regards to the opposite sex.

"We feel that person who is morally good only can be a brave fighter...[a] good fighter,... [a] good leader... [and a] good cadre".

(Arasi)

By linking fighting abilities with moral conduct, the LTTE reinforces society's dominant view of patriarchal control over feminine virtue and modesty, along with their own view of moral conduct linked to ability to perform as a fighter. I would argue that this is also reflective of the way in which gender is constructed within the LTTE. Its roots are deeply embedded in patriarchy that links morality and physical virtue tied to an ability to perform, all neatly packaged as Armed Virgins, who have risen above social decadence.

Many of the women combatants do not see a need for marriage and socially accepted normalcy of a family life, which is often against the wishes of the biological parents, but not the wishes of the LTTE. Unlike women in civic society the combatant women are neither frowned upon nor penalised within the LTTE for being unmarried, even if they are of mature age. Interestingly this reveals both a replication of patriarchal views of civic society along with questioning of that same ideologies and norms.

¹¹¹ See play 'Forbidden Area' (2000), films 'Kalu Sudu Mal' (2005) and 'The Terrorist' (2001).

The women combatants who harbour different views to that of their consanguine family with regards to marriage mediate these expectations by positioning themselves as children. This was highlighted by Arulvili who states, “we are the children.....” meaning that they are too young to be considered for marriage and thus having no need for them to be in a matrimonial relationship. They were unanimous in saying,

Arulvili: We don't like it [marriage]. We don't need to have boy friends. We don't need...

Yalini*: We don't need to have a boy friend. but they [female combatants] don't like to [get married]in our movement they [female combatant] don't like to get married before 25. We don't like (laughs)

Arulvili: We joined young and our mind is still like small children. We are the same now as the time we joined the movement. We are quite happy at the moment, so we don't have the desire to be married

Close social interactions between the sexes are frowned upon by the civic society. Though the LTTE may not take into consideration all of civic society's moralistic views, they none the less need to rely on the support of the civic society, especially on the issue of sexual morals. It can be argued that the creation of the 'Armed Virgin' with her pure sexual morals does feed into this mindset. Therefore the justification for the 'dislike' of marriage is given by Arulvili as "We like our work" and the lack of a 'need' for a boyfriend needs to be seen in the context of the environment in which they live. Female combatants live in separate compounds to male combatants, with little interaction between the two sexes except during certain types of training or in the field of battle. Social interaction is virtually non- existent. That is not to say that they do not speak to each other out of field conditions but there is a definite lack of male-female social interaction. This is viewed as part of the discipline that is coveted in the organisation and the civic society.

The separation of the sexes in effect preserves the sexual morality of the women combatants within the confines of the LTTE movement and overlooks the possibility of same-sex relationships forming. As explained in Chapter Two, an individual woman combatant's sexuality away from the hetero-normative understanding of sex and sexuality is a taboo topic that was not discussed with the combatant women. Whilst reflecting on the individual combatant woman's sexuality I became aware of the stringent nature of morality linked to homosexual interactions as viewed by the society

in general and the LTTE in particular. It must also be understood that not only does the society (regardless of ethnicity or religious persuasion) abhor single sex sexual-relationships; this view is also reflected in law as an offence under Sri Lankan Penal Code 365A¹¹². It is interesting to note that whilst the LTTE does not prevent women from moving away from their traditionally constrictive gender class / caste roles, they do not condone any aspects of sexual liberation. As stated previously, the LTTE relies heavily on civic society's support and will not isolate themselves over the valued issue of sexual morality. The complex nature of same sex interaction is highlighted when society is observed as a whole where single sex friendships of women (and men) tend to be very tactile. This is often seen by the very close physical proximity in which women conduct their interactions with each other; as well as holding hands with other women in public places. This form of behaviour is perfectly acceptable in a society where women's sexual morality is regularly scrutinized and criticised. Also it must be noted that a woman keeping company with another woman is far more socially acceptable than a woman keeping company with a man. As sexual morality is held in high esteem for both men and women, I am unable to confirm or deny with any certainty whether the strict claims of sexual morality and chasteness as depicted by women combatants in effect are a true indication of their sexuality.

However when discussing (hetero-normative) marriage, it became evident that the combatant women see marriage in a different way to the civic women I interviewed. This difference can be seen in two main ways. Firstly, as the women combatants questioning patriarchy and secondly as combatant women seeing male partners as equals, thus expecting domestic chores and responsibilities to be shared equally with a male partner.

“After they got married...men and women are both doing their housework they take turns.”
(Yalini*)

The equality of sexes within the domestic sphere is quite a novel idea within the Tamil culture where there are clearly defined boundaries between men and women, and their roles both within the house as well as away from it. Men do no laundry, cooking,

¹¹² Section 365A of the Sri Lankan Penal Code prohibits homosexual relationships and carries a maximum penalty of 10 year imprisonment. It must also be noted that the law is directly aimed at male homosexuality rather than lesbianism. However, attempts were made in 1995 to include lesbianism into homosexual laws. It is also noteworthy that no prosecution has been attempted for homosexuality for the past 50 years (see WSG :2002).

cleaning or childcare, which are strictly the duties of women. The women combatants however see their male counterparts in a different light to men of civic society.

“Our cadres are different. Our cadres do the sweeping and all other work... cooking, sweeping”.

(Arulvili)

“Our cadres are unique ones. LTTE men are all the same. They won’t expect us [to do all house work]. They are also prepared to do anything. They can cook. ”

(Yalini*)

The gender implication raised in Yalini’s statement positions both male and female combatants firmly within the LTTE’s own gender construction. It is interesting to see that women combatants see the male combatants as progressive in comparison to men of civic society. The male combatants are viewed as ‘unique’ and ‘prepared to do anything’ meaning any domestic chores that have historically been in a female domain. The women combatants’ comments gives a clear indication of male combatants being comfortable with their masculinity that requires no boasting or approval from the society and embraces a moderate social role that is quite alien to the Tamil culture. This kind of alternative masculinity within the LTTE may be a direct result of the familial structure that is cultivated within the LTTE where hyper- masculinity is not visible within its overall gender construction, or through a militarist context where the discipline of combatants is partly enforced due to sex segregation and the regulation of everyday tasks.

The female combatant’s view, that male combatants are a more suitable marital partner, is not reciprocated by male combatants. Stack-O’Conner (2007:51) claims that in 2006 there appears to have been a preference amongst the LTTE male combatants to marry women from the civic community over these within the LTTE family.

The male LTTE members prefer to marry outside of the LTTE where they can find ‘traditional’ wives despite the LTTE efforts to encourage marriage within the LTTE.

(ibid)

The reason given by Stack-O’Conner for male combatants’ preference for ‘traditional’ women is the stark division between combatant women and civic women’s conduct and expectations. As I discuss in Chapter Six, combatant women have been separated from

the women of civic society by being able to do anything that a man can do, in effect removing themselves from the matrimonial eligibility criteria by being independent of male assistance. Added to this, the interviews revealed that the women combatants do not view marriage as the life changing experience as many of the women who remain in civic society. If a marriage is to happen, it is accepted in a very pragmatic way, but not as a means of distancing one's self from the movement.

“Even after getting married the women cadres carry on working. Not changed. After married also not changed.”

(Arulvili)

“After the LTTE women cadres got married they also doing their work within the LTTE movement as normal”.

(Yalini*)

The commitment made to the LTTE can continue after marriage as seen in AK's narrative that only considered marriage to a civic man on the condition that he would not interfere with her work in the movement. AK was discharged from the LTTE at the time of her marriage (due to injuries received in combat) and moved back to living in the civic community, but continued to work in LTTE related areas. It must be noted that this is in direct contrast to civic society where a married woman is expected to be totally committed to her husband's family as she is seen as belonging to another household. The combatant women of the 'LTTE household' do not necessarily hold this view as their fictive kin relationships and responsibilities to the LTTE must be able to co-exist with the marital relationship. The active combatants who decide to marry one another are provided with housing by the LTTE. Married combatants with children are given an option to opt out of battle engagements. If parents do decide to engage in battle activities, there is a choice to leave the children either with the maternal or paternal side of the family. There is also a care home in the *Puthukuddyiruppu* area that is provided by the LTTE for the children to stay in until their parents return from war. In the event that both parents die in battle, care is provided by the grandparents or other family members. If there is no one to provide such care, the LTTE steps in as an alternative family making provision for the children to be housed with them in one of the LTTE's own children's homes and continue to provide a familial structure based on kinship as discussed through this chapter.

Kinship and the nation state

The LTTE's usage of kinship is reflected in the narratives that are extended to link kinship, the individual and the nation state. The women in the revolutionary group invoke a metaphor of family and kinship that is tied to the nation state. Arasi expands on this use of kinship linked to nation-state by defining the symbolic role of the protective mother in the guise of a Hen rising to protect her helpless chicks (the Tamil civic citizens) being attacked by a mighty Hawk (the state run armed forces).

"I will give you an example. In our homes we all have poultry. The mother hen looks after her chicks with love and care. When you look at the mother hen she looks gentle, soft and very loving. But if a hawk comes down to catch one of the chicks. The mother hen will immediately jump up and fight with the hawk to protect her chicks. So the strength she gets to fight with the hawk comes from her gentleness and her motherhood. We love our community and we want to protect them because we felt the responsibility to protect our community we had to become fighters".

(Arasi)

The first reading of the above discourse reveals a narrative that is straightforward, discussing the weak rising against the strong regardless of their inabilities, incapability or inadequacy. However underneath the veneer of strength and weakness lies a whole plethora of kin and nation-state complexities, which are mixed with female roles in society based on theories of biological essentialism, that require women to be 'givers'. The 'givers' are seen in multiple roles as givers of life and givers of self as always rising above their own needs to provide for others. It also portrays women as mothers who are seen as the good women in the society, who are expected to harbour a maternal instinct that has a 'need' to protect others (see Enloe 1993, Yuval-Davis 2000, Narayan 1997, Puri 1999). The 'others' in this instance are seen as kin relations based on an understanding of the ethno-national Tamil nation-state and its collective identity. The narrative further addresses the women combatants' own awareness of the 'difference' in kin ideology between the greater Tamil community and the women combatants. This particular aspect will be discussed at length in Chapter Six, however it does reveal an awareness on Arasi's part of the women combatants' role of being the protectors of the Tamil community, and through this a stronger part of the nation-kin group.

The awareness by women combatants of their differences with women of civic community is the result of combatant women having stepped out of the consanguine family that forms part of the community that Arasi claims to 'feel' a responsibility to

protect. In order to protect the civic community she had to step out of one community (civic) into the other (revolutionary) community. With this transition she in effect moved from one family to another; but it is interesting to notice that she is still contained within a family unit.

The idea of the nation as part of the kin group is claimed by Ryang (2004) to be an aspect of war when "...morality of the nation as family emerges as a dominant ideology..." (2004:763). She further argues that the non-consanguine familial identification is in effect achieved through the usage of language such as "our sons and daughters" (*ibid*); which in Arasi's discourse is highlighted as the 'protective mother'. By such references those who have gone to war as part of ethno-nationalistic bidding become metaphorical mothers, fathers, sons and daughters as directed in kinship. As stated earlier, linguistic expression is important in constructing the alternative family unit.

The 'fictive kin' concept as discussed in anthropology describes non-consanguine or non-affinal individuals treated as members of one family. The ethno-nationalism related to kin identity has the same ability to create a fictive kin identity amongst a whole community without any kind of blood ties, illustrating that within the nation state the kin identity of individual combatants blends with that of the civic society during periods of social unrest and mass protests. This was particularly visible during the hunger strikes carried out by LTTE combatants or their sympathisers. On such occasions a kin identity develops on a non-consanguine basis, which identifies the individual as part of a blood-related family.

"In 1987 Thileepan Anna [older brother] had a hunger strike¹¹³ but the Indian government or Sri Lankan forces [did nothing].....And in 1980 one Amma [mother¹¹⁴] had a hunger strike for a month. She died. They [government] did nothing. Almost everyday the cadres attained martyrdom everyday during the battle" . (Yalini*)

¹¹³ Thileepan was a male combatant of the LTTE in charge of the male political wing in Jaffna during 1980s. He began a fast unto death on 15th August 1987 at the, Nallur Kandaswamy temple in Jaffna. He refused food and water until his demands of withdrawing Sinhalese army camps and Sinhalese government colonisation of Tamil areas etc are met. Thileepan died on 26th August 1987.

¹¹⁴ Kanapathipillai Poopathy was a 56 year old grandmother, a civic citizen, who fasted for 30 days before dying on 19th April 1988. It is believed amongst Tamil nationals that she was the 1st woman to have died for a political cause by fasting unto death. She conducted her fasting at Mahmangam Pillayar temple (Balasingham 1988). In April 1990 Prabhakaran paid her the following honour.

The very identification of Thileepan as *Annay* (a brother) and the elderly woman Poopathy as *Amma* (a mother) illustrates a kin identity with those of civil status who are joined together by a single cause. This narrative clearly identifies the martyred dead as members of the same non-consanguine family through the use of familial kin terminology. The shared cause and related identity lays the culpability for their deaths with the state and also absolves the LTTE of their responsibility in supporting an act of this kind solely to gain attention from the wider public.

The sense of injustice that is felt by wider society in turn becomes a stronger and more forceful part of the ethno-national consanguine identity leading to the development of a notional fictive kin (in this instance civic citizenship). This in turn has the potential to move towards a greater nation state based on kin identity. The wider concept of such kin identity runs parallel to the socio-cultural ways of addressing those who are respected in the community as dictated by age and caste¹¹⁵.

Summary

One of the catalytic aspects of displacement is the breakdown of the consanguine family structure causing women to actively seek alternatives away from home, where they may feel safe, secure and be part of a family. With the limited options open to women they often end up with the LTTE who has re-constructed a form of metaphoric or fictive family unit that is both culturally and socially integrated with the ideologies of the Tamil society, with its attendant hierarchical familial relationship structure. The LTTE's use of the metaphoric family facilitates the building of strong interrelationships that can be used to serve the aims and objectives of the revolutionary organisation. It also maintains the socially accepted moral values as part of its own discipline procedure causing the familial structure created within the organisation to be further in line with the civic society.

The interview discourse also revealed that the friendships that were formed amongst women revolutionaries were different to other forms of friendship. In the LTTE warm and fluid friendship is often illustrated through kinship terminology. I would agree with

¹¹⁵ Whilst acknowledging that there is a strong caste dictated hierarchy that operates in Jaffna, it must also be considered that the LTTE operates on a non-caste based metaphorical family unit, therefore caste does not form part of this study .

many researchers in the field of friendship and kinship, such as Bell and Coleman (1999), Rezende (1999), Reed-Danahay (1999), and Schneider (1984), who claim that Western notions and understanding of kinships must not be used to measure friendship in a non-Western cultural setting, such as the extent of the LTTE women combatants' relationships with one another. The subtle ways used by women combatants to describe their own roles or their relationships with fellow combatants (including Prabhakaran), from an ambiguous yet identifiable process of social distinction, very much based on the culturally accepted family structure. Within this structure there is a great deal of respect given to fellow combatants, who are identified as elders within the group.

The kinship provided by the substituted family feeds a need and fills the void that has been left open by the absence of a consanguine family. The consanguine families are unarguably patriarchal in Tamil society. The LTTE travel along a fine line of what is expected by civic society and accepted by the combatants. There is a degree of replication of a patriarchal family, with its morality and behavioural codes, but without the rigidity that is seen in consanguine families with its gender division. Prabhakaran has been actively involved in the recreation of that familial unit by his personal involvement in the LTTE's children's homes where he is seen very much as a father figure. He has further developed fictive kinship by naming his own children after those who were close to him and died in various battles. This practice serves the purposes of keeping the names and memories alive to venerate friendships that were built within the LTTE's kin family. Similarly, the combatant women show the same kind of respect for their dead comrades, which can be likened to, that which is shown to dead family members (as discussed in detail in Chapter Five).

The combatant women's marriages within the LTTE can be seen as perpetuating the values of a society that dictates all women to be married at a given age and become mothers. The fact that the women combatants do not see any need for marriage can however be argued as their own way of reconstructing an alternative gendered role within the organisation that challenges the socially dictated roles for women, which includes marriage. The combatant women have stated an apparent lack of need for marriage or the companionship a marital union offers which could be seen as a direct result of their strong friendship ties within the kin group.

The non-consanguine uniqueness of the relationships is particularly reflective within the fictive kinship formation amongst women combatants who have adopted a friendship-based kinship that is a replacement or mirror to the familial structure in civic society. It is imperative to understand that the metaphorical kin relationships that are formed between the women combatants of the LTTE are deep and significant. As such these relationships are a result of not only a shared commitment to the political cause but also extend to include socially formed kin relationships with the wider community.

The kinship in the LTTE discussed in this chapter critiques the use of relationships within the revolutionary movement as an environment for women tied to the patriarchy, that has been successfully structured to rise above social barriers such as caste, class and religion and has pushed combatant women into accepting one another. I would argue that the success of the LTTE's revolutionary family has been its ability to transcend the basic social prejudices that have been engrained in Jaffna society for generations. I would further argue that the kin relationships created within the LTTE cultivate loyalty and trust amongst individuals regardless of the similarities or differences in their personal circumstances. It is also an affirmation of relationships conducted in private spaces of public arenas within the revolutionary group. The strength in fictive kinship forms a foundation that reaffirms women combatants' shared experiences. Such affinities translate into being valued and placed in a familial position within the kinship group.

CHAPTER 5

DEATH AND THE SUICIDE BOMBER

Introduction

The Black Tiger Marching Song

*With the name of Black Tigers – would 'u see-
With a bomb which'd blast the strong enemy
We march without a battalion army-
We die by routing our adversary
Our deaths are of exceptional history-
In them are written hundreds of victories
There ain't a thing like this bravery-
Life gift – the max limit in philanthropy
Marching with thoughts of not missing our aim –
With prideful anger – we kill the enemy
We die now- for our folks to enjoy their lives –
In Tamil hearts – even in death we still live.
Greeting the Leader's feet – like thunder we blast –
Sagging like a flag – for Tamil Eelam to stand
Tiger flag will sway strong in the Motherland-
Glory will engulf the global bands.*

(Translated from Tamil by Sri Kantha (2006)

On the 21st May 1991 at Sriperumbudur Stadium in Tamil Nadu (Southern India) an LTTE combatant woman Dhanu (real name Thenmuli Rajaratnam) placed a garland of flowers around former Indian Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi's neck and bent down to touch his feet as a cultural mark of respect. As she bent down she pressed a button of a vest packed with explosives that was carefully concealed under her dress. The explosion killed 16 people who were nearby along with Dhanu and Rajeev Ghandi.

Whilst the precise circumstances were unknown, the culpability for the act was directed at the LTTE movement. Knowing the inevitable political backlash, the LTTE swiftly

issued a statement denying any involvement in the attack¹¹⁶, but claimed that Dhanu was in fact a victim of rape committed by the IPKF¹¹⁷ (which was based in Jaffna during 1987 to 1990). Whilst many ambiguities remain over Dhanu's motives, the LTTE have stated that she carried out this act to avenge her loss of sexual purity (de Mel 2001, Schalk 1992, Narayan-Swamy 2003, and Knight 2005).

An analysis of Dhanu's act reveals a number of politicised issues, ranging from body politics to the nationalist nation state. In the eyes of most women combatants, Dhanu's act elevates her to an equal status with male combatants. Her actions crossed over gender polarisation into the realms of significant political activism by targeting the key player in the ill-fated Indo-Lanka Peace Accord. This can be seen as redressing the violation of her own and other women's bodies, and of her country. The symbolic nature of Dhanu using her socio-culturally viewed polluted body by engulfing it in fire feeds into her cultural upbringing that views immolation as purifying. Dhanu's subsequent suicide mission can be interpreted as an act of redemption for the trauma and the culturally perceived shame she suffered (see Maunaguru 1995, de Mel 2001).

The woman killing her oppressor using her polluted body as a weapon symbolically performs the above two functions [taking revenge against the perpetrator and self purification]. In other words, by killing Rajeev Gandhi, she not only takes revenge against the enemy, but also performs an ancient purification ritual- the *agnipravesam* (immolation by fire).

(Maunaguru 1995: 171)

Other combatant women view Dhanu's suicide as a brave act of revenge and regard her as a goddess who will protect the living. Whilst I do not glorify Dhanu's actions she can be recognised for being successful in killing the perpetrator (although not the individual directly responsible). She attained purification by fire, and pushed the cause of Tamil Eelam to the forefront of the world's media. In so doing she challenged the fundamental social construction of gender in relation to Tamil women. If her action was indeed revenge for the violation of sexual purity, it can be questioned whether this was an

¹¹⁶ The LTTE as a practice deny any responsibilities for political violence, especially high profile assassinations.

¹¹⁷ There is a lone claim made by Bloom (2005a) that it was Dhanu's mother who was raped rather than Dhanu.

emancipatory act in the way that the female gender role is constructed in Tamil society as discussed in Chapter One.

In this chapter I put forward the argument that suicide bombing by LTTE combatant women has to be understood as part of a rational strategy on the part of LTTE, and in the case of the individual woman suicide bomber, as an example of what Durkheim (1952) calls 'obligatory altruistic suicide'. I also suggest that suicide bombing contributes to the development of gender equality within the LTTE. In developing this argument, I start with an overview of women's suicide bombing in the LTTE. I explore the gendered dimensions influencing women combatants' social roles, and the possible motivational forces behind their participation in suicide bombings, including the impact of loss of sexual purity. I then survey the literature on suicide bombing and the various explanations that have been put forward for this phenomenon.

The last section focuses on the way the LTTE has constructed death as a form of reverence, and presented this to both the civic society and to those within the movement (to exclude religious variations and existing social perceptions). It further analyses the involvement of women as suicide bombers both from a global and an LTTE perspective. It addresses issues that arise from women's participation in suicide bombings, including the changing perceptions of gender polarisation in the civic society and the way that suicide bombing is used as an argument for the existence of gender equality by the LTTE. I also discuss the creation of the elite Black Tiger squad that recruits both men and women, and propose that this is seen as a further example of gender equality within the movement.

An overview of women as suicide bombers

A modern historical perspective reveals that the first woman suicide bomber was a 16-year-old Lebanese woman from the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) in Lebanon named Sana'a Youssef Mhayadliin 1985¹¹⁸ (Cronin 2003:86, Bloom 2005:143, and Pape 2005:138). Her involvement is seen as part of then President of Syria Hafez al-

¹¹⁸ Bloom refers to her age as 27. Both Pape (2005) and Cronin (2003) states she was aged 16; The age 16 needs to be viewed in relation to the culture of the country. In this case Sana'a was seen as an adult woman, (as discussed in chapter 4) as the definition of a child varies greatly according to the state. The name is also spelt as San Mheidleh in Cronin (2003) who describes the event as "Mheidleh] ...drove a car packed with 450 pounds of dynamite into an Israeli check point, killing herself and two Israeli soldiers"(2003:86).

Assa's attempt to 'secularise' the act of suicide bombing and gather support from the non-religious sector in his community (Victor 2004:17). Since then there have been a number of incidents involving women suicide bombers around the world.

An essentialist understanding of women as nurturers, allows women suicide bombers a certain freedom to be a successful phenomenon in revolutionary groups, and in particular the LTTE. The women combatants of the LTTE have been at the forefront of change by their active involvement in suicide missions since the early 1990s. The analysis of suicide missions by its very nature reveals an act that is differentiated from other forms of violence, where the focus is changed from an "act-based" event to one of an "actor-based" event (Bloom 2005:3). However there are also symbols that are attached to such acts as described below by Atran (2003).

Although a suicide attack aims to physically destroy an initial target, its primary use is typically as a weapon of psychological warfare intended to affect a large public audience. The primary target is not those actually killed or injured in the attack, but those made to witness it.

(Atran 2003 cited in Sri Kantha 2004:5)

Androcentric beliefs in society have granted the success of women as suicide bombers primarily due to the gendered nature of social perceptions of women. When this view is taken together with an essentialist view of women being incapable of violence, a new kind of dynamism is added to women's participation in suicide bombings. The essentialist female identity often allows women suicide bombers to succeed in attacking the targets. The use of women as suicide bombers has led to a paradigm shift that moves women combatants beyond the biological realms of essentialism that focuses on gender identity (based on physical/emotional abilities) to an alternative identity that challenges the androcentric nature of the patriarchal culture and its perceptions.

The views of women as passive caregivers make it easier for women to penetrate high security areas. Leila Khaled (of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation), perhaps one of the world's most renowned revolutionary women, has stated the following,

Strategically women are able to gain access to areas where men had greater difficulty because the other side assumed that the women were second class citizens in their own society -- dumb, illiterate perhaps, and incapable of planning an operation.

(Khaled: 1973 in Bloom 2005a:3)

The gendered perception that discriminates against women's abilities as stated above allowed a suicide bomber disguised as a pregnant woman to gain access to a military hospital within the army headquarters in Sri Lanka, in April 2006. She carried out a suicide mission that killed her and many civilian bystanders, seriously injuring the target, a senior military commander of the Sri Lanka army. At the time of the attack there were conflicting reports as to the authenticity of the pregnancy. The subsequent claim that the woman was in fact not pregnant has none the less challenged the cultural view (amongst Sri Lankans) of motherhood as a role created by nature to protect one's own child/children¹¹⁹. It must be noted that though this has been viewed by Sri Lankan society as a violation of the social reverence for motherhood, it must also be acknowledged that amongst global revolutions this is a tried and tested method of gaining access to hard to reach targets¹²⁰. Therefore the use of pregnancy or motherhood as a disguise or subterfuge is neither new nor innovative, although the fact that such acts shatter the idealism of society makes them harder to accept.

Another issue pertaining to suicide bombers is their ability to leave the boundaries established by war zones where citizens actively take up arms, and enter those areas where civic citizens have little or no involvement in the political violence. The fact that some citizens live away from war zones is not seen by many combatants to mean that they are innocent bystanders. I have been informed (in conversation) by both combatant and civic women that often those who do not condone political violence, living in cities away from war and destruction, may inadvertently support the stance taken by the state simply due to their passive acquiescence¹²¹.

¹¹⁹ The earlier belief that the woman suicide bomber was pregnant give way to various rumours questioning the moral legitimacy of the pregnancy, for instance was it created by an act of rape by Sri Lanka armed forces? On the other hand, was it the result of a woman avenging death of a husband in the hands of Sri Lanka armed forces?

¹²⁰ The German Baader Meinhoff used this method very successfully (reference Das Spiegel, Kampfmittel Baby-Bombe Tarnung, Klasse, einfach besser aals Manner-date not known)

¹²¹ This view is not limited to those of Jaffna, but has a resonance amongst Chechen revolutionaries who consider the Russian civic citizens as silent supporters of the state armed forces committing violent act in Chechnya (Bloom 2005: 99).

The LTTE is the first revolutionary movement to use large numbers of women¹²² as suicide bombers and the only revolutionary organisation so far that has carried out suicide missions away from its home soil by engaging a woman as a suicide bomber. Women suicide bombers were involved in the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi, several cabinet ministers, some high-ranking armed force officials, and in the failed assassination attempt of President Kumaratunga¹²³.

It must be understood that within the confines of the act there is a belief by the suicide bomber that they are saving the Tamil nation through suicide bombing. Therefore the violence committed in this extreme form is viewed by some civic citizens as well as combatants as an act of heroism (this emerged through the informal discussions with some the participants - civic women, the Gatekeeper and combatant women). However a cautionary note must be made highlighting that not all civic society support or condone the violence associated with suicide bombings.

The women who are involved in revolutionary groups are often labelled in gendered terms. “The Army of Roses” (Palestine) depicts the beauty of a flower, “the Black Widow's” (Chechnya) are named after a deadly spider (so named due to their wearing black clothing and some (not all) being widows) and the “Armed Virgins” (LTTE) who represent moral virtues based on an assumption of their sexual purity¹²⁴.

The Black Widows of Chechnya

The conflict in Chechnya escalated into open warfare in December 1994 when Russian armed forces occupied the capital city of Grozny from secessionist forces. The cost was high in terms of human causalities and collateral damage to the city, and did not bring peace as five years on a second wave of the civil war began.

¹²² Bayler (2003:3) claims women combatants of the LTTE have carried out some 30% to 40% suicide attacks. De Mel (2004:75) places the figure at 217 suicide attacks up to 2002 (there have been more since of late) out of which women conducted 64 attacks. These figures comprise of 46 Sea Tigers and 18 others.

¹²³ The successful assassination of Prime Minister Premadasa was carried out by a male suicide bomber. The December 1999 attack on President Chandrika Kumaratunga caused death of some 23 bystanders and her to lose the sight of her right eye

¹²⁴ I use the word *assumed* in order to include victims of rape as part of the Armed Virgin group.

The women of Chechnya took active roles during the first civil war in 1994-1996, and grew from resistance fighters into suicide bombers. In 2003 women conducted six out of seven suicide attacks (Uzzell: access 2005, Bloom 2005:127¹²⁵). In 2004 women conducted all twelve of the suicide missions. The well- publicised Russian theatre siege (October 2002) included a young woman of 16 years of age. These women were known as the Black Widows and the status of widowhood in the traditional patriarchal society indirectly creates social outcasts and grants a sense of hopelessness and lack of self-worth to such women.

The Chechen anger was directed at the Russian State and its civic citizens, who are viewed as silent supporters of the State mechanism used against the Chechen nationals. The paying of tax was viewed as supporting the authority's means of sponsoring the war in Chechnya and the unwillingness of the Russian civic population to protest against the Russian State's atrocities meant condoning the same (Bloom 2005:99).

One of the aspects of the Chechen women's involvement in suicide bombing is the lead given to other women to be suicide bombers. Although the Russians labelled the suicide missions conducted by Chechen women as 'Palestinisation', in reality it is quite the reverse. Letters sent by Palestinian women to Hamas argued that if Muslim women in Chechnya could become martyrs then why not the Muslim women of Palestine (Bloom 2005:130).

From a global perspective the Chechen women suicide bombers have revealed their catalyst to be the loss of a loved one (Cronin 2003:87, Kline and Franchetti 2002). It must be understood that from a Chechen context a woman as a widow has no prospects but a bleak and miserable existence to look forward to as her identity and agency have always been linked to that of a man. An article in *The Times* newspaper titled, "*The Woman Behind the Mask*" (3rd November 2002) by Kline and Franchetti refers to other reports from Chechnya that show women being either *sold* into the Chechen revolutionary movement, due to the socio-economic needs of families (where a widow is a financial burden), or simply being forced into recruitment by patriarchal authority (*ibid*). However there is no academic input into this view.

¹²⁵ BBC News Inside Chechen Bomber's Mind, 4th September 2003 referred to in Bloom 2005:127

The lack of empirical research is primarily due to the danger and difficulties involved in gaining access to such organisations. It is also interesting to note that the newspaper report on the Russian theatre siege claims that only the women wore suicide belts and not the men. The gendered aspect of Chechen suicide bombers is further reflected in the article written by Vinogradova (2003) titled “*Deadly Secret of the Black Widow*” (22nd October 2003) where she questions a Chechen professor who resides in Moscow (who did not wish to disclose his identity). “Question: so is human life of no value in Chechnya today? Answer: “no, you have misunderstood....the human life is, it's a woman's life that isn't” (Vinogradova 2003). This then questions whether female social roles and women in society are of a lesser value than men are. Vinogradova appears to suggest that Chechen men are valued far greater than Chechen women, thus women are expendable to the revolution and the greater society.

The Army of Roses

On 27th January 2002 Yasser Arafat shifted the focus on suicide bombers from the traditionally masculine role of a male suicide bomber *shahide* (the male martyr), to a newly created feminine role as *shahida*, (a female martyr). This role change was presented to an audience of over a thousand women as equality, selflessness and above all a responsibility of womanhood.

Women and men are equal...You are my *army of roses* that will crush Israeli tanks....You are the hope of Palestine. You will liberate your husbands, fathers, and sons from oppression. *You will sacrifice the way you, women, have always sacrificed for your family.*

(Victor 2004:19-20 -my italics)

Suicide bombings conducted in Palestine have increased since the year 2000, with Palestinians claiming that their lives have become more unbearable since the Al Aqsa Intifada (Bloom 2005:19). The targets identified by suicide bombers in Palestine are often ‘soft’ targets against the civic society, and it is said that the cost of a suicide attack can be “no more than \$150 to mount” (Hoffman 2003:42).

Bloom (2005) and Victor (2004) argue that women’s involvement can be theorised as a direct result of the social conditions forced upon Palestinians. Those who live in refugee camps often view life as a transient journey into paradise that is full of hardships,

shortages, humiliation and violence, and is not perceived as a life worth living. Within these external hardships the role of women in the domestic sphere is one of subjugation to men in the family. Decisions about their lives are made by men, moving from father to brother to husband. In addition to this patriarchal control, generations of Palestinian women have been born under Israeli occupation and filled with not only resentment but also prohibition. If they wish to attain equality with the men in the community they must then be prepared to pay a high price for such liberation. In highly gendered societies where there are clearly defined social roles, the use of women as suicide bombers adds a further dimension to the argument. It conveys a message to the men that their masculinity is under threat, and women have become sufficiently politicised to warrant active participation in any armed struggle (Victor 2004, Bloom 2005).

Women's participation in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is a relatively new phenomenon. The lateness of women's participation in suicide bombing lies in the fact that militant religious political groups (such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad) did not engage women in their ranks (Victor 2004). When nationalist groups realised the value of the suicide missions carried out by religious militant groups, they tried to convince their secular members to act in the same way. The reason may well be that by this stage men who were already pre-disposed to such thinking had joined the religious militant groups of Hamas and Islamic Jihad (Bloom 2005:98). When the nationalistic movements called upon women to be active, Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade stepped into provide the logistical support for women suicide bombers (Victor 2004:52).

The first incident of a woman being involved in a suicide bombing occurred on the very day that Yasser Arafat stated that women could be a part of the revolutionary struggle (27th January 2002). A 26 year old Palestinian Red Crescent worker named Wafa Idris, carried a bomb in her bag, and detonated it in a department store killing one and injuring some one hundred Israeli civilians. Al Aqsa Brigade claimed responsibility, stating she was a member of the Brigade, even though she never left a video message as Palestinian suicide bombers usually do (Victor 2004:20). This has been viewed by some as indicating Idris had no intention to be a suicide bomber, but fate had stepped into make her so, and in that act she became idealised as shown in her eulogy by the Fatah movement,

Wafa's martyrdom restored honour to the national role of the Palestinian woman, sketched the most wonderful pictures of heroism in the long battle for national liberation.

(Victor 2004:54)

The first confirmed Palestinian female suicide bomber may well be Darina Abu Aisha, as her actions (though a few days later), were planned with a recording left for posterity in the usual manner (Victor 2004). Since then many female suicide bombers have followed her example, including two women suicide bombers from Palestinian Islamic Jihad in 2003, and one from Hamas in January 2004. The Hamas engagement is of interest as Sheik Yassin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, declared that there is nothing written in the Koran's holy text to say that women should not fight in national liberation wars (Victor 2004:111). They engaged their first woman suicide bomber on 14th January 2004. Although Reem Riashi was a wife, mother and grandmother, she undertook a role that previously had been open only to unmarried or divorced women with no nurturing responsibilities.

There are a number of religious-based justifications popularised by the media with regards to Middle Eastern suicide bombers. These include the popularly held belief that the afterlife would provide the suicide bombers with many riches and comforts that they lacked in life, providing the act was committed in the name of holy war, *jihad*. Sheik Yassin claims that women suicide bombers will be,

even more beautiful than the seventy two virgins...if they are not married they are guaranteed a pure husband in Paradise, and of course they are entitled to bring seventy of their relatives to join them there without suffering the anguish of the grave.

(Victor 2004:113)

Women suicide bombers are thus gendered even in the afterlife. Marriage is still their goal, as is physical beauty and allegiance to blood ties. In comparison these hyper-masculine visions of female needs are not reflected amongst the women suicide bombers of the LTTE.

A Reflection on the Literature

The majority of literature written on suicide bombers is androcentric, which I would argue is a result of war being perceived as a masculine domain thus limiting the advancement of knowledge gained in relation to suicide bombers with anything other than a masculine bias.

The single act committed by Dhanu raised the awareness of the LTTE on a global scale and the usage of a woman as a suicide bomber attracted and retained much of the world's attention. However the extent of the literature that concentrates on women as suicide bombers is considerably less in comparison to that which focuses on male suicide bombers. This gender blindness is also reflected in academic conferences that focus on the global threat of suicide bombings, where there is a tendency to rush past women's engagement in such activities. The narrow area of literature relating to women combatants becomes even narrower when considering the women combatants of the LTTE.

During the early period of the Sri Lankan struggle there was a notable absence of western feminist writings that were willing to engage with the LTTE's violent political discourse on suicide bombings. Interestingly since post 9/11 this position has changed dramatically with literature emanating from western women academics (such as Bloom 2005, Alison 2003, Cronin 2003, Skaine 2006) some focusing solely on women's involvement and participation in suicide bombings. Much of the literature regarding women's involvement in the LTTE and their active participation as suicide bombers was written primarily by western educated (and westernised) Sri Lankan female academics of either Sinhalese origin such as de Alwis (1998b) and de Mel (2001 and 2004), or of Tamil origin such as Thiranagama (1990), Samuel (2000), Maunaguru (1995), Tambiah (2005) and Coomaraswamy (1996 and 2002). They have much in common with each other as social scientists not only based in Sri Lanka but also living in Colombo (the participants of my research constantly criticised these academics who never experienced the conflict staying well away from the danger zones). Their ethnic identity did not impair their shared feminist discourse that disapproved of women participating in violence and were forceful and forthright in the condemnation and criticism of women's participation in the LTTE's armed struggle.

Some authors (de Silva 1994, de Alwis 1998b, Coomaraswamy 1996 and 2002, de Mel 2001 and 2004), who have written about the LTTE have not had any direct dealings with the combatants of the movement in their own environment. I emphasise '*own environment*' as many of those interviewed either were escapees from the LTTE or arrested by the armed forces. Interviews that are not conducted in their own spatial location carry a different dynamic to those conducted in the combatant's own space (as referred to in the previous chapter). The result of such action is always a notable reliance on hypothesis or on others' work.

A number of books and articles that were published by authors such as Skaine (2006), Brunner (2005 and 2007), Zedalis (2004), Bloom (2005), Cutter (1998), Beyler (2003), Cronin(2003), and Victor (2004), focus solely on women as suicide bombers, though not necessarily on the women of the LTTE but mainly women of Palestine and Chechnya. Even though the women of the LTTE have carried out considerably more suicide bombings (some which have been deeply challenging such as lone deep-sea attacks on armed navy vessels) their contribution is not recognised in the same way as that of Palestinian female suicide bombers.

Within the global discourse of women's involvement in suicide bombings, the literature groups together the Palestinian, Chechen and Sri Lankan conflicts with the occasional comparative study. These writings run the risk of a western bias being imposed on non-Western cultural patterns and of overlooking the unique ways in which women negotiate their gender roles within the context of their own cultural confinements. The combatant women of the LTTE have actively negotiated a kind of gender role that is different to their historical social roles. A western bias overlooks this negotiation, and fails to understand the complexities and dynamics that are involved in these new social roles. The views that at times did emerge in Western academic writings were also seen amongst the Sri Lankan feminist writings (see de Alwis 1998b, Coomaraswamy 1996 and 2002, Maunaguru 1995, Sangarasivam 2003, de Mel 2001 and 2004). These feminists bring a western-based knowledge and understanding into the discourse regarding the conflict in Jaffna, thus some of the writings are of a single mindset with a particular western strand of feminism as its foundation. This contribution caused the type of literature to change from an essentialist feminism, which argued that women should not be involved in violent activities, to an alternative liberal form of feminism that began to question the actual achievements of such participation. It is too early for this view to

have made any significant impact on literary discourse, but none the less it is more representative of the current reality where women's involvement is assessed within the cultural context of what was essentially a masculine act of self-sacrifice for the greater good of the nation.

Brunner (2007) claims that the narrow focus used to gain an understanding is a result of western academics that have conducted research and written about women suicide bombers from a western feminist perspective. She argues that racialising the non-European women as the Other distances academics from them. This argument of Occidentalism (Brunner 2007) is reflected in many works from western educated Eastern academics (de Alwis 1998b, Maunaguru 1995, Coomaraswamy 1996 and 2002, de Mel 2001 and 2004), which create a distinction between 'us' and 'them' (e.g. Western society Eastern society). Feminist writers who research the field of violent conflict tend to distinguish the women combatants of the LTTE and other revolutionary organisations by labelling them as the Other.

Rose (2004) is also concerned by this and comments,

[i]t may indeed be that your desire to solve the problem is creating it, that burrowing into the psyche of the enemy, far from being an attempt at dignify them with understanding, is a form of evasion that blinds you to our responsibility for the state they are in.

(Rose, cited in Skaine 2006:26)

Whilst Rose is aware of the shortcomings in this narrow discursive perspective it is also clear that relatively few authors who write about suicide bombers show any kind of familiarity with the LTTE and its engagement in suicide bombings.

Rationality as discussed in literature

The key objective amongst most authors who study the rising global phenomenon of suicide attacks is to find the rationality behind such missions, and most claim that there are a number of reasons that act as motivational factors (see Hassan 2004, Gambetta 2005, Hague 2003, Reuter 2004, Pape 2005, Hoffman 2003, Zedalis 2004, Skaine 2006). Some have contributed to this debate by stating that differences between ethnic groups makes one group a legitimate target for the other by making the Otherness the

basis for conducting suicide bombing campaigns. For instance Bloom argues, “[i]t becomes simpler to dehumanise people on the other side and perceive them as legitimate targets and appropriate for suicidal attacks” (Bloom 2005:79).

Others have identified the complexity of identifying any single reason as the motivations.

Motivated [motivation] is an open question. Some agents [suicide bombers] accounts are cast in a selfish, albeit extreme rhetoric, which makes us wonder. Some say that they want to achieve worldly immortality, guaranteed by the respect and status bestowed on them and their families by their communities....and some say they do it to acquire the status of martyr and reap the heavenly benefits that comes with that...

(Gambetta 2005: ix)

The literature shows that the complex nature of suicide bombing cannot be explained with a single reason but encompasses many, as discussed in this chapter.

Sexual purity as a motivation

Mirroring other ethno-national violent conflicts globally, the rapes committed on women in Jaffna carry a dimension of ethnic violation because women's bodies and their virtue are used to symbolise the Tamil nation's honour. Sexual violation provides a high level of motivation in gendered societies where female sexual purity forms part of the individual's as well as the family's honour.

The rape of Tamil women should not be considered as an expression of mere racism or sexual frustration. The basic aim of this is to humiliate in the most shameful manner the moral code of Tamil culture. The Tamil culture considers values such as purity and chastity as sacred. Hence, these rapes are planned assaults on the Tamil cultural values and moral codes.

(Balasingham 1984:34 in Ramachandran 2005:168)

The highly gendered Sri Lankan public has accepted that women who commit acts of suicide bombings are often victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence. This public view gives rise to a false reality based on cultural perceptions of women that

preclude them from committing such extreme forms of violence without the personal violence they have endured¹²⁶.

In Jaffna's patriarchal society women's sexuality and reproductivity is held in high esteem. Virginity is linked to chastity that defines a woman's virtue and morality, and is seen through a spectrum of "nation's honour" (De Mel 2001:214). The loss of a woman's virginity due to violent sexual acts committed during conflict is emotionally and physiologically damaging and becomes part of the gendered discourse. Such civic women become socially stigmatised as polluted beings that do not deserve care and respect. The future life options these civic women have become limited to either living in the community as outcasts with little or no civic status, or joining the revolutionary movement where women's gender construction based on sexual purity in particular does not form part of their contribution to the armed struggle, or importantly to women's perceived worth (Cutter in Beyler 2003:16).

Women's groups who challenged society's gender polarisation and androcentrism during the 1980s in Jaffna, had to confront the discourse of rape, arguing that it did not reflect the way in which rape was perceived in the Tamil community. They discussed the cultural concept of female purity and chastity linked to virginity, the socio- patriarchal interest that underlies female sexual behaviour, and the social stigma (based on a patriarchal view of women) that apportions blame and encompasses the rejection of rape victims. The Women's Group discarded the Tamil word "*katpalippu*", meaning "the abolition of chastity", which feeds into the notion of female purity, and introduced words such as "*paladkaram*", meaning an act committed by force, and "*paliyalvanmurai*", meaning sexual violence. The introduction of these words did not conform to the traditional view of purity (Maunaguru 1995:166) and forced society to contextualise rape as a forceful and violent act committed against an individual's wishes.

The social rejection of rape victims is reminiscent of Vietnam's traditional society where rape is viewed with shame. However the Vietnamese revolutionary movement have been active in dispelling and discouraging the continuation of prejudices against women who have been raped (Eisen-Bergman 1974:75). The LTTE interestingly hold an ambivalent position on the issue of rape victims. The cultural roots of the LTTE, as with

¹²⁶ The violence suffered by the person can also be non-sexual physical violence, but it is the sexual violence that is considered far more damaging.

civic society, are embedded in patriarchy and advocates sexual purity for its women combatants, known as Armed Virgins. However they actively distance themselves from the social perceptions of measuring a woman's worth by her sexual purity. Those in the LTTE movement recognise that those who were sexually violated receive little or no support in the community and they have stepped into this void left by the community. The LTTE's advocacy of virginity and sexual purity is ostensibly contradicted by the acceptance of civic rape victims, thus disregarding the view that such women are polluted or social outcasts. These civilian women are accepted into the fold without any stigma being attached to them (Schalk 1992).

This organisational non-judgemental view along with the support and consideration of the revolutionary group creates a strong loyalty in the women combatants. The women who join revolutionary organisations due to a loss of sexual purity develop a newly created sense of strength, both emotionally and physically. Part of their reconstructed identity within the movement is the ambivalent compartmentalisation of women as combatants who care for their community and seek to avenge their bodily violation. "Acting as human bombs is an understood and accepted offering for a woman who will never be a mother..." (Cutter 1998 in Beyler 2003:16). The revenge aspect is nurtured separately by encouraging women combatants to feel hatred towards their aggressor (Ramachandran 2005:169) with a heightened need for self-purification.

As sexually violated women they can achieve purification of a kind by first and foremost being strong in mind and body; and by dispelling any weaknesses associated with the socially constructed female roles by performing what is seen in traditional Tamil culture as self-immolation "*agnipravesam*" (Maunaguru 1995:171, also Thiruchandran 1997b, Cutter 1998 in Beyler 2003). By engaging in the cultural belief of purification by fire, the women combatants are treading a fine line between the traditional role that requires purification by self-immolation and modernity where a shift in paradigm illustrates combatant women achieving a different kind of equality through being suicide bombers and the recognition that comes with carrying out a successful mission.

The collective silence of the LTTE preserves a woman's honour and virginity, however there is an instrumentalised manipulation of the very same silence when the revolutionary group is forced to justify individual actions of suicide bombing by claiming it is revenge for sexual violation (De Mel 2001:221). This manipulation of sexual

violence is presented to the world as an individual avenging their own and collective violation and adds to the ambiguous roles of women within the revolutionary organisation. It is incorrect to assume that all women who were raped end up as combatants or all suicide bombers were victims of rape. A substantial number of young women have committed suicide and an unknown number of women do not discuss their ordeals due to the social stigma. Instead many internalise their anxiety and build a wall of silence in the name of honour and purity. Living combatants are granted a silence whereas those that die become iconic images of avengers of sexual violence (ibid).

Brainwashing and/or Religion

Some have focused on religion by arguing that it is the “attackers psychopathology, poverty, and lack of education, or individual motives such as religious indoctrinations, especially Islamic fundamentalism” are the motivational reasons for suicide bombing (Hasan 2004: 2). Whilst Hasan’s (2004) assessment of Islamic fundamentalism appears on the surface to be accurate, it is noteworthy that suicide rates on a global scale are lowest amongst the Muslim nations (Pape 2005:181). From a religious point of view suicide is not a sin amongst those who practice religions with a belief in reincarnation such as Hinduism and Buddhism. However the linking of the LTTE motivations to a form of religious fundamentalism is a misnomer as religious differences are not a central component of the LTTE suicide bombings. Pape’s statement that “religious difference is a central component of the LTTE’s concept of self-sacrifice” (2005:150) ignores the nationalism that is central to the ethno-nationalist debate at the core of the LTTE struggle. The misunderstanding by Pape’s may have been due to the LTTE’s usage of religious terminology to unite the main religions practiced amongst Tamil nationals (Christianity and Hinduism) in its construction of martyrdom and death. Schalk describes the use of words such as *punita ilactiyam* (meaning ‘holy aim’) to describe the fight for an independent state (1997b:27). It is important not to confuse the LTTE’s usage of religious based words with its secularist acts as they represent a more secularist terminology rather than a religious terminology.

The attachment to Prabhakaran by the combatants may be seen as a form of cultism as claimed by Reuter (2004), but I would distance myself from such an analysis as it runs the risk of overlooking all other aspects that contribute to the greater discourse.

However the need to succeed that is profoundly engrained in all suicide bombers has a direct link back to Prabhakaran. An example of the fear of failure (based on total dedication and admiration) or of 'letting him down', or disappointing him on a personal level is referred to in Pratap's (2001: 104) interview conducted with two male suicide bombers of the LTTE¹²⁷.

This is further reflected amongst the women combatants I interviewed who view the acts as recognition of themselves as individuals and as a collective reflecting Prabhakaran's faith in women combatants. Pratap (2005), Bandara (2002) and Gunaratne (1998) all argue that Prabhakaran is very aware of the power he holds over the combatants and their desire to fulfil his wishes. It can therefore be argued that a subtle manipulation that is considerably more complex and significantly different to that of religious promises, or cultism is used to motivate combatants. One notable factor in cultism is the group's isolation from any other social contact making them reliant only of each other (Pape 2005:179). Such isolation does not happen with the LTTE as they are actively engaged with the civic society as part of their ideological struggle for the greater good of all Tamil nationals.

When the motivational factors are unclear authors tend to hypothesise. Reuter (2004) claims that "Brainwashing methods have played a significant role in the Tamil Tiger organisation" (2004:160). He suggests that combatants are brainwashed into acting as suicide bombers, which is not an accurate representation as confirmed by Hopgood (2005). However what must be recognised is that the LTTE combatant training does include a substantial amount of visual imagery, such as schools and hospitals that were bombed by the State's armed forces, and heroic songs of liberation being sung (Reuter 2004, Gunaratna 2001, Bandara 2002). However it would be insufficient to count this alone as a formal way of brainwashing suicide bombers due to the fact that such training is given to all combatants in the movement.

The LTTE suicide bombers carry the term of endearment "suicide warriors" which is given to distance them from terrorism, so avoiding negative connotations and move

¹²⁷ Pratap(2001)conducted her interviews with permission from Prabhakaran. It must be recognised as an extremely rare activity as the identity of the LTTE's suicide squad is kept highly secretive. During Pratap's interview, the two male combatants kept their faces covered throughout the interview, thus preventing them from being recognised.

towards a warrior image that conjures up images of those who are engaged in a path of righteous action (Sri Kantha 2004).

Altruistic Suicide

The LTTE suicide bombers are often described by academic scholars, such as Schalk (1992, 1994, 1997a and 1997b), Pape (2005) and Sri Kantha (2006), as following the Durkheim model of 'altruistic suicide'. A closer reading of Durkheim (1952) reveals that the LTTE suicide bombers follow not merely an altruistic but a closely defined category of *obligatory altruistic suicide*.

Having given the name of *egoism* to the state of the ego living its own life and obeying itself alone, that of *altruism* adequately expresses the opposite state, where the ego is not its own property, where it is blended with something not itself, where the goal of conduct is exterior to itself, that is, in one of the groups in which it participates. So we call the suicide caused by intense altruism *altruistic suicide*. But since it is also characteristically performed as a duty, the terminology adopted should express this fact. So we will call such a type *obligatory altruistic suicide*.

(Durkheim: 1952
translated by Spaulding and Simpson 2000:221 – their own italics)

I would argue that the obligatory aspects of the altruistic model would explain to a greater extent the nationalistic commitment felt by the LTTE's suicide bombers. Such obligatory commitments are also reflected in the discourse of women combatants as discussed later in this chapter. The motivations often appear to be multi-layered with their own set of dynamics, which are deeply embedded in the nationalist commitment to the cause of a free state of Tamil Eelam and a need to succeed. It is also important to note that those who are involved in the LTTE's suicide squad are focused on death rather than life as part of their commitment to the cause. This is the main difference in comparison to the combatants of non-suicide squads, who are focused on life and living, where only death on the battlefield is counted as inevitable.

The LTTE and Suicide Bombers

The complex and secretive nature of suicide operations has inevitably made data gathering rather problematic. Within the LTTE it is almost impossible to gather data from failed suicide bombers due to the cyanide poison they carry. In the rare circumstances where authors had the opportunity to interview combatant suicide bombers the androcentric nature of the organisation becomes visible, as it has always been men who were participants of interviews (as discussed in Pratap 2001 and in BBC “Inside Story” Programme 2004). It must also be recognised that there is no prior knowledge of the ‘would be’ suicide bomber until after the event. Rajasingham-Senanayake conducted the interview with Dhanu without having the faintest notion that she was talking to the future suicide bomber of Rajeev Gandhi¹²⁸. Interestingly the views expressed by Dhanu were no different from those of the women I have interviewed over a decade later.

As stated before, the information and data about the LTTE’s suicide bombers squad is virtually impossible to come by, except on a piecemeal basis, and with difficulty in verifying. However, it is noticeable that gender equality is less in need of negotiation within the suicide squad as the acceptance in the squad is itself a recognition of equality. It can be argued that the equality is a necessity, but it needs to be acknowledged as a recognition that narrows the gender polarisation which questions women’s abilities to carry out the same tasks as men¹²⁹.

The data on combatant deaths that is published by the LTTE on their official web page ‘Eelam web’ gives an indication of the gender blindness by not separating the number of male and female Black Tiger deaths, but merely gives the total sum as 241 killed between 27th November 1982 and 30th September 2002. However there is a gendered breakdown of combatants (non-Black Tigers) killed which indicates that 3,766 female and 13,882

¹²⁸ Rajasingham-Senanayake (2001) interviewed Dhanu some time before the Ghandi assassination, when she was a commander of an LTTE women’s wing. During the interview Dhanu conveyed the same ideology as all other women combatants of the LTTE who support the achievement of a separate state of Tamil Eelam above the promotion of the emancipation of women, and no indication was given of her views on suicide bombings.

¹²⁹ The equality to die for one’s own country is a demand that the women of Hamas have been asking for over many years and which was finally granted to one woman in 2005. As a good Muslim woman she was chaperoned by a male relative to the venue. Of course this could also be to ensure she carried out the act. (But it is certain that Hamas has finally come to realise how effective the women are as suicide bombers).

males combatants were killed during the same period (Hopgood 2005; 68 referring to information gained from LTTE web page www.eelamweb.com). De Mel's (2004) data obtained from the army media spokesman's office in Colombo claims that 64 of the suicide attacks have been carried out by women, a figure that also ties in with Sri Kantha's (2004) data. None of the data recognises Dhanu as a suicide bomber, which is not surprising considering that the LTTE only admitted responsibility for the assassination of Rajeev Gandhi in 2006. It is also interesting to note that Sri Kantha also recorded a further 26 separate incidents (both male and female) of combatants who had died whilst training. Black Tiger training requires a higher level that can and does cause accidental deaths during training and on rehearsal runs for specific missions. Furthermore, his data reveals that the first officially recognised Black Tiger woman was Capt. Angaiyarkanni from the Sea Tiger squad that specialised in suicide sea attacks, in 1994. In addition, a majority of women Black Tigers are of at least 21 years of age at the time of their mission. Further the majority of Black Tiger women combatants' deaths occurred in 1998, totalling 13 deaths as detailed in Appendix 8.

My own data gathered from the Mulathir district Tamil Eelam Heroes Office Political Wing (the office is situated in the cemetery), Pudukudiirupu, Northern Jaffna indicates that there were 18 Black Tiger and 46 Sea Tiger¹³⁰ deaths, giving a total of 64 deaths from 27th November 1982 to 31st October 2002. This latter figure ties in with data De Mel obtained from the Sri Lankan armed forces. Within this period the information board also stated that 64 deaths were attributed to women suicide bombers and the total number of male and female suicide deaths were 241(indicating that 177 were male suicide bombers). My research reveals that there were 3,768 female combatant deaths (a difference of 2 more than cited on the LTTE web page). It must also be noted that my research data extends one month beyond the LTTE web page information. Overall my findings support that of the information stated on the Eelam web page. The total numbers that were given on the board were not broken down to show details of the deaths which is not uncommon when dealing with the LTTE as their mode of gathering data is never explained, nor are the LTTE willing to let information out into the public domain that could be used against them. It must also be noted that since the ceasefire unofficially ended in 2005, the number of women suicide bombings have increased with no current accurate data to reflect the true numbers involved.

¹³⁰ Sea Tigers specialised in carrying out attacks in waterways and open sea

kuppi -the cyanide vial

Prabhakaran first became aware of cyanide poisoning in 1974 through the death of Sivakumaran, a man he admired who committed suicide to avoid being captured by the police for his involvement in the militant Tamil student movement¹³¹ (Narayan-Swamy 2002:55). As stated previously part of the LTTE's graduation ceremony for combatants includes the allocation of a necklace with a cyanide capsule known as *kuppi* (meaning small jar) attached to it (Figure 11). The capsule itself is a glass vial filled with cyanide that is hung as a pendant on a string that is worn around the neck¹³². The vial contains sufficient poison to kill an adult, however some combatants carry two vials to ensure death is a certainty. The occasions when the vial should be used is described in the LTTE's *Mavirkurippetu* magazine as,

...in a frontal attack by the enemy where there is [a] threat of possible extermination or capture; when surrounded or in a prison; after the infliction of a mortal wound when the LTTE fighter realises that there is no chance of survival and that [s]he is an obstacle to his or her comrades; and after capture, facing torture and death.

(Schalk 1997a:11)

Whilst the magazine explains the situations when the poison should be taken it must also be recognised that the women combatants are particularly in favour of the cyanide necklaces. They have been educated by the movement to understand that the State armed forces will rape and torture them in search of answers prior to subjecting them to a brutal form of execution (Schalk 1997a). Hopgood (2005:74) expands the point further by stating, "excruciating torture would almost likely be followed by execution in any event." This can be seen in context when analysing the epitaph written in the

¹³¹ The fact of Sivakumaran's case stands as police raided the World Tamil Research Conference held in Jaffna in 1974 causing deaths of a number of delegates. This action angered Sivakumaran who planned a retaliatory attack on the police, but the information reached the police before the attack, leaving him no option but to commit suicide to avoid a painful death in police custody. ("Martyr Sivakumaran remembered to day", June 2005, www.ltteps.org. accessed on 3.7.2007)

¹³² The glass vials worn by the combatants are made in Germany; the cyanide (effective form of cyanide is recognised as sodium cyanide than potassium cyanide) is purchased from India, and put into the vials by the LTTE. The glass containers are bitten into at the point of suicide to release the poison that will enter the blood stream and prevent oxygen entering into the body, thus causing a painful convulsion mixed with confusion, ending with a painful death. The duration of the violent death will take no more than a couple of minutes. However, taking an insufficient quantity will not bring death, but permanent brain damage. The vials need to be replaced after 3 months or so, due to discolouration of the poison exposed to sun and moisture (Schalk 1997:10). The new vials used since the current wave of violence started, are believed to be easier to bite into than previous models.

Mavirkurippetu magazine issue 1:10 about the very first combatant who died by biting into the cyanide capsule.

Having been surrounded in a hideout in Valvettiturai by Sri Lankan soldiers and having *enjoyed* cyanide, he died heroically.

(translated by Schalk 1997a:11. my italics)

The wording that illustrates taking a cyanide capsule as a form of enjoyment needs to be seen in a situational specific context of the combatants finding themselves with impending torture and extreme violence prior to a slow death. Therefore a painful, yet quick death offered by taking cyanide poisoning is a highly preferred alternative.

The first woman combatant to be considered as a martyr was Malathy (a non-suicide squad combatant) who used her cyanide vial at the point of serious injury received in battle. By her actions she has become a venerated figure in the movement and her death is commemorated in October every year.

The vial that is worn around the neck is fully exposed for all to see including those from the civic society. By this action those who see it become de-sensitised and accept it as part of the LTTE's combatant role and their commitment to the cause. Such openness removes the shock element from civic society and indirectly removes any forms of stigma or negativity that are associated with carrying a vial of poison.

Black Tigers

In 1987 Prabhakaran stated that “the method of war may change. But the aim of our war will not change” (Schalk 1997b:25). Part of the changing strategy of war brought Black Tiger suicide squad into existence with their first reported action on the 5th July 1987 with the kamikaze-style suicide attack performed by Captain Miller¹³³. The creation of the Black Tigers has been attributed to Prabhakaran's admiration for the INA, the nationalist army of Subash Chandra Bose. This group was operational against the British rulers in India during the 1940s. The INA had an organised suicide squad and was the first to use suicide-belts that were tied around the waist (Schalk 1997:174). This

¹³³ Captain Miller filled a truck with explosives and drove into the Neeladi school grounds, which was occupied by the Sri Lankan army (Narayan-Swamy 2006).

particular method was further developed and a vest used for the first time by the LTTE in the assignment of Dhanu to assassinate Rajeev Gandhi in 1991(Narayan-Swamy 2006).

The Black Tiger suicide operations are “never spontaneous or arbitrary” (Schalk 1997a:12) and generally conducted in two ways: those who take part in the battlefield and those who are individual operators set up as lone bombers, penetrating heavy security to attack a hard to reach target.

The Black Tiger constitutes the armour of self-defence for our ethnic group, and also serve to remove the barriers coming in the way of our struggle. They are the balls of fire smashing the military power of the enemy with sheer determination.

(Prabhakaran speech on *Mahaveera* - Martyrs day - 5th July 1993
referred to in Narayan-Swamy 2006:249)

The Black Tigers are a very unique and deadly creation of the LTTE with an emblem of a dark image of a head and shoulders with a beret, holding a gun (Figure 9). The image itself is publicly displayed (including in the Jaffna University¹³⁴) and believed to be the silhouette of Capt. Miller. This specialised suicide squad has a reputation of being both fierce and elite with loyalty given solely and unquestioningly to Prabhakaran and to none other (Narayan-Swamy 2006, Pratap 2001). The elitism is a direct result of special training that primarily focuses the mind to distance itself from others, and retain an unwavering focus on the assignment. The fierceness is a by-product of the strength of mind that has made the Black Tigers an enigma to all who study suicide bombers. They serve a very useful purpose for the LTTE by being able to penetrate security and carry out successful missions.

The training programmes of Black Tigers are a secretive affair (Narayan-Swamy 2006:234) but we can assume that women have negotiated gendered roles as combatants that are carried through to the next stage of training.

“I think she wants to know how we join that group. There is not much difference, a normal Tiger only becomes a Black Tiger. Yes. If they want to become Black Tigers they need special training. They have to be trained in both, mentally and physically.”

(Arasi)

¹³⁴ There is substantial support for the LTTE within academia (staff and students) in Jaffna University.

Arasi's emphasis on mental and physical training resonates with the nature of pressure that a suicide bomber may face. Their specialised training is conducted separately from other combatants for a period. During this period they have minimum or no contact with consanguine and non-consanguine families including those in the revolutionary family. The training they receive during this period is primarily focused on their mental status, to ensure that when the time comes they will be fully prepared, mentally and physically, to carry out the act to the bitter end (Pratap 2001: 103).

The issue of an individual's autonomy and free choice to join the Black Tigers is often at the forefront of discussions about suicide bombers. There is no evidence to suggest that individuals are either drugged or conscripted against their will into the elite squad (Hopgood 2005:67). Many of the combatants and civic women informed me that becoming a suicide bomber is a decision made by combatants, who volunteer themselves. Pratap (2001:102) however claims the best 200 combatant students are selected to join the Black Tiger squad, suggesting that being *chosen* means the individual's choice of volunteering, or putting one's self forward and retaining some autonomy is taken away. My informal discussions with the Gatekeeper and female combatants reveal that the individual's ability to make a choice is a widely held belief and that those who become suicide bombers are allowed to make a *free* decision and are not forced into the role.

"Say, I am a normal Tiger. I also can become a Black Tiger. The decision is mine. Yes, yes we have lot of choices. Even at the last moment I can say I cannot do it. If one is not mentally strong enough or prepared then they cannot achieve what they set out to do. We believe in this very strongly."

(Arasi)

Arasi's description grants those who join the Black Tiger suicide bombers a certain empowerment and control over their actions. However Arasi's assurance that those who become suicide bombers are able to withdraw from a mission at the last minute is disputed in the writings of De Mel (2001). She refers to an instance when the decision to pull the cord of a suicide jacket is taken away from the individual suicide bomber by

being remotely detonated¹³⁵ (De Mel 2001: 225 referring to Tamil Times 15 March 2000).

If we look beyond the accepted notion that it is a voluntary role to be a member of the elite force, then one tends to notice two strong influences being involved in the decision-making process. Although this may not be coercion, the discrimination and suppression of one ethnic group and culture, together with the use of a combatant's emotional involvement with Prabhakaran have an impact on the decision-making as discussed in previous sections. The following extract from Pratap's interview with male Black Tigers illustrates that the commitment to Prabhakaran outweighs all other factors.

The only time they [Black Tigers] showed some emotion was when they talked about Pirabhakaran [Prabhakaran], their *Annai* [older brother]. A Black Tiger names Sunil said with something close to awe, 'For us, he is mother, father and God all rolled into one. But I detected one fear in all of them: the fear that thy might let Pirabhakaran [Prabhakaran] down. They would die happily; their only hope was their death would inflict the kind of damage on the enemy that would make Pirabhakaran [Prabhakaran] happy. Securing *Annai*'s happiness was all that mattered –then, they would not have lived and died in vain.

(Pratap 2001:103-104 -my italic)

Suicide bombers who make the choice to put themselves forward believe it is their own conscientious decision. Through my interviews with combatant women it is clear that when an individual first volunteers to join the Black Tigers they are chosen or rejected, a decision based on the LTTE's assessment of an individual's capabilities. The potential women Black Tigers submit an application in writing¹³⁶, and if successful they become part of the elite squad (Hopgood 2005:60 referring to Elliot 2003). The transition from being a 'normal' Tiger to a 'Black' Tiger is seen as a procedural change with a great deal of mental and physical training to toughen up the individual. The Black Tiger unit is differentiated from other units by a powerful song that expresses pride (Sri Kantha 2004). Those who join the elite squad are the most dedicated and committed to the cause.

¹³⁵ Therefore the freewill to decide may not be as clearly defined once a combatant becomes a member of the elite squad. It must also be noted that there is no published material to illustrate a change of mind being an issue for combatants in the elite squad to withdraw their services. The change of mind argument seems to appear in fiction and cinema as discussed later on in this chapter.

¹³⁶ All applications are based on skills, motivation and domestic situation including care responsibilities.

“We never ever force anyone to fight if they don’t want to. We explain to them why we have to fight but the final decision to fight is their decision. Everything within the movement is like that. Yes, that is true.”

(Arasi)

Arasi's description revolves around choice being given to the individual to make the decision based on their own understanding, which itself may be asymmetric due to the nature of warfare and based on the explanation given to them by the organisation.

An enactment of their appreciation of Prabhakaran has become part of a created ritual of a suicide bomber's farewell by having their photograph taken ceremoniously with Prabhakaran¹³⁷. There is an unsubstantiated but popularly held belief that the photo session is followed by sharing a meal with him before the individual is sent out on their mission (Pratap 2001:103, Narayan-Swamy 2006:235 and 273, De Mel 2004:78). It must also be noted that those who are assigned a mission may or may not know who the target is until the last minute. The chosen suicide bomber may have to be a 'sleeper' for a period of time until she (or he) is given the go ahead by the LTTE to carry out the attack¹³⁸.

The freedom to decide needs to be seen within the context of the LTTE's teachings, and its discipline, which merge in creating a hybrid (a special kind of) conscience that Prabhakaran describes as,

...that commitment comes from discipline. From the beginning I felt that for a person to dedicate his life to a cause, he must be free from self-centred, egotistic existence. He has to renounce personal pleasures. I have instilled discipline in the (LTTE), and selected a group of persons capable of renouncing their lives.

(Narayan-Swamy 2006:233)

It can be argued that Prabhakaran's own statement is gendered by his referring to suicide bombers as 'he'. However, the message he conveys is that those who are chosen to join the Black Tiger squad are of a higher calibre than the average combatant. There is no information available to identify if the unit was created from the outset with both

¹³⁷ The photographs becomes a cherished possession of the dead suicide bomber's family(de Mel 2004:78)

¹³⁸ a good example of a 'sleeper' was Babu, the 23 year old male suicide bomber who assassinated President Premadasa on 1st May 1993 (Narayan-Swamy 2006:239-240). He was also believed to have been part of the community for a long period of time.

male and female combatants or whether it was first created with male combatants only, and included women combatants at a later date (in the same way as the LTTE was originally set up).

Religious aspects

Suicide bombings in the LTTE are a secular activity whose motivation is never based on religion or the gains of afterlife (Schalk 1992, 1997a and 1997b, Sri Kantha 2004) due to the fact that the LTTE is a secular movement and suicide missions are carried out by both Christians and Hindus. My research confirms that LTTE suicide bombing is a secular activity with no religious aims. Although in Jaffna the major religion is Hinduism, there are also a number of Christian and Brahmin faith combatants within the LTTE's revolutionary family¹³⁹. Once the combatants join the LTTE they often do not practice their religion or are unable to keep within the guidelines dictated by their religion¹⁴⁰. Therefore the values gained in the afterlife which are important for other groups of suicide bombers are neither relevant to the revolutionary culture nor their perceived symbolism of giving a gift of life.

Religious teachings and constraints are disregarded by many women combatants who prepared to sacrifice themselves for the cause and especially for those within the cause with whom they have built relationships. This is shown in one of their propaganda illustrations on the back cover of the *Mavirarkurippetu* magazine (Schalk 1992:83), which depicts armed young men and women walking together with heads held high. In the background there are Christian gravestones and a Hindu funeral pyre. The picture (in Figure 10) is titled 'Spirits of dead heroes and heroines from the tombs of Christian and pyres of Hindu unite'. Whilst the title is contradictory in 'uniting' Christians and Hindus after death, the emphasis here is focused on overcoming religious differences to

¹³⁹ It is believed that there have been Muslim nationals amongst the LTTE at the earlier stages of its formation based on an ideology of a minority Tamil language speakers. Over the years the Muslims have disappeared from the fold. Lately there have been a number of bitter incidents between the Muslim and Tamil groups based on the LTTE wanting to have Tamil only ethnic groups in Jaffna and certain parts of the N.E. province of Sri Lanka.

¹⁴⁰ Brahmin women combatants of the LTTE often find it difficult to follow religious directions on food preparation and consumption whilst being in active service. (BBC "Inside Story" programme shown in UK History Channel, 17 July 2004)

attain a common aim. It further creates a picture of equality between male and female combatants which overrides the society's views of masculinities and femininities.

Although a majority of women combatants view the afterlife as being part of their religious upbringing, these traditional religious views undergo a change when a woman joins the revolutionary movement, as illustrated by Kavitha.

“We must do good in this life so that in our next birth we will be blessed more. When we were growing up we believed in re-birth. But now we don't think like that. We feel we have to use this time given here properly by doing good. We don't think about re-birth and so on. Our main thinking is how we are living now.”

(Kavitha)

Kavitha's discourse shows that a change in belief occurred when being continuously exposed to extreme forms of existence whilst living under the restrictions imposed by the State. The choice of words used in her narrative such as 'now' and 'properly' conveys a duality of determination (to carry out the tasks designated by the LTTE) and the temporality of life. The change of belief is a complex transition from 'what used to be' to 'what is currently happening'. This change of thought process also illustrates a move away from the consanguine family and its cultural upbringing. New thought processes directed by the 'new' LTTE family remould the individual's thinking to fit in with the movement's idealisation of martyrdom as a selfless act that must be venerated.

A selfless act given to others in this life emphasises betterment in the next life as the women have been brought up to believe. The pragmatic view of living 'here and now' comes from the understanding of the fragility of life, which also extends into the women combatants formation of relationships with one another and the concept of a Tamil nation state. The women combatants believe they have a responsibility for the safety and welfare of civic citizens, with whom they have an extended kin identity as discussed previously.

Rationalities of Suicide Bombing

“You must explain to her this properly. Because this is very important. We are a minority. But the war that was imposed on us was a major one. Many international countries helped those who imposed the war on us. Our strength to oppose this war was weak. So to fight this big enemy only we invented this Black Tigers. Instead of losing many of our combatants in the war we were able to attack big targets but lost only one person. Yes, yes they are also a group.”

(Arasi)

Arasi's explanation has a strong justification for both the creation and use of the Black Tigers as the ultimate weapon born out of necessity. The explanation also carries a definitive pragmatism based on the cost/ benefit of losing one combatant rather than a whole battalion. The death of a suicide bomber must be viewed from a logically and pragmatically as it only requires one combatant to be trained and lost from the revolutionary movement, rather than risking a combat unit with no guarantee of success (reference my interview with Arasi 2003). Those who elect to apply to be selected for a suicide mission also view it as being a career pinnacle. Such selection elevates their status and affirms their commitment to the cause (de Mel 2001:225).

Overall life is valued regardless of its male or female identity, and more importantly suicide bombings are a rational strategy hence the trained suicide bomber is a strategic weapon and a valued resource. It appears that a significant importance is placed on individual combatants in the LTTE regardless of their gender identity. The gender identity itself creates an agent who is tasked into carrying out the policy/mission. However the value of the agent as a highly trained entity remains until their demise.

By analysing the available literature on LTTE suicide missions, it does appear that though combatants are sent to perform suicide missions it does not necessarily mean they have to die in the process. Death is a by-product of the act, but the act itself does not necessarily require the death of the combatant in order for the mission to be successful. The suicide bombers of the LTTE do not appear to have the humiliation of failure attached to them.

It must also be noted that there is no evidence to show that any of the LTTE's elite suicide squad ever abandoned a mission, which in turn means their exact views will

never be known as they always (except on one occasion¹⁴¹) end up dead. Those who have written specifically about the LTTE suicide activities, such as Hopgood (2005), admit the difficulty in obtaining data as the death of the subject is a fundamental problem for the research¹⁴².

When conducting research amongst the LTTE, researchers never know who amongst their research participants is a future suicide bomber. On the extremely rare occasions the LTTE have granted journalists an audience¹⁴³ with trained suicide bombers from the elite Black Tiger squad, their identity is never revealed and their faces are covered with masks¹⁴⁴.

Altruism in *Thatkodai*: the Gift of Sacrifice

The gift of sacrifice made by women suicide bombers was explained to me as,

“The suicide bombers are known to commit ‘Thatkolai’ which means suicide. But these people [the LTTE women combatants] are known as committing ‘Thatkodai’. ‘That’ means self and ‘Kolai’ means killing and ‘Kodai’ means gift. So when you say ‘Thatkodai’ it means they are giving themselves [as a gift].”

(Kavitha’s Translator)

“Some people say, Christians also say that there is no better love than giving your life for a friend. That is what ‘Thatkodai’ means.”

(Kavitha)

The single thread that runs through the combatant women’s own justification for a suicide act is the concept of giving a gift. The actual act of giving can be argued as a ‘materialistic gesture’ where the human value of the gift surpasses the materiality and

¹⁴¹ The single occasion where a member of the Black Tiger squad did not die was due to his ability to leave the vehicle full of explosives that was about to explode and escape to safety.

¹⁴² The women focused research that is currently available is gathered primarily from failed women suicide bombers held in various Israeli gaols (Victor 2004, Channel 4 programme “The Cult of the Suicide Bomber”, 11 September 2006).

¹⁴³ LTTE has thus far granted access only to the BBC and to Indian journalist Pratap in the 1990s.

¹⁴⁴ It is impossible to predict how many of those I have interviewed will end up as suicide bombers in times to come. This uncertainty is primarily based on two facts as at that point they either have not been chosen to become members of the elite Black Tiger squad or they are awaiting the allocation of an assignment.

places it in a superior category of a selfless act. Within this category women are often seen as selfless givers.

The words ending *Kolai* and *Kodai* convey a powerful message within the suicide discourse. The very act of taking one's own life in suicide, *Thatkolai* is separated from that of committing an act of suicide bombing, which is a selfless act of giving a gift, *Thatkodai*. The interviewees took a great deal of time to explain this difference to me, which is significant as it appears that my understanding of the difference was important to them. The significance between the words is not recorded in any of the literature by the academics that generally regard the women combatants as being 'used' by the LTTE (de Mel 2001, Coomaraswamy 1996). As Durkheim recognises,

we actually see the individual in all these cases seek to strip him[her]self of his[her] personal being in order to be engulfed in something which [s]he regards as [her]his true essence.

Durkheim (1952),
translated by Spaulding and Simpson 2000:225)

The altruistic suicide discussed by Durkheim is strongly reflected in Kavitha's discourse above, which shows that she is aware that the social perception of self-sacrifice through bombings and other means are seen negatively.

Amongst many citizens of Sri Lanka, suicide is not culturally frowned upon or stigmatised, but is seen as shortening the lengthy period of suffering endured during an individual's lifetime¹⁴⁵ (Hopgood 2005:69). This view is very much based on the cause and effect in life's never-ending cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Such a cultural perspective remains very different from that of Western societies, and contextualising the perceptions of suicide along with the revolutionary ethos of death attained during the cause of fighting is viewed as a 'gift' that is given to one's friends, family and the nation state of Tamil Eelam.

It must be recognised that neither the wider community nor the LTTE revolutionary group see human life as cheap or worthless. Though the LTTE's use of human life to further the cause as battlefield combatants or suicide combatants can be viewed as

¹⁴⁵ Sri Lanka has the highest rate of suicides amongst its female population according to statistics produced by the World Health Organisation in 1991. Also referred to in Hopgood 2005: 76.

contradictory to those who value life, it needs to be seen in a context of ‘war’ conditions, whereby the giving or sacrificing of human life is required to achieve their aims and objectives. The sentiment of being unable to put a value on life makes it a priceless commodity. Hence the women combatants of the LTTE see the sacrifice of life as giving the ultimate gift.

“People refer to them as suicide bombers but they are not committing suicide, they are gifting their life.”

(Kavitha)

Kavitha’s own insistence that this is a gift signifies an understanding of sacrifice similar to that described by Bauman (1992) who claims that the willingness to die for another is the “only truly individual of human acts”. He further states that “[t]he greatest gift one human being can offer another is the gift of one’s life. ‘To die for another’ is the ultimate ethical act; one by which all morality is measured” (1992:200).

Many in civic society feel a great obligation to the combatants for the sacrifices they make on behalf of the community.

“When you hear the news that many of the fighters have died fighting for us you feel bad. It is just like how if one of my relatives have died. I have the same feelings. At times like that we help them in other ways by giving money. Yes we do that a lot [helped out with food or money or medicines and bandages]. This is something everybody does and it is normal. We cannot repay them for the sacrifice. You cannot put a value on a life.”

(GV)

In the above discourse, GV harbours a strong sense of personal indebtedness towards the combatants who are perceived by her as ‘fighting for us’. The collective usage of the word ‘us’ in this instance focuses on a transitional relatedness in kinship that is due to the act being committed on behalf of another, the ‘us’ in this instance referring to the Tamil community at large. Whilst the relatedness links the combatant women to the civic society it invariably creates a complex situation by sharing both its achievements (the success in the attack carried out) and losses (of life) thus invoking simultaneous senses of gratitude, admiration and of guilt. The relatedness that links the combatants and the civic community further carries a sense of familial identity when GV refers to the deaths as “It is just like how if one of my relatives have died. I have the same feelings.”

These sentiments are also echoed in Sri Kantha's (2004) writing in relation to suicide bombers where he states that "all were superheroes of a higher order for Tamils like me. They belong to my extended family, and they are the real thing..." (Sri Kantha 2004:3). The sentiments expressed by both GV and Sri Kantha corresponds directly with Durkheim who argues,

Because altruistic suicide, though showing the familiar suicidal traits, resembles especially in its most vivid manifestations some categories of action which we are used to honouring with our respect and even admiration, people have often refused to consider it as self-destruction.

(Durkheim 1952 translated by Spaulding and Simpson 2000:239).

The identification of the suicide combatants as both heroes and kin places the suicide bombers in an elevated position where they are not only removed from the society but also venerated. The kin identity forms a lifeline to the perceived heroic act, which then (indirectly) allows the civic state to embrace the altruistic glory of the suicide martyrdom.

Gendered Dimensions

The suicide bomber's performance of *Thatkodai* and not *Thatkolai* gives credence to the paradoxical dualism of the destruction of life in order to give (the gift of life) to the nation.

"Yes. Sacrifice is the most important thing. Living for other people and doing good for them and not thinking about ourselves."

(Yalini*)

Yalini's discourse illustrates a gendered dimension that is implicit in the female roles of Tamil culture, which suggests that sacrifice and selflessness are a part of a socially constructed womanhood. De Mel (2001:225) argues that the women suicide bombers can identify with the cultural upbringing of Tamil women to accept sacrifice as a way of life. I would agree with De Mel as women in Tamil society have been socially constructed to be selfless givers. Even though women combatants leave the domestic sphere and enter into a more public sphere, the values of their upbringing permeates

into the new roles as suicide bombers. This gendered aspect is also recognised by civic women who state,

“They [Tamil women] don’t concentrate on how fair it is or what they want. Sacrificing is a main character of the [Tamil] women. There is no surprise in sacrificing. Anyway she [Tamil woman] is sacrificing wherever she is no?”

(HA*)

Based on these definitions the self-sacrifice involved in suicide bombing is not an added ‘extra’ to the culturally accepted social roles of women combatants, and there is a noticeable difference between the language used by male and female combatants to describe what suicide bombing means to them as gendered individuals. It must also be noted that the dictionary definition of martyrdom significantly includes “death or suffering for *any* great cause” (Oxford Dictionary 1980 my italics).

By analysing my own primary data and the existing secondary data, the gendered dimension of the act of suicide bombing is highlighted through language used. The interviews conducted by the BBC¹⁴⁶ with male ‘would be’ suicide bombers reveal that they view suicide bombing as an act of sacrifice, meaning to forgo, forfeit or surrender their life. There is a similar argument of gendered manipulation that can be applied to the male combatants,¹⁴⁷ as reflected in one male who stated that “I feel honoured that my death will take our struggle one step closer to Eelam” (Pratap 2001:103). The male combatants in this instance tend to see the act of suicide more as an internalised honour gained than an externalised sacrifice made.

Whilst acknowledging that it is often difficult to separate biology from culture (Eichler 1980 referred to in Mackie 1987: 3) it is none the less noticeable that the discourse between male and female suicide bombers reveals a gendered division. Interestingly men do not use the same words, suggesting that sacrifice could be seen with a specifically gendered inflection.

¹⁴⁶ BBC “Inside Story” programme shown in UK History Channel, 17 July 2004.

¹⁴⁷ As discussed previously, Black Tigers are an elite suicide squad who are hand picked for their high discipline and unquestioning loyalty to Prabhakaran. (reference my own interviews, Pratap 2001, Narayan-Swamy 2002, Bandara :2002)

“...They would die happily; their only hope was their death would inflict the kind of damage on the enemy that would make Prabhakaran happy. Securing Annai’s [Prabhakaran] happiness was all that mattered – then, they would not have lived and died in vain” (Pratap 2001:103/104)

This is in stark contrast to my own research into the women combatants who view suicide bombing to be a gift, a present, an offering, or a contribution. Women suicide bombers call it ‘an act of giving’. This may be tied to essentialist views of women’s socio-biological roles as nurturers, defining them as ‘givers’. This is opposed to male suicide bombers who call it ‘an act of sacrifice’, tied to the masculine role of a ‘non-giver’ or a ‘receiver’, which their gendered socio-cultural roles have dictated.

Therefore I would emphasise the importance of understanding the multi-layered thinking that is contained within the LTTE’s ideology of martyrdom. The theoretical justification of Thatkodai (self-giving /gift) as a present to the nation to alleviate the nation’s problematic state can be debated as a gendered facet of women. Whilst the available literature does not address the issue of combatant men carrying a different view to combatant women, a number of academics argue that the agency of women is deeply embedded in the culture of sacrifice (de Mel 2001, Coomaraswamy 1996, Maunaguru 1995).

Friendship, Kinship and Death

Combatant women viewed dying for a friend in a kin relationship or for the nation at large as an extension of being physically responsible for the well being of the LTTE kin family. Though social scientists such as Bauman (1992:207) may argue this as a “moral awakening from the egoistic somnolence in which life is for most people,” the reality of life lived amongst friends in kinship carries far greater attachments of care and personal sacrifice¹⁴⁸.

The selfless act of Thatkodai (‘gift of self’) which is steeped in altruistic suicide is much more significant on a personal level and works on several levels that are overlooked by many authors. A major theme amongst women combatants that appears in

¹⁴⁸ Bauman (1992:209) argues that in death and morality there are two kinds of individuals present; the hero who acts to promote the cause and the moral person who sees the cause as life / well being of another person. Both these individuals are called upon to sacrifice themselves for the cause that is far nobler than the value of their lives.

Balasingham's (1993) writing¹⁴⁹ is the use of a fictive kin identity (as in Kavitha's discourse referred to earlier) that indicates emotions towards 'a friend' are stronger than those for the consanguine kin family. However, the sacrifices of this nature send ripples through the civic community which positions itself within the fictive kin structure of the LTTE in relation to death. It also forms a part of a transitional consanguinity as discussed earlier in Chapter Four.

It must be recognised that the sacrifice of life as a gift to the nation creates a value added commodity within the revolutionary movement. "Values [are] often gained when people die...[...]...In the end it is death, rather than lives it claimed to preserve, which turns into the supreme value. Death itself becomes the cause for the hero of a cause" (Bauman 1992:209). Therefore, women combatants such as Dhanu and Malathy (whose role is discussed in this chapter) have become examples of heroes created in death. They were both young women combatants who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the LTTE and over the years have become highly revered legends.

Arasi discusses two deaths that mean a great deal to her emotionally, that of her sister and her close female friend Sambathy. In Arasi's discourse the death of a friend appears to be discussed with a greater tenderness than the death of a family member.

In relation to the sister Arasi states,

"my sister next to me was in the movement she was martyred. She was next to me so we both went through the same experiences. She was martyred in 1998. She was born in 1975... [after some calculation]... she was 23. We were both together but then I had to go to do something else and it [death] happened then. [In] Killinochi. Not on any of those 3 operations [Never Ceasing Waves operations¹⁵⁰]. This was when the army moved forward there was a battle."

(Arasi)

Whereas, in relation to her friend Sambathy, she states,

¹⁴⁹ Women combatant who have fought in the Elephant Pass battle said "our friends and colleagues have voluntarily given their lives to a cause which they firmly believed in and held precious to their hearts...they died expecting us to carry on the struggle after their death. So when we see them fighting with all their strength, when we see them dying, when we are side by side with them as they die, our determination to fight the enemy does not diminish, it grows even more stronger". (Balasingham 1993:84)

¹⁵⁰ LTTE conducted a series of attacks against the state Armed Forces code named Never Ceasing Waves. A great number of human losses were incurred on both sides.

“in 1993 during the Poonahari Battle I lost a friend Sambathy. That was very shocking. She and I were very close friends. I was with her and saw her dying. When I went near her there were shells and rounds all around her. Before that we used to talk a lot about the people and about the status of women in the society. After my friend’s death, I wanted to fulfil her desires and ambitions”.

(Arasi)

There is a strong sense of reflexivity in Arasi’s discourse regarding the two deaths that are of significance to her. A closer analysis reveals a difference between the two personal losses. Sambathy’s death invoked emotionally revealing statements of the shock encountered in seeing her friend die, which then directly relates to a close affinity before death “we used to talk a lot.” This type of bond between Sambathy and Arasi was missing in her discussion of her sister’s death, which was more distant in comparison to the death of her friend, and may be due to reasons such as the friend being with Arasi during times of hardships and extreme physical endurance. Furthermore, witnessing Sambathy’s death added further emotional turmoil in a way that her sister’s death did not, thus removing her from the immediacy of her sister’s death. It is the death of Sambathy that has inspired and created a yearning as she describes, *“I wanted to fulfil her [Sambathy’s] desires and ambitions.”* This also refers to the emotional ties that have been built with the non-consanguine family of the LTTE which override consanguinal ties, as discussed in the previous chapter. Firth (1999) describes this as a key theme of friendship that relies on an assumption of “benevolence and loyalty” (1999: xv), which extends to women combatants preparing to sacrifice their own self for a friend and the greater civic community.

I noticed that those living in Colombo had a disinterest in the war and the suffering endured in Jaffna. These observations were confirmed by way of casual conversations with women in Colombo who admitted that the war was too far away to concern them. Thus when suicide bombings occur in Colombo they bring the message of death to their relatively safe lives, and this fosters the same feelings of insecurity as those living in war zones. The lack of comprehension of suicide as a gift is perhaps reflective of society finding the concept totally alien, as their views are different to the LTTE, as is illustrated in the following,

...there was virtually no support for attacking civilians regardless of whether they were in Sinhalese territory or Tamil region. The attitudes regarding attacking military targets (Sri Lankan soldiers occupying Jaffna for instance) were more varied.

(Bloom 2005:67)

Whilst the Tamils of Colombo and Jaffna may not all support suicide bombing, the funding received by the LTTE from the diasporas community is channelled into all aspects of the movement's activities as the LTTE reaches out to a Tamil society which extends beyond the boundaries of Sri Lanka.

Celebration of martyrdom

Death in the LTTE is justified as a form of martyrdom. Suicide deaths in particular follow the Tamil linguistic definition of *tiyakam*, meaning 'abandonment' rather than 'destruction' of life, and those who are engaged in such activities are considered to be ascetics who have given up the pleasures of life such as intimate relationships (Schalk 1997a and 1997b).

It is of uttermost importance to understand the concept of *tiya[a]kam* as a reaction of encountering death. *Tiya[a]kam* is a specific type of aggressive mourning behaviour in the martial culture of the LTTE.

(Schalk 1992:51)

'Aggressive mourning' as referred to by Schalk (1992) above defines instances where a sense of loss is felt when a comrade who has been a close friend in a kin relationship dies. This sense of loss and bereavement can act as a trigger for avenging the death through self-sacrifice, and often of volunteering to be a suicide bomber. Though my research did not reveal the range of meanings that are discussed by Schalk (1992) I was informed of the ethos and the sentimentality behind the self-sacrifice of undertaking suicide missions.

Schalk's (1992 and 1997a) article on LTTE suicide bombers reveals two main ways in which the LTTE constructs its suicide martyrdom ethos. Firstly the root of the martyrdom concept lies deep in the revivalist literature used in India during its struggle for independence. Whilst Indian independence did not rely on the concept of martyrdom as popularised by the LTTE, Schalk (1997a) identifies a common link in the

use of the concept *tyagi* from ancient Sanskrit. Whilst the Sanskrit language refers to *tyagi* as ‘one who abandons life’, this changes in the Tamil language to *tiyaki*, ‘the one who loses one’s own life in the act of assisting another’ (Schalk 1997a). Secondly, there was a need to identify those who sacrifice themselves for the cause through martyrdom. This meaning of martyrdom illustrates a move away from the Indian linguistic roots of martyrdom to the Tamil language’s own hybrid version (Schalk 1992:51). Schalk (1992) identifies the separation of death on the battlefield from death as a suicide bomber, and claims that *Caatci*¹⁵¹, which literally translated means ‘one who endures submissively’ and is further defined by the LTTE as ‘one who fights furiously’, is only granted to combatants who die on the battlefield. In addition the word *Tiyakam*¹⁵², which translates as “abandonment” is also used as “martyrdom” and is given specifically to suicide combatants (Schalk 1992:51).

Your children love the independence of the motherland more than their life. You must feel great and proud of being the parent of those who have given these extraordinary beings for a *holy aim*. Your children have not died; they have become history.

(Prabhakaran 1009:218 in Schalk 1997a:15 my italics)

The above speech by Prabhakaran instils a sense of pride in parents, as the life of their child is not wasted, the child is fulfilling holy aims and is granted a place in history. Prabhakaran’s use of the term ‘holy aim’ is not aligned to any religion, as the LTTE is a

¹⁵¹ Schalk(1992)s linguistic linking of LTTE ‘s Hinduism and Jaffna’s Christianity has resulted in him arguing that the word “*caatci*” literally meaning to “submissively endure all suffering to the end without using violence” (Schalk 1992:53) was in effect was created by Tamil Christian (Catholic to be precise) priests when describing LTTE combatants who have been killed in combat. At the earlier part of the struggle there was some notable support to the LTTE by the Church giving credence to the church’s willingness to make the combatants both martyrs and heroes. Arguably there is a fundamental difference between the literal meaning of the word and the adoption made by the LTTE which Schalk claims is an anomaly, whereby the LTTE in fact uses the word to describe aggressive and extreme form of combat committed prior to own death in battle field. The word *Caacti* has some of its roots in colonial period when a person was willing to sacrifice own self to uphold a personal conviction (ibid:53-54).

¹⁵² *Tiyaakam* in reference to an armed struggle is to be found in *Bhagavad-Gita*, the sacred scriptures from ancient India that are believed to have been spoken word of Lord Krishna. This notion of the armed struggle was revived in India during the period of conflict against the British. A further development of terminology extends to *Cattiyaccaaski* meaning ‘truth-witness’ or *Irrattacaaksi* meaning ‘blood-witness’. Blood-witness was a title handed over by Christian missionaries upon translating the Greek word *Martyr* from the New Testament. An example of this can be seen in Matthew 18, 16 and many other places in the translated version of the Tamil language New Testament (Schalk 1992:52).

secular organisation as discussed previously. However by using this term he is attempting to give the fight for a free Tamil nation State some moral justification.

The LTTE's concept of martyrdom was developed in the 1980's and actively promoted later in that decade. De Mel (2004:77) comments that,

...what animates suicide bombing is the personal status and self-esteem that accompanies the act of self-destruction. This self-esteem is constructed and reinforced by the militant group's glorification of the suicide bomber's martyrdom¹⁵³.

This calculated and rationalised promotion of martyrdom was linked not only to the violent armed conflict but also to the suffering of those in the civic society. Whilst the civic society had no control over the LTTE's ideology or its rationale, the LTTE had incorporated them into its thought process as a way of gaining an endorsement for its activities. The significance of this inclusion is seen by the way martyrdom is celebrated in society¹⁵⁴.

Schalk (1997a and 1997b) argues that with the Diaspora's support and the need for international exposure the LTTE needed to translate Tamil language specific words, such as *tiyaki* (meaning 'martyr') and *tiyaakam* (meaning 'martyrdom'), into English and other languages for both the overseas Tamil population and a non-Tamil audience. With the activation of suicide bombings in 1987, the LTTE made its first public proclamation on martyrdom in 1989 at the *Marvirar Nal* celebrations stating that "every freedom fighter who sacrifices his or her life is a martyr..."(Schalk 1997a:4). *Mavirar*¹⁵⁵ means 'Great Heros' (*Nal* means day) therefore every combatant who sacrifices their life for the cause is a 'Great Hero'.

¹⁵³ This is a view based on the work of Hage (2003), writing about Palestinian suicide bombers who states that self-esteem and the glorification of martyrdom are primary motivational factors for suicide bombers. The martyrdom aspect, which is mostly discussed amongst the literature relating to Middle Eastern suicide bombings, is seen as an extreme form of religious belief which is manipulated to create an ending with immediacy of reward.

¹⁵⁴ Bloom (2005:68) had conducted research illustrating that those under the age of 30 with less education are more likely to support the LTTE's violence than those over 30 years with a university education. She further states that many saw the armed forces as legitimate targets for suicide bomb attacks.

¹⁵⁵ *Mavirar* is plural and *Maviran* is singular.

The martyrdom aspect of death is publicly celebrated in a number of ways by the LTTE. Firstly there are set dates for celebrations such as 27th November (dating back to the first event in 1989) which honours *Marvirar Nal* aimed at all the LTTE combatants who had died in battle. The death of Malathy (who died by taking cyanide capsule in 1987 and was the first woman combatant to die in battle) is celebrated on the 10th October, and the 5th July is Black Tiger day (when Capt. Miller became the first suicide bomber on this day in 1987). All these days consist of a ritualistic ceremony, which includes lighting candles, raising flags and parades combined with cultural entertainment such as music, dance and plays.

My research period coincided with the anniversary of Malathy's death, which gave me an opportunity to experience at first hand the kind of atmosphere that is generated by such occasions. Apart from the large paintings and posters that decorated the roads and junctions, it was very interesting to note the very prominent shrine for Malathy that was built in the stadium where the festivities were conducted. Every person present (approximately over a hundred people) attended the shrine to offer flowers, incense and prayers. The schoolchildren in their clean and smart white school uniforms appeared to be 'on duty', distributing picture cards, posters and pocket calendars with Malathy's image, or were engaged in general assistance, and a number of school bands played at the celebrations. The atmosphere for the day was very much that of a family event, with free food and drink. However it was not difficult to realise that such veneration and engagement of children in the process paves the way for the next generation of combatants and maybe even suicide bombers.

The celebration of martyrs includes those who died in the battlefield whilst fighting, those who had to resort to cyanide poisoning, and those who were engaged in suicide missions. The collective memory of them is kept alive by pillars erected by the LTTE that can be seen from the road, and have the role of actively reminding civic society of the sacrifices made by the combatants of the LTTE. These pillars are known as *Ninaivuccinam* or "Tokens of Commemoration" (Schalk 1997b:44). The tokens that I witnessed in Velvettiturai (the home town of Prabhakaran) were for the twelve members of the LTTE who were arrested by the IPKF and were on the verge of being handed over to the armed forces when they resolved to commit suicide by cyanide poisoning in

1987¹⁵⁶. There were twelve pillars rising from the ground (some 12 feet or more) with widening columns that reached towards the sky. Each of the pillars contained a photograph of one of the people being commemorated along with the dates of their birth and death. Although these structures are not gravestones and do not contain bodies or ashes they are painted in the same blue colour as the LTTE gravestones. The deaths that had occurred in order for the movement to be built are strongly etched on the memories of all present through the impressive nature of these structures. Whilst the pillars commemorate the death of combatants who had community and family kin ties, both the construction and maintenance of the pillars is carried out by the LTTE with no involvement by the consanguine family members (Schalk 1997 b: 45).

The distancing of dead combatants from their biological families is an interesting aspect of the LTTE which I suggest feeds into the creation of the non-consanguine LTTE family. Schalk's extensive research into the LTTE reveals that prior to 1991 the dead bodies of the combatants were handed back to the family for disposal, with the LTTE attending the funeral service and making speeches and salutations to the dead (Schalk 1997b:45). This position changed after 1991, when the LTTE did not return the bodies to families but started to bury them in the LTTE's own cemeteries known as *Tuyilum Illam*, meaning Sleeping House. The official ceremony typically consists of a farewell speech made by a leader from the LTTE followed by a gun salute. This is further followed by a ritual reading of a text comparing the dead person to a seed returning back to soil from which new plants will emerge. This can also be seen in the context of reincarnation and the perpetual cycle of life and death. This type of funeral ritual replaces the religious funerals so further highlighting the secularism within the LTTE (Schalk 1997 b: 45).

The cemeteries I visited had neatly arranged rows of headstones with mounds. After the initial shock of realising a majority of the dead were in their late teens and early twenties, I noticed how extremely well maintained they were. There were no weeds growing on them or any paint chippings, in fact they looked immaculate. One of the cemeteries I visited located in Mulathir district, Pudukudiirupu had an unusual layout with identical neatly arranged mounds all starting from a central podium and spreading outwards, reminiscent of the rays of the sun (Figure 13). The reason for identical mounds is explained as "The ambition is to give every martyr a visible mound recalling

¹⁵⁶ An LTTE leader who visited handed the cyanide capsules to the twelve members.

his [her] memory as a fighter, not as a private person" (Schalk (1997b:45). At both the cemeteries I visited I was informed that not all mounds actually contain bodies. The reason I was given for this was that sometimes there were no whole bodies to bury.

It is notable how devoid of religious imagery the LTTE cemeteries were. None of the graves had any form of religious symbols attached to them. This gave me a sense of an active propagation of the LTTE's secularist ideologies. All religions have their varying practices, especially for death; for instance burial of the dead is usually conducted in the Christian faith whereas Hindus normally carry out a cremation. However the LTTE bury all their dead, rather than following the dead person's original religious background. Though Schalk does not engage in the religious difference debate he does say that the LTTE find it hard to convince families of Hindu combatants that their family member should be buried rather than cremated. He further states that,

Since July 1991 all martyrs have been buried and not burned in the tuyilum illam [Sleeping House]. The official reason for this was that the martyr should feel close to the soil which [s]he defended. The non-official reason is that Yalppanam [Jaffna] suffering from a lack of firewood.

(Schalk 1997b: 45)

The creation of a separate cemetery for the LTTE combatants who die contributes to them being recognised as different from civic society. Furthermore, by separating the dead combatants from their consanguine family burial grounds (many use part of their family land as a collective family cemetery) the LTTE has in effect created their own family cemetery, with all the care and maintenance being the responsibility of the movement.

The LTTE's veneration of the dead had been addressed by the State armed forces by bulldozing/flattening a number of the LTTE cemeteries (Narayan-Swamy 2006:259). At one of the cemeteries I visited they had collected some of the rubble and had showcased it with an epitaph to the destruction¹⁵⁷.

The families of martyrs are honoured and are looked after financially from a welfare aspect, which is not dissimilar to Palestinian suicide bombers (BBC "Inside Story" 2004)

¹⁵⁷ I was informed by the Gatekeeper that the idea to prepare a showcase was given to the LTTE by one of the civic women who was part of my interview group, whose specific identity (as well as the name of the second cemetery) I wish to withhold for safety reasons.

¹⁵⁸. A notable difference amongst the Palestine women suicide bombers is in the monetary remuneration received by the families, where noticeably the financial remuneration paid to a female suicide bomber's family is only half that of a male suicide bomber¹⁵⁹(Victor 2004:35). The justification of a lesser payment for a woman suicide bomber has been that had the male lived, he would have been able to earn a higher amount of money than a woman would. Information concerning any payments from the LTTE is unobtainable as it operates on a closed book basis. Families of martyrs do not discuss financial remunerations, and are often kept in a highly visible social position especially during times of festivals. During the celebrations of *Mahaveerar Nal* (the Martyrs day) the parents of dead martyrs are paraded in front of cameras and honoured for loyalty shown to the cause, and the sacrifice their children have made to the same cause (BBC "Inside Story"¹⁶⁰ 2004, de Mel 2001). The photographs taken on such occasions are posted on the revolutionary group's web pages for the world to view¹⁶¹. Further, there are commemoration cards that can be purchased though the website to celebrate the LTTE's martyrdom from any part of the world (Figure 12). The LTTE grants martyrdom to both male and female suicide bombers, and female suicide bombers are given the same martyrdom recognition as male suicide bombers in death.

Summary

Female suicide bombers have become a *cause celebre* in the world of revolutionary warfare, raising issues about feminist body politics, individual agency and autonomy along with gender identity within revolutionary movements. Social perceptions have made the existing male focused analysis of the gender discourse sensationalised in the media reporting of women who commit acts of suicide bombings. The essentialist views in society may have added to the refusal to accept the reality of the rising phenomena of women as suicide bombers and it appears that analysts are less willing to address this phenomenon. It is a mistake to overlook the rising phenomenon of women suicide

¹⁵⁸ BBC "Inside Story" programme shown in UK History Channel, 17 July 2004

¹⁵⁹ A life time stipend of four hundred dollars is paid by which ever the organisation claims responsibility for the attack (eg. Hamas, POL or Islamic Jihad) to male suicide bombers and two hundred dollars per month was paid for women suicide bombers (Victor 2004:35).

¹⁶⁰ BBC "Inside Story" programme shown in UK History Channel, 17 July 2004

¹⁶¹ www.eelam and www.tamil.net.

bombers as it clearly suggests a change in the negotiated traditional roles of women as combatants in both revolutionary groups and civic society.

The reasons for becoming suicide bombers are both complex and multi-layered. An analysis of suicide bombing by the LTTE combatant women reveals that it is an empowering act reinstating an individual's lost agency, and can be seen as the ultimate gift given to those they care for and to the nation at large. Feminist academics (see Coomaraswamy 1994, 1996, 2002, de Mel 2001, 2004 and Maunaguru 1995) had seen the role of women suicide bombers as a clear manipulation of women by patriarchy. However, the women revolutionaries see this as a career pinnacle, where their complex gender negotiation grants them the same 'high' status awarded to the men who become suicide bombers.

The reality of the socio-cultural situation dictates limited options for a sexually violated young woman in a highly patriarchal society where women's sexuality is linked to the moral virtue of the nation state. In such circumstances the revolutionary group provides a valuable social service that the community may be unable or unwilling to provide. Some sexually violated civic women who feel vulnerable do end up as strong willed combatants who receive no discouragement to pay with their lives. Such women may harbour deep-rooted feelings of impurity from a violated body that turns into the victim's right to avenge.

It can be argued that Dhanu became an avenging angel of death rather than a mere suicide bomber on a mission and her act was emancipatory by targeting the head of the nation state that violated her sexual purity. However it can also be seen as being purely instrumentalised in feeding into the cultural construction of women's roles whereby they are in need of purification for the sexual violations committed by others on their bodies. Therefore I would say that until society changes its attitudes whereby the worth of a woman is not measured by her virginity and sexual violence against women is recognised as not being a fault of the victim, there will continue to be a risk that those who are marginalised will be directed into carrying out extreme acts of violence.

Whilst the actions of women suicide bombers are highly visible, their motivational factors are often overlooked by focusing on religious fundamentalism (Middle East based perspective). This narrow view reduces the impact of other culturally dictated motivational factors especially those felt by women such as the hatred and hopelessness

created by the many kinds of personal losses and violations, especially the loss of sexual purity. It must also be noted that there are no religious motivational factors within the LTTE linking female combatants to suicide bombings. It is seen as an entirely secular act that is part of a rational strategy of altruistic suicide. It must also be understood that the Tamil society in Jaffna are living in a culture that does not view suicide as a basis for stigma.

An analysis of the way in which the LTTE deal with their dead highlights a number of key points; firstly, the dead are kept alive in the collective social memory by building monuments in public spaces. Secondly, the dead are separated from the greater society and placed in an elevated position by being buried in a cemetery of their own. Thirdly the religious, caste and class segregation as practiced in the society is replaced by the LTTE's own set of rituals. Fourthly, the dead combatant is no longer part of their consanguine family but a substantial part of the LTTE family. Hence s/he is buried in the LTTE's 'own' cemetery (which can also be seen as the LTTE family cemetery), by the side of their non-consanguine kin members and not in the consanguine family cemetery with the rest of their biological family. The women combatants are buried next to male combatants illustrating a sexual equality in death through the act of burials.

The gender equality argument must be seen in the context of violent political conflict. Whilst women take an equally active role in becoming suicide bombers, it is questionable whether they can maintain this form of equality gained through an extreme form of self-sacrifice during a post-war era. This in turn questions the sustainability of this particular form of negotiated equality achieved by women combatants of the LTTE.

CHAPTER 6

AH-LU-MAI EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF THE NEW WOMAN, PUTHUMAI PEN

Introduction

The term Empowerment is used widely within the feminist discourse implying the possession of some form of power. A working definition that I will use here to represent this term defines empowerment as a ‘multi-dimensional social process’ that enables individuals to gain some kind of control or authority over some aspect of their lives and in their society (Page and Czuba 1999). It suggests some change in the existing power relations, and relates specifically to individuals and their relationships with others in their communities (also see Rappoport 1984, Zimmerman 1984, Afshar and Alikhan 2002, Wray 2004, Rowlands (1998). The definition of *Ah-lu-mai* given below represents similar sentiments and as such should be treated as the same.

There is no definition of empowerment in Tamil that relates specifically to women which recognises the control or authority they have over their own lives. Therefore when women combatants came to be recognised for their abilities and resilience, there was a need to define this development. The LTTE created the word *Ah-lu-mai* which is reflective of the new woman that is seen amongst their combatant women who regularly use the word *Ah-lu-mai* to mean empowerment. The word *Ah-lu-mai* encompasses ‘governance, authority, or leadership roles’ and ‘authorise, give power, make able’ to provide a new word that is used by the LTTE women to represent their new identity. The lack of a direct translation caused a problem during the interviews that was resolved by the women combatants and their translator coming to an agreed decision as to what it could mean, even though the meaning was imprecise. It must be noted that the word *Ah-lu-mai* is often used by combatant women but never by civilian women.

The war has challenged gender identity in civic society, which in turn has opened up possibilities that were unknown and certainly unavailable in the pre-war era for women.

In this chapter I discuss whether the prolonged war is the catalyst for a notable number of women to leave their traditional roles and embrace a completely new way of life. A life which offers a new purpose, a new aim and a new ambition but still retains traditional views about female modesty, chastity and other forms of normative femininity as practiced in the Tamil society. This creates a paradoxical position for women who enter the revolutionary movement, and the changing social roles that have enabled Tamil women certain freedoms have been credited to the LTTE's intervention in civic life in Jaffna.

In this final chapter I will explore how gender is (re)constructed within the revolutionary movement and how such (re)constructions of gender have reverberated through civic society and challenge the existing social construction of female roles in Tamil society. The chapter will further analyses *Ah-lu-mai* in relation to the traditional and changing roles of women in Tamil society and the creation of the new woman, *Puthumai Pen*. I will also critically examine the role played by Prabhakaran in the formation of the new gender discourse to asses the extent to which he has assisted in developing women's roles both within LTTE and in civic society.

Changing views of traditional roles

As discussed in Chapter One, Tamil women in Jaffna have a long history tied to the cultural values and practices of Southern India. These form the basis of Tamil women's social roles within the confines of the home in Jaffna where women have begun to negotiate a new kind of identity. The negotiated identities are the result of a situation where women are engaging in new roles, by physically fighting for an independent state of Tamil Eelam whilst still maintaining most of the traditional social values.

The texts relating to Jaffna's Tamil women in civic society are noticeably limited with publications by westerns academics ending circa 1980¹⁶². Since these available works are contemporary (c.1980) I will take the reader through the existing roles as portrayed and indicate ways in which they have changed over years. These texts discuss existing representations of Tamil woman in civic society, such as "a slave and renouncer, bound

¹⁶² See Hayes (1972), Hock et al (1978), David (1980), Reynolds (1980), and Wadley (1980). From 1990 onwards, there is only Thiruchandran (1993, 1994, 1997, 1998, and 1999) whose work also deals with South Indian Tamil women.

on the exterior but internally powerful" (David 1980: 93). Hoch- Smith and Spring (1978) describe a "nurturer/healer and as witch/prostitute (referred to in Wadley 1980: 14), whereas Hayes uses the "myth of feminine evil" (Hayes 1972 in Wadley 1980: 154) which is perhaps an appropriate explanation of the paradoxical dualism that the women find themselves in.

The power held by women (known as *sakti*) in effect forms the basis of Tamil women's overall social position that posits women in an inner and an outer realm in society. The inner realm, known as '*akam*', is the domestic sphere where women are powerful, as their voices are heard and their views are aired. In the outer realm, known as '*puram*', they are visibly controlled by the men in their families as "Jaffna Tamil culture views women as outwardly enslaved and inwardly powerful" (David 1980:103-4).

Akam, or the inward power of Tamil women in general (both combatant and civic), must not be disregarded as it forms a strong foundation for our understanding of combatant women. There is a Tamil proverb that states "through woman is being; and through woman is downfall" (Reynolds 1978: 69 as quoted in Wadley 1980: 153) which means that within Tamil society a woman is believed to have the power to control and alter significant events in life such as health, wealth, happiness and death. The power held is so great that "In order to control and direct powers, the dominant ideology states that the Tamil woman should be constrained and controlled by her male kin" (Wadley 1980: 153).

Tradition demands a form of self-control that is embedded deep in patriarchal culture giving Tamil women a degree of social power that is recognised as being confined to the domestic sphere, but is nonetheless controlled by male relations in the family. The creation of the domestic sphere and its boundaries is an act of patriarchal control. There is an ambiguous acceptance by society of a woman's recognised social powers within the confines of domesticity based on sexual purity (virginity) and morality linked to motherhood, which in turn places women on a pedestal and likens them to goddesses. At the same time her sexuality causes a great deal of concern to the four male family entities (father, brother, husband and son) that are in charge of controlling it, through a guise of stringent female behavioural expectations (Wadley 1980, David 1980).

The socially contradictory position that a Tamil woman finds herself in is of particular interest as she is overtly dominated by men, but covertly recognised as having an

exceptional power as a woman. However the public image is predominantly ruled by an assumed social position of women. A closer inspection reveals that women primarily interact with kin and non-kin folk, but not necessarily with strangers. This asymmetrical social relationship positioning has brought observations from an American academic, who notes that:

...the public image of Jaffna women, putting it bleakly, is that women are selectively ignorant and incapable of learning crucial kinds of social knowledge, that they are dominated and subordinates to men, and that these states of affairs are ideologically represented as the state of nature.

(David 1980: 106)

Though this notion is not applicable to all women, it is often perpetuated by women who actively distance themselves from any open debate about politics. The men in society confirm this by claiming that women's unwillingness to participate in such conversation is due to their lack of knowledge (David 1980: 107). Whilst David's observation can be argued as dated and as colonialism embedded in orientalism, some parts of his study are still true in today's patriarchal society. However I did see exceptions to the observations given by David (1980) amongst many of the combatant and civic women I met in Jaffna (including those I interviewed) whom were an educated, socially conscious minority. Their social conscience can be attributed not only to education but also to the changing political climate that emphasises women as active participants in society.

Reynolds (1980) argues that women's acceptance of a subservient social position derives from Tamil women's need to be secondary to men in order to maintain a powerful position as an auspicious being, who holds the responsibility for the well-being and maintenance of the family's lineage through selfless acts of suffering. She argues that beliefs such as self-denial and self-sacrifice are seen in religion and that this ideological social position then translates as "a salvific condition" (Reynolds 1980: 57) whereby the women act in a covert manner to perpetuate their subordinate state and maintain the power it yields.

Social change: rationale and impact

Through my own research I noticed that though women (combatant and civic) agreed unanimously that women's status in Jaffna's Tamil society is certainly secondary to men; none of the civic female supporters and advocates of equality practiced an alternative social role within their own confined domestic sphere. Women are able to exert some autonomy within the confines of the patriarchally defined private space however it is within the public space that social change is more clearly visible. Thus with the controlling mechanism set in the domestic sphere, civic women have embarked on social changes in the public domain where even the simple act of women riding bicycles through the streets of Jaffna is seen as a symbolic reference to the independence of civic women¹⁶³.

Women riding bicycles was an act born out of necessity rather than an emancipatory act. During prolonged periods of warfare public transport was no longer available and the petrol embargo resulted in private vehicles being garaged.

“Here we [are] affected by war. Because war started no buses coming, no electricity, no such as thing!!!. So every woman... working woman in Jaffna [was] forced to ride [a] bicycle. Otherwise they can't go for their work. Because work place more than two miles from their home. So they have to walk otherwise no other transport.. Nobody takes them to office. Who's here? So they [working women] suffered. I first started walking to my school. One week I go walking. It took one hour. 2 miles...Yeah. Very difficult [to wear a sari, carry books in the heat]. So I [was] forced to learn [to ride a] bicycle. So 2nd week I started going by bike. So this thing 'I am a woman I must go on my own'..., I can't expect others to come... I didn't think like that, but *the need* forced me to do that....This [social change] induced by war. Luckily we are now happy. I saw lot of women older than my age, they are riding bicycles and we [were] very happy... So many women. Very grass root memory... We[women] are so happy because they [women] are not obliged to younger brothers, sons. 'Son can you take me to the temple, can you take me to the hospital' that thing is out now. Before that we used to do that”.

(BP*)

¹⁶³ In a culture where female modesty is a key part of the gendered behaviour for women, riding a bicycle was seen as a masculine activity or an activity which could only be practiced by pre-pubescent girls.

This view is shared by GV,

“Tell her this. A woman had to always live depending on her father first, then the husband and then son. But now she is going abroad or going to another place leaving young children to work. Not that she has no love for her husband or children, but she is more capable of doing these things now. She is able to ride the bicycle and go about doing what she wants to do. She can now live alone and send her family away to educate or work”.

(GV)

The experiences women were having of social change were emancipatory. The independence and freedom discussed by them is reflective of their own changing attitudes as well as that of civic society as a whole. Added to this, many young men joined the revolutionary movement, or left the country through the fear of being shot by the State-run army under suspicion of being a rebel, or were forcefully recruited by the revolutionary group due to their need for fighters or willingly joined for protection from the State. The result was a shortage of able-bodied young men in families who could act as chaperones to women in civic society. Hence women had to mobilise themselves by any means of transportation available in order to go to the market to purchase food items, go to work, or to attend any other need that arises¹⁶⁴. Undoubtedly, this resulted in definitive social changes that took place in women’s lives after the start of the war.

“So everything happens, there was a change in the society. Women also no? So we can survive. So the concept of the family is changing. So the husband is drunk. Before displacement we had to balance everything. We had to adjust to the man. Because of this concept. Since the displacement the woman told ok you go I will live alone. I can manage well. So there was the courage to do”.

(HA*)

The word ‘courage’ as used by HA encompasses both admittance and reflection of major social changes that have occurred in women’s lives. A loosening of the patriarchal grip of male control meant that in a post-displacement period Tamil women became aware of their own potential and this released a body of women to become combatants and assume the role of the male fighter. This particular role is so alien to the traditionally passive social roles of Tamil women that it becomes a significant addition to the already changing roles of women in civic society.

¹⁶⁴ At times when there was no electricity, bicycles were used to power radios through their dynamos in order to hear news both nationally and internationally.

Impact of LTTE on society

The transition made by women from a dependent to a relatively independent role is often seen in Jaffna as a radical aspect of empowerment. Some women such as BP, ES and DK are also of the view that women change their social behaviour in order to survive and that it is a necessity induced by the war rather than a part of a social revolution¹⁶⁵.

The direct influence of the LTTE on the lives of civic women can be seen in the key areas of marriage and widowhood, although the levels of achievement of the LTTE over such in-grained social practices are limited. Through self-confidence the women combatants are able to influence some of the social restrictions imposed on women's lives, such as choices of marital partners and the social views of widows.

Marriages of personal choice (colloquially known as 'love marriages'), which are generally frowned upon and discouraged in society at large, are accepted by the LTTE along with traditional arranged marriages. However the LTTE thoroughly disapprove of the dowry system practiced in Jaffna, which they see as being an insult to a woman, where her worth is measured in means that include moveable and immovable property as well as money. The LTTE issued laws disallowing this time-honoured practice (which was undoubtedly an economic relief for many of the poor in Jaffna), but failed to eradicate it as the dowry system changed its name to 'donations' and was thus retained. The metamorphosed dowry as a donation is given to the groom's family by the bride's family. The difference is that a dowry is agreed prior to the marriage then written down and formalised, but the donation is a verbal agreement with no documentation.

One change on this issue can be seen when women combatants retire from the revolutionary organisation and marry a man of civic society. Many such women (such as AK) have not exchanged any 'donations', staying true to LTTE ideologies.

The women combatants who have entered into matrimony have found it harder to conform to the expectations of in-laws and those of the greater civic society. These expectations are often simple practices such as wearing jewellery or flowers in their hair

¹⁶⁵ I have separated the act of war and aggression from social revolution in order to define that social revolution in this instance is viewed as part of women's social evolvement, which is not necessarily tied to war and its aggression.

or any such female-centred beautification. By not following such customs, they convey a message of widowhood.

Traditionally widows are shunned from public life and excluded from auspicious occasions such as weddings. They are often condemned to wearing white saris and seen as bearers of bad tidings, and are not accepted as a part of the functioning society.

Within the Jaffna peninsula, widows are not stigmatised to the same extent as before and are now a more accepted part of society. Though the overall status of a widow in Tamil society has improved greatly, it is a mistake to believe that the status has totally changed. Many women including BP, DK, ES, GV, HA have said that they will not allow their widowed mothers to wear white saris and live in the shadows anymore.

The LTTE is very successful in repatriating widows back into civic society. Whilst the removal of the socio-historical stigma of widowhood is perfectly admirable, it must be noted that since the war there has been a rise in the number of female-headed households. Many of these are widowed women struggling to bring up young families with the added burden of care responsibilities for the elderly. The women of the LTTE have been active in promoting the ideology of a non-stigmatised social status for widowed civic women, and have started to address it formally as an issue. The women combatants give confidence to the widowed women in civic society and educate them in trades that were never open to them before, including undertaking roles that are traditionally perceived as masculine employment, such as motor mechanics.

The LTTE discourages the traditional reverence bestowed upon motherhood and the symbolic roles of wives dependent on the women's fertility¹⁶⁶. The LTTE do not hold women as the keepers of purity of race and caste, and as being subservient to men in all aspects of life (Schalk 1992:80). Neither the traditional nor the revivalist attitude reveals the fundamental problem that the LTTE has in creating a combatant woman and linking her to history. The rationalisation of women carrying arms has been a difficult concept in comparison to the notion of a militant mother that is seeped in history. Thus the directional link had to be from either the leader as the 'creator' of the combatant women, or from borrowing an image from contemporary violent political struggles from other nations. This link can be further developed with the introduction from Tamil cultural

¹⁶⁶ Infertile wives have a lesser social role than fertile women.

values of a ‘virgin’ linked to arms; hence the concept of an ‘Armed Virgin’ was born (Schalk 1992:135). Schalk (1992) argues that the LTTE actively promoted the image of the armed virgin and purity of the holy cause.

Women’s initiation and perceived feminism in the LTTE

The involvement of women in revolutionary groups predates women’s engagement in the LTTE. The emergence of combatant women in the *Vituthalai Pulikal Munani Pen* (Women’s Front of the LTTE) is undoubtedly a new phenomenon, though a historical recording of women’s involvement in political struggles reveals that Tamil women were involved in Gandhian style peaceful protests. A number of women (including AK) from varying socio-political backgrounds did contribute to the LTTE’s armed struggle from the outset. Their roles at the time (early 1980s) were limited to socially defined ‘women’s work’, providing safe housing and caring for the sick and injured.

The combatants that joined in the mid 1980s (such as Arasi, AK and Kavitha) had to continuously prove themselves in order to claim their place beside male fighters as competent combatants. “Women can do everything as good as the men, but we did have to work harder” (Arasi). By the time Yalini and others joined the revolutionary movement, women combatants were very much seen as a normal part of the revolutionary family. Those who joined later (c.1990) did not feel that they had to work to gain respect from the male combatants and were able to reap the same benefits as established female combatants because their roles had already been defined within this gendered sphere.

“They [combatant men] also came from the same society. At the beginning they also had their doubts. When they saw how we performed and saw our ‘Ah-lu-mai’ their views changed, from looking down on us now they have changed to treating us as their equals and respect us more”.

(Arasi)

In order to gain equality and respect the women combatants often undertook tasks that were arduous, and above all dangerous. For AK the ability of women combatants to perform acts that have historically been in the male domain, such as digging deep wells for water (and the socially recognised female act of carrying away of the sand being completed by male combatants) is a sign of a reversal of roles.

“When I was in the Mulatheevu jungle, we had to dig a 6oft deep well. We did the drilling and put explosives, went down and if we did the digging at the bottom they [male combatants] will take the soil away”.

(AK)

The reversal of traditional roles within the LTTE movement has created a perception of equality that has empowered women in revolutionary society to believe in themselves.

“I don’t think there is any difference between men and women in the movement. We are all treated equally. Whatever a man is doing in the battle we are also doing the same thing”.

(Mallika)

It is interesting to note that except for Balasingham and Schalk, none of the other authors discuss the origin of engaging women in armed combat. When I questioned any combatant or civic individual, they always claimed that the originator of the idea to engage women in combat was Prabhakaran. This is also reflected in Balasingham’s (1993) writings.

Mr Prabhakaran, who views the successful induction of women into the armed struggle as one of his major achievements, will, without reserve, promote the holistic development of the women fighters, as part of his vision of women’s path to liberation. For him the independence of women is crucial to their liberation and the assertion of courage and self –confidence is a pre-requisite to the realisation of such independence

(Balasingham 1993:110-111).

Schalk (1992:84) claims the originator was the western educated academic Nirmala Nithyanathan (an English language lecturer attached to the University of Jaffna known as a feminist sociologist and a political scientist), who was (with her sister Rajani Thiranagama¹⁶⁷) actively involved in the LTTE during the early days of its formation. According to Schalk (1992), Nithyanathan’s role included translating key feminist texts relating to women’s involvement in the armed struggles of other regions, such as Latin America. Balasingham (2004) claims that the western ‘second wave feminism’ as learnt by Nithyanathan during her period of education in the west was neither understood nor

¹⁶⁷ Doctor Rajani Thiranagama was a lecturer attached to the Medical Faculty, University of Jaffna who was allegedly killed by the LTTE due to her criticism of the movement.

appreciated by Prabhakaran and was viewed as being too ‘radical’ for the female recruits from villages to understand.

In Mr Pirabakaran’s [Prabhakaran’s] ideological perspective, Nirmala’s idea of women’s liberation represented more the stereo-typed conception of western women’s liberation than any emancipation which the masses of Tamil women could identify with and embrace as their own. Not only he [Prabhakaran], but also the girls who were with us, had difficulty in relating to and comprehending Nirmala’s ‘radicalism’. She was a world apart from the village girls who had come to join the struggle and fight for their homeland and had no real idea of women’s liberation, nor necessarily aspired for it.

(Balasingham 2004:87)

Jayawardena (1992) argues that “those who want to continue to keep the women of our countries in a position of subordination find it convenient to dismiss feminism as a foreign ideology” (1992:1). Therefore Prabhakaran’s dismissal of Nithyanathan confirms Jayawardena’s argument that feminism is viewed as a diversion that distracts women from familial responsibilities or worse still the “revolutionary struggle for national liberations” (Jayawardena 1992:2).

Jayawardena (1992) sees feminism as a tool to understand women’s oppression in the public and private spaces, but Prabhakaran viewed Western feminism as an alien concept for Tamil women in the LTTE and for himself. His views were very much in line with traditionalist Tamil society who understand feminism to be “a product of ‘decadent’ western capitalism; that is based on a foreign culture of no relevance to women in the Third World” (Jayawardena 1992:2). This was a particularly problematic position for the LTTE. On the one hand feminism is western and problematic, and on the other the movement needs to challenge traditional roles in order to allow women to fight. Therefore when an ideology of militancy was developed for the women of the LTTE, it was promoted within the patriarchal values of an Armed Virgin. Thus the LTTE were able to resolve a problematic situation without overtly challenging the existing traditional view through the introduction of an Armed Virgin based on purity. The kind of radicalism that is seen in Nithyanathan and her teachings was not an agreeable quality for the women of the LTTE to develop (in contrast to the qualities of aggression they were expected to develop by becoming combatants).

Balasingham states that Prabhakaran has the ability to relate to women combatants far better than Nithyanathan as his own background is more in line with the lower middle

and working classes from which the majority of women combatants come. In comparison Nithyanathan came from an educated and financially affluent background.

I do recognise that there is a confirmed belief amongst women combatants that it is truly a long-sighted view by Prabhakaran to allow women to join the LTTE and become an equal part of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. As women combatants they are accepted as an integral part of the revolutionary group.

The LTTE perceive the struggle for independence as being common to both men and women, and the power relation in a post -conflict period will affect both parties equally. They hold the view that “the struggle for independence is the frame, base or the background for the struggle for rights of women” (Schalk1992:78). Hence they argue that priority must be given to the cause of an independent state, and then added to this are the specific demands of women. The liberation of women is directly linked to the liberation of the Tamil state. Enloe (2000) claims that asking women to wait until the nationalist goal is achieved is “weighted with implications.” She argues that “it is advice predicted on the belief that the most dire problems facing the nascent national community are problems which can be explained and resolved without reference to power relations between men and women” (Enloe 2000:62). Women combatants of the LTTE view this equality linked to their liberation as being a primarily political freedom, which will be followed by an economic and social freedom from the Sinhalese government (Schalk 1992:79). However Schalk fails to notice that the women in the organisation may not be sufficiently independent to state an alternative view.

One theme common to both civic and LTTE women is their belief that a nation state needs to be created first before women’s true emancipation can be addressed. It is debatable whether normative femininities are the cause of women combatants saying that they would want a free state before total emancipation.

“The movement was started to free us from being oppressed. The main aim of the war was to free people who were oppressed and for the people to enjoy freedom. For this reason they are ready to sacrifice. Which is something we have to appreciate. For our society to move forward first the political barrier has to be broken and people have to be free. Then only the cultural barriers can be broken. Barriers with regard to cast and widows etc can be removed only if the political situation is resolved and people are free. Yes. And the main objective of the war is to break the internal barriers and be politically free. The internal barrier is male dominated society has to break up and also cast and cultural changes has to break up.”

(GV)

Why the LTTE cannot achieve both simultaneously is never discussed, but it may be because all their learning in relation to women combatants have been from revolutions that have fought first to create an independent state and then attempt to liberate women from society's constraints. The LTTE claims that it is imperative for women to take part in the revolutionary struggle for the ultimate aim of emancipation and truly be a part of the achievements within the organisation.

“Women's participation in the struggle is an important thing. Because our policy, LTTE's policy is emancipating our society is part of our liberating our homeland. So here, in the North and East women's participation is equal to men's participation. If we have to free our society and if we have to make the women's awareness, first we have to free our homeland. Then we can make women awareness. So the women's participation in the struggle is very very important.”

(Yalini*)

The claim that the homeland must be freed before dealing with the issue of equality in society resonates deeply with other global revolutionary groups in which women have participated (see Wilson 1991, Hale 2001a and 2001b, Muller 2006, Helie-Lucas 1988, Knauss 1987, Gordon 1968, Afshar 1985, Eisen-Bergman 1975, Turner and Hao 1998, Young 2001, Young 1998, Rovira 2000, Kampwirth 2001 and 2002).

Glass ceiling : Women in leadership

The number of revolutionary organisations where women combatants have reached higher levels of leadership are limited. Women combatants mostly appear to gain a certain level of leadership where they become commanders of units but are rarely at the very top of the organisation. These units could be fighting units as well as support units. The Chinese revolutionary combatants create a mixed picture of women reaching the

levels of heads of departments that were engaged in providing “food sacks, straw shoes and clothing for the Red army” (Young 2001:164), as well as being combatant leaders. Exceptions are seen amongst organisations such as the Zapatista, where the key ideological concept was ‘autonomy’ rather than ‘tradition’ or ‘progress’ (Rovira 2000:6). By moving away from tradition and progress, they were able to focus on the revolution in an alternative way whereby socially constructed gender roles were not considered to be of paramount importance over their ability to be combatants. By this action, women combatants had an equal opportunity to become leaders based on their own actions. This was also reflective of the Uruguayan Tupamaros revolutionary group, the Salvadorian FMLN¹⁶⁸ and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas (Lobao 1998, Kampwirth 2001 and 2002).

A general perception exists amongst LTTE combatant women that leadership of a combat unit is a natural progression for women combatants with battle experience. There are examples of fighting units led by women and though these are fewer in number than the male led units, women combatants view this as an opportunity that can be achieved regardless of the social perception that relegates women to the role of being led. It is pertinent to note that women are still in a minority as leaders within the LTTE although a large proportion of its combatants are females. According to Arasi the Central Committee of the LTTE claims that there is one woman in every three members at this present moment indicating that at least one third of the LTTE combatants are female¹⁶⁹.

The emergence of Liberation Tigers on the Tamil national political scene has provided Tamil women with opportunities and horizons that would never have entered the minds of Tamil women a decade ago.

(Balasingham 1993:15)

Balasingham (1993) claims that being a part of the LTTE has granted women an opportunity to learn alternative skills, however, the extent to which women are involved in both decision-making and high-level leadership appears to be limited. This is not addressed by either Balasingham or Schalk, however Coomaraswamy (1996) states that:

¹⁶⁸ FMLN means Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation

¹⁶⁹ Information gathered at the interview held by me with Arasi, the Head of Women’s Political Wing of Jaffna in October 2003.

...despite the celebration of armed cadre by LTTE ideologues, there is still no evidence that women are part of the elite decision-making process. They are not initiators of ideas, they are only implementers of policy made by someone else, by men.

(Coomaraswamy 1996:9)

Such statements suggest that the combatant women have yet to achieve full socio-political empowerment. This may illuminate a certain defect in the LTTE leadership, which only develops women up to a certain point and not beyond. Thiranagama's (1990:19) argument is that the women were accepted due to a militaristic need for foot soldiers, rather than a need to develop or improve their role in society. Further, women would fit into the trained roles easily with a belief that they are on par with men in Tamil society, which of course would increase their self-confidence. The change that took place within the women's own social perception of themselves does not appear to be reflected at the strategic level of the LTTE. Although a limited number of women hold key positions, these are not necessarily positions where the decisions made affect the whole of the revolutionary movement.

Although there is a lack of transparency regarding the LTTE leadership which prevents a complete picture from emerging that illustrates women's involvement at the highest levels, the evidence from my interviews indicate that the combatant women believe that there is an attempt to show an equal representation between men and women at higher levels.

"In the LTTE Central Committee there are two men cadres and two women cadres. The director is Mr. ... Deputy directors there are two one is a lady and other one is a man. And another lady secretary. We will be very friendly. We will talk friendly. We will do our work even each other we will help others. The Central Committee of the LTTE has a two male and two female participatory units. The director of the committee is a male".

(Yalini*)

The women combatants appear not to be concerned by the fact that the Director of the Committee has always been a man and is likely to remain so. The acceptance of a male leader does not completely determine the position of women combatants within the organisation however it reaches far into the Tamil cultural mindset where women are seen in the *akam* (inner) and *puram* (outer) social location as discussed earlier.

The issue of women as leaders needs to be looked through cultural norms where an individual's own upbringing plays a part in the desire to lead men and women to war. For many years the cultural norms and patterns of behaviour have prepared women to take orders and directions. Once they join the LTTE organisation their confidence is built up to regard themselves as an equal amongst other men and women, but within a hierarchical militarised structure. Promotion of women within the organisation helps women combatants strive for more (male-centric) leadership roles.

Women-only committees deal with the decisions that focus on women's welfare. Men primarily deal with the decisions that effect the whole organisation but with some input by women.

"There are men working under women. And in the women's section the women leaders made decisions and there was no need to ask the men for any decisions regarding the women. Whatever decisions we make we will let them [male combatants] know".

(Kavitha)

On closer examination this contradiction changes to include separate decision-making trajectories. The harmonious picture created to illustrate the neutrality of the power relation between male and female combatants was that women were the decision-makers, and men were only kept informed of the decisions made. Women have been accepted as part of the revolutionary movement but although the Women's Section and the Women's Committees are able to make decisions, none of the women combatants interviewed say that they have authority to direct men in any strategy or policy led matters. This then raises the question as to what levels women can rise to within the movement.

An analysis of the power to make one's own decisions reveals that there are complex negotiations of gender relations in transition. The power described by Arasi is very much a delegated authority with some room to manoeuvre within a given structure created by men to achieve the nation state. The roles to which women are directed and have gained some empowerment from are primarily in the female domain. The combatant women's decision-making power is limited to making decisions that only concern women within the movement. These "women's issues" remind me of Tickner's (1992:2) argument that women in politics are channelled into policy areas centring on issues relating to women, thus giving them a limited amount of controllable power. Such power I would argue is

controlled by the leadership (which is male) hence such allocated or transferred 'controllable power' bears a strong resemblance to the masculine leadership roles of the LTTE.

On rare occasions when the LTTE leaders venture out of the country to meet with other revolutionary groups there is usually a woman combatant to complete the picture. A closer look will reveal the participatory role of the woman combatant in attendance to be merely symbolic, as she will not contribute to political discussions. It is therefore a tokenistic inclusion, and evidence that the LTTE leadership knows that they need to offer a vision of equality to gain favour and widen their appeal.

An example of this was seen a few years ago. The LTTE sent an envoy including a number of men and one woman, leaders of various fighting units¹⁷⁰ to Ireland in October 2003 to conduct a series of discussions with the IRA and Sinn Fein on how the LTTE should progress their struggle. The first day of the talk consisted of introductions, a photograph session and identifying the aims of the visit. On this day the woman combatant Arulvili was visible amongst the group. However from the second day onwards, when the talks began in earnest, the LTTE group consisted of men only.

The lack of female involvement in at the higher levels of LTTE politics is an important point in an ethno-national liberation group that promotes female equality and women are believed to form one third to half of its fighting combatants¹⁷¹. The LTTE's involvement of women combatants in decision-making on both a national and international stage is extremely limited. Highly eloquent female leaders such as Arasi are visible within the LTTE but have a relatively obscure international profile. The only woman who has been seen in political discussion groups is Adele Balasingham, the white Australian wife of the LTTE's political theoretician¹⁷².

¹⁷⁰ Those combatants in political units are also fighters but currently engaged in political activities.

¹⁷¹ As stated previously, there is no formal record of the exact number of women combatants in the LTTE, except for Balasingham's statement of 1994, which said that one third of the LTTE were women (Schalk 1997). This figure was taken as a basis by many academics, and the numbers, if not the proportion, are presumed to have increased since then. Also see c.f. 169.

¹⁷² However, since the death of her husband in 2006, it does appear (contrary to the rumours) that Adele Balasingham has taken a back seat in the politics relating to the Tamil Eelam.

Upon questioning the Gatekeeper on the visible lack of female participation in actual discussions, the reply was that women combatants of the LTTE are still not ready for such a political role (informal conversation with the Gatekeeper October 2003). This view is not from a combatant woman directly, and it needs to be seen as a view from a masculine perspective, which forms the strong social foundation that harbours an accepted perception of the limited abilities of women as political representatives. The view that women are 'still not ready' for higher political roles within the LTTE is cause for concern. Though there are a number of women in senior ranks within the LTTE, the women's levels of power do not reach to the top but stop at a *Glass Ceiling* with the Head of the women's Political Wing which is the highest female rank in the LTTE (also see Samuel 2000 and Alison 2003). Whilst the lack of female combatants in the uppermost positions within the LTTE is identified, one must not make the mistake of undermining the leadership roles held by women combatants as they are powerful within a complex negotiation both within the organisation and within the greater civic community.

Has Prabhakaran contributed to gender equality?

Prabhakaran does not indicate any affinity he may have had with women's social roles or a need to challenge the restrictions imposed on them by society. However he has become the champion of major social change that (re)constructed the female identity for women combatants which has impacted on civic women. Prabhakaran may not have been overtly aware that his actions in engaging women in combatant roles would create a feminist challenge and change many Tamil women's lives. During my visit to the Women's Political Office in Vanni I noted that every room carried portrait photographs of him, and women combatants were almost sentimental in their references to him. The women combatants I interviewed saw him as unlike any other man in Tamil society, who has bravely gone against the cultural normative practices to transpose his faith in women (combatants) and in turn to instil confidence in them to succeed as equals to men. This progressive view of gender equality is in complete contrast to the society's general view of women and their capabilities. "Pirapakaran [Prabhakaran] is very much appreciated by LTTE women, who praise him as King of Tigers" (Schalk 1997a:7). In a speech below Prabhakaran identifies the contributions women can make as equals to men.

The Liberation Tigers is one of the greatest accomplishments accomplished by our movement. This marks a revolutionary turning point in the history of liberation struggle of the women of Tamililam. Women can succeed on the ideal path towards their (own) liberation, only through joining forces with a liberation movement. (Women) [of civic state] can change into revolutionary women who have heroism, abandonment (of life), courage and self-confidence. Only when women join forces with our revolutionary movement that has formulated (a path) to liberation of our women, our struggle also shall reach perfection

(Schalk 1992:50).

The speech remains a call for more women to join the LTTE, especially if they are concerned with self-liberation from the patriarchal chains of Tamil society and is reflective of the faith he has in women combatants. He regularly vocalises this faith in public speeches to encourage women combatants to be more active and civic women to join an organisation that appears to practice equality regardless of gender differences.

“In our movement, opportunities are equal to every one. In the name of women we are not oppressed there. Our leader is the reason for this. It is important that we rise up to these expectations. Our leader has a very high regard towards the women. He has lot of confidence in the women’s ‘Ah-lu-mai. We didn’t have many obstacles just because we were women. You must understand this properly and explain to her. We all get equal opportunities.”

(Arasi)

The recognisable admiration in Arasi’s discourse for Prabhakaran is very much repeated by all the women combatants I spoke with. The veneration of Prabhakaran extends to the moment of dying when the women of the LTTE are often known to call out ‘annay’ (older brother)¹⁷³. Whilst this can be argued as a form of patriarchal reverence, I would say this has a much deeper kinship identity that extends beyond a consanguine family tie to the very special kind of loyal veneration held by a dying individual. This unwavering loyalty is encapsulated in the personal oath taken by each combatant to support Prabhakaran. It is also reflected in AK’s discourse when she refers to Prabhakaran.

¹⁷³ Whilst Prabhakaran has been elevated to a level of a national leader, he still carries strong kinship ties with women combatants.

“We [women combatants] didn’t have any problems as our leader has very clear ideas about women cadres. *He always gave us the opportunity to be in the front and get involved in the fights* and this was an example to others.”

(AK)

As illustrated in AK’s discourse Prabhakaran actively encourages women combatants to take part in the battles and be seen as an example to others. This can be seen as callous trickery of a male leadership to direct the women to the frontline, or as a form of recognition of women’s capabilities to be brave and active in the frontlines (as viewed by the combatant women). It can also be seen as a challenge to the patriarchal society that undermines women’s abilities. The women in Tamil society are seen as being incapable of taking on the tough, masculine-orientated roles of protectors of the nation. However the combatant women have shown that they too are capable of meeting the demands of such activities.

Although it can be argued that women combatant’s trust and loyalty to Prabhakaran has been exploited by the overt encouragement of the leadership, it none the less appears to have made the women combatants feel that they are treated equally within the revolutionary movement, unlike the women in civic society who are marginalised for being women. Arasi reflects on the combatant women’s recognition by Prabhakaran as,

“Our capabilities, our dedication and our goal were only important to us and we didn’t have any obstacles to go up because our leader has lot of confidence in the ‘Ah-lu-mai’ of the women.”

(Arasi)

Women combatants viewed *Ah-lu-mai* as a direct result of Prabhakaran’s active encouragement and forceful advocacy of equal rights for women. However a closer inspection of Prabhakaran’s faith in women’s *Ah-lu-mai* in regards to his own family reveals a lack of the same promotion of equality in his private life in relation to his wife (Mathy), whom he has kept completely away from the movement, even though she was an activist during her undergraduate days (as discussed in Chapter Four). Pratap observed that,

Prabhakaran married the prettiest of the fasting girls... ... As she sat by his side during the interview, Prabhakaran's wife did not speak even once out of turn. She wore a printed wrinkle-free sari and a modest blouse. She seems gentle and domesticated .

(Pratap 2001:76)

Pratap's observations of Mathy present a picture of a traditional Tamil woman and she could be regarded as a 'beautiful auspicious mother'. She continues to wear traditional clothing and stays within cultural expectations with a lack of sophistication befitting her modesty and respectability. Mathy's behaviour of sitting quietly by her husband's side without intervening 'in male businesses' projects the traditional image of the non-interfering 'good' Tamil wife. Her demeanour in the public arena presents her as 'gentle and domesticated' and her appearance and mannerisms are a complete contrast to the combatant women. The fact that the social changes for Tamil women are lead by her husband appears to have made little difference to her own continuation with tradition where normative feminine practices are considered the 'only' acceptable form of behaviour for women (also see Banerjee 2006).

It can be argued that Mathy's appearance and behaviour can be seen as a clever strategy, as contributing to the normative practices for women she continues to be a part of the civic society, which became tenuous for many of the women combatants after they joined the LTTE, as discussed later in this chapter. This image of Mathy may be reminiscent of Elshtain's Beautiful Soul, a woman who can lay claim simultaneously to family and society, and Mathy's appearance of unselfish devotion is needed in order for the country and the family to survive (Elshtain 1987:9).

Mathy's position does question whether the LTTE's approach really challenges existing attitudes and whether Prabhakaran is committed to truly challenging traditional views, or whether he is keen to uphold part of its traditions to gain support from the civic society. That said, Mathy's normative femininity contrasts with the LTTE's martial feminism and seems to uphold the traditional values of civic society, stopping the struggle from being isolated from the much-needed support of civic society.

‘Puthumai Pen’: the new woman

Maunaguru (1995:166-7) describes the new phenomenon of *Puthumai Pen* as a concept that was transferred from 20th century Indian nationalism to the Tamil national discourse of the 1980s in Sri Lanka. Under the creation and construction of a *Puthumai Pen* the four virtues that all Tamil women are tied to (modesty, charm, shyness and respectful fear) were challenged¹⁷⁴. Although Tamil women (both combatant and civic) have taken on new roles and (re) constructed an alternative gender identity the greatest change (from the traditional view to the newly (re) created alternative) is seen in the combatant women.

Balasingham (1993:5) claims that the deepening genocidal oppression resulting from the race riots of 1983 propelled young women into a revolutionary world.

Young women broke the shackles of social constraints; they ripped open the straight jacket of conservative images of women. The militant patriotism of Tamil women finally blossomed as they entered into a new life of revolutionary armed struggle.

(Balasingham 1993:6)

In the new life of armed struggle the main qualities that are valued from women are the ability to self-sacrifice and the ability to be courageous in the face of death, clearly demonstrating the rise of a new kind of Tamil woman, *Puthumai Pen*¹⁷⁵, who has self-assurance and assertiveness. Thus the combatant woman in Tamil society is taking over the traditional image under the guise of “militant nationalism” (Maunaguru 1995:167) and changing it to suit the times.

The Tamil women who become combatants become new women. The fearless reputation, tough external appearance and the widely discussed (and publicised) sexual purity of women combatants have all fed into the public imagination to create and harness the image (Schalk 1997a). Their lack of dependency on men in society is in direct contrast to the historical relationship between the sexes whereby women

¹⁷⁴ Part of the challenge was creation of new words for the usage in language to describe female sexual purity, an important part of the Tamil women gender identity within the community, where words for violent sexual acts did not exist prior to this time. With the creation of the New Woman words such as *Paliyalvanmurai* meaning sexual violence entered into Tamil linguistic discourse (Maunaguru 1995:166) as discussed in Chapter Five.

¹⁷⁵ *Puthumai Pen* is also written as *Putiyappen* by Schalk 1997a.

depended totally on men for their needs and welfare. The combatant woman not only boasts about her ability to look after herself, but also those around her, including men.

The women of the LTTE are aware that the change in traditional roles of femininity in society is a challenge to the patriarchy and view this as a positive and progressive way forward. The ability to maintain the change that has occurred in society and in women's lives will be a challenge for combatant women. However they have long since anticipated that they will have to be equally pro-active in the future to maintain the momentum of social change and the negotiated gender identity of *Puthumai Pen*, the New Woman.

Identity politics

The normative femininity that is practiced in society distances the combatant women from those of the civic society, but also brings forth a slow process of a nuanced change in their relationship with one another. In addition to holding the necessary social appearances required of combatant women as part of society's collective identity (as Tamil women), they also need to fulfil the collective identity of the revolutionary movement (as combatants). It is the second of these that differentiates the women combatants from civic women and sets them apart in their unique position. This separation between the two groups of women removes the combatant women from becoming a direct part of the cultural practices that prescribes female roles and governs their behaviour.

Both Sangarasivam (2003) and Rajasingham-Senanayake (2001) have acknowledged the importance of recognising women combatants for their achievements as women in revolutionary warfare rather than labelling them as a 'consequence' of a masculine separatist struggle.

To confirm with a notion that women's liberation struggle s were and are simply by-products of patriarchal nationalist struggles would potentially erase women's histories and women's experiences and displace women from any history, of every day, organised resistance to patriarchal authority.

(Sangarasivam 2003:63)

"We [women combatants] don't want importance. We want to be simple" (Arasi). Arasi's discourse is strong in rejecting gender-orientated achievements. The simplicity that

Arasi claims is humbleness and humility which are accepted behavioural traits of modest Tamil women who will not crave glory or draw attention to themselves.

“Another thing is we don’t want importance just because we are women. We don’t believe in that culture [*giving importance to women*]. It is important they recognise her ‘Ah-lu-mai’ and her capabilities.”

(Arasi)

Arasi’s insistence on being recognised for her own ability rather than an identity based on her gender contradicts the traditional female identity that has been created within the culture. It is important to show the community as well as the world that these achievements are due to the individual’s effort and commitment to the revolutionary cause rather than to a gender-based positive discrimination. This however must not be viewed in isolation, as the achievements are both tied to and gained through the movement.

The confidence gained by combatant women is often visible and they are happy to discuss their achievements. They are also vehement in denying that any aspect of their lives is controlled by men in the organisation.

“Under any circumstance we do not get dragged behind the men. We have our own individuality. We have authority to make decisions about anything. We will join and do things. But we are separate. But nobody can impose their views on us.”

(Arasi)

Arasi takes a strong view in defending her role as a woman combatant in a male combatant’s environment. She rejects the notion that as women combatants they are hindered in the progressive path of female liberation. Arasi’s apparent refusal to acknowledge male dominance may be completely rational as a way of enabling her to talk about gender in ways that permit her to continue to believe in equality despite debates over the apparent lack of it.

The extent of the male influence over women combatant’s lives that can be seen through the intricacies of male–female relationships is often disclosed in a careful manner. When Arasi was questioned about working with men within the revolutionary organisation she paused for a long time before answering, which suggested that as she was guarded in her reply that might indicate a fear of misinterpretation. The deliberate

caution I detected could be an attempt to disclose cultural confinements that prevent 'talking together' or any social interaction between men and women generally, as male and female roles are divided in society and have little or no social mixing. Upon reflection it appears the caution is highly likely to be based on the male hierarchy that is operating within the LTTE and the repercussion of discussing a socially sensitive subject such as male /female interaction. It may also be that Arasi was formulating a line to appease what she assumed I wished to hear.

".... They [men] are looking at us in a positive way. How can I say it ..., We are very helpful to each other. We talk to each other about our day-to-day problems. Whatever we decide we all talk together and come to a decision. We share our work".

(Arasi)

This paints a picture of modernity where male and female relationships are in a comfort zone of familiarity. There is a modesty that is also part of expected feminine behaviour – as seen in Arasi's diffident take on being recognised as a woman. Of course, the crux of her argument is that women must be recognised for their individuality rather than a collective gender identity.

"Women cannot be separated from the society. They are very important part of the Society. So it was inevitable that women also took part in the fight for freedom. When the enemy came to war against us he didn't differentiate between man and woman. War is common to everyone. So we also look at it the same way".

(Arasi)

This view is an acknowledgement of her ability to be a woman and still manage to obtain recognition for her achievements. By the same token she refuses that acknowledgement in favour of an individual identity that is not based on gender but on acts of achievements alone.

Image

The image presented by LTTE women wearing combat fatigues or male shirts and trousers, carrying a gun, directly challenges the social conventions of symbolically bejewelled and sari clad women as the ideal in line with normative femininity in Tamil society. The deeply ingrained views of what women 'ought' to be is defined by a series of symbols such as appearance, conduct, behaviour and by fitting into a culturally mapped

out social role in Tamil society. In contrast to this the combatant women's unyielding refusal to be conformist in their appearance openly challenges this social convention and caused Coomaraswamy to argue that their appearance is androgynous due to an agenda of the LTTE to distance women from femininity in favour of "self sacrifice, [and] austerity ... (1996:10)".

...wearing of rich saris, brilliant jewellery, flowers in flowing hair, silver anklets, a silver toe ring and red pottu on the forehead. Today the views presented are women in combat fatigues, in boots, with no-make up, jewellery or ostentation, often with their hair cut in short male styles, wearing a cyanide capsule round their neck

(Coomaraswamy 1996:9).

The argument of Coomaraswamy is viewed by many in Jaffna's Tamil society as an unfair claim against women combatants. It can be argued that by definition women who move away from civic society to become combatants would challenge normative feminine behaviour and the society's symbolism. The wearing of traditionally symbolised feminine clothing such as saris, skirts or having long hair due is impractical (for carrying out the tasks necessary for surviving under extreme circumstance). The swapping of feminine clothes for masculine ones and carrying out masculine oriented tasks inevitably makes some in society to refer to their maleness. However my research participants in civic society explained that the clothing is worn not to appear as men, but for convenience of fighting. BP explained that when the women combatants first started to wear trousers and shirts those in society did object, but with time they had gained an understanding on the practical aspects of such clothing.

"I think their clothes is [are] very necessary for them for the work. Earlier they wear like that [shirts and trousers] and people, civilian people don't like. Why these girls are wearing trousers and shirts and they are not very good. Later discussions among women some are telling it [is] needed, they are driving tractors and vehicles [in battle]..."

(BP*)

This view is also shared by ES,

“That their field no? They went to the field and fight with the army. So with this dress [men’s shirts, men’s trousers] they can do that. Yes it is convenient for them. So it is like the police it is their uniform no? No [not think that it makes them look masculine]. For us no...Yes there is a reason no? And wearing a trouser like that won’t be bad. It is not a bad thing. So it’s ok. They won’t show anything[of their body]. Not like short blouses. It is ok”.

(ES*)

ES’s acceptance of women combatants clothing contains a particularly interesting point of modesty. According to her, the masculine dress worn by women combatants in fact doubles up as a garment of modesty that does not reveal any part of the female body, thus conforming to the social expectations. Whilst this particular aspect of modesty is overlooked in Coomaraswamy’s account of combatant women, the civic women agree that it is the practicality such clothing provides than a transformation of gender identity. Roja who claims that shirts and trousers or the combat fatigues in fact are less restrictive in comparison to traditional women’s clothing confirms this view.

“Also with these clothes we can run and do our training in fact we can do anything with these type of clothes. Our stripes [combat fatigues] is not only for fighting. That is our considered normal clothing. And we use it for fighting as well. Now we are wearing these clothes [shirts and trousers] because the army won’t let us come out in the stripes”¹⁷⁶.

(Roja)

Arasi contributes to the explanation of ease and comfort in wearing masculine clothing specific to the roles they are now playing in Tamil society. “Say in our society nobody wears jeans and shirt. The main reason we started to wear was, for our convenience” (Arasi). However the masculine clothing offers a dual purpose, which appears to have been overlooked in the academic feminist discourse. The combatant women and the civic women both stated that by wearing masculine clothing women tend to be far safer than wearing feminine clothing.

¹⁷⁶ During the period of ceasefire women combatant were not allowed to wear camouflage clothing away from Vanni area.

“...some girls their face telling [feminine] but their clothes and other things don’t tell”.

(BP*)

“Men have a habit of trying to be funny with women. The clothes that we are wearing now protects us from that and we feel safer”.

(Mallika)

Civic women and combatant women share these views as confirmed by both BP and Roja’s discourse. However some civic women such as DK claim by wearing masculine clothing the combatant women contribute to their gaining some form of equal status with men both in the civic society as well as in the movement¹⁷⁷. Therefore the theory of secondary gender equality that emerges here is an effect rather than an aim of wearing practical masculine clothing.

How combatant women view civic women

Women combatants, in having to negotiate their multiple femininities in a highly gendered society, have claimed that civic women are passive victims of that same society.

“Women [of civic society] are soft [passive]. They need to wear lot of jewellery, they need more money for marriage and dowry. They also have safety problem....Men from young age are used to hard work but women are not like that. They [women] are very soft, and they [are] unable to make decisions on their own”.

(Arasi)

The combatant women often use non-complimentary words such as ‘soft’ to describe civic women, meaning the civilian women are ‘passive’ and ‘dependent’, qualities which

¹⁷⁷ It is also worth noting that there is a school of thought, developing amongst the women of Jaffna’s civic society, that challenges the wearing of a sari. “Yes, everybody says that it is a cultural dress, but I don’t think that we have to wear a sari to keep our culture” (AK). The challenge to traditional wearing of a sari is viewed by some civic women in this research as BP, AK, DK and CH as contributing to female sexualisation and objectification by the way it accentuates the feminine body and it also restricts women’s physical movements thus making them depend more on men. “Sometimes this sexual view comes with the sari. If a girl goes in a sari they [men] can see and they [men] can feel that there is a girl....[...]. When you are beautiful they treat you as a doll. So I don’t want to be treated as a doll every time” (DK*). Such recognition of femininity as a beautiful doll is also representative of women’s objectification combined with a perception of weakness and a form of inability to be independent.

are seen as weaknesses by the combatant women. The strength of women combatants' self-belief is directly born out of being fighters and contributing to the attempt at creating a new nation state. They see this as an achievement that has elevated them beyond civic women and far beyond the gender boundaries that constrain women in civic society¹⁷⁸.

"The changes have come about very quickly. Because a woman could not go out alone in the night before the war. The society did not accept that. Also the woman didn't have the courage to go out on her own. Both prevailed. Because we got involved in the war the society began to understand that a woman could go out alone and the woman got the confidence that she can go out on her own. The society which did not accept a woman going to the seaside, saw the women being in charge of boats and fighting from the boats and lead a life in the sea, [the society] accepted it all very easily".
(Arasi)

They also view this social position as a responsibility that requires them to educate the civic women to be similarly independent and self-reliant.

"The first job is to teach the women to make decisions on their own. Only we can teach the women to stand for themselves".

(Arasi)

"I don't think that [women in civic society are] fully aware of their status. From the beginning women have been dominated, now some women coming out of this tradition, and we [LTTE] are also slowly trying to assist this [change]".

(Mallika)

Both Arasi and Mallika's views on civic women can be described as a personal challenge to ensure that civic women who are incapable and passive are changed to take control of their own destiny, by being pushed into building a strong mind and overall empowerment. Nevertheless the women combatants see the change that needs to take place is seen as a task that can only be fulfilled by the LTTE women. The normative femininities in Jaffna prepare women from a very young age to serve, sacrifice and

¹⁷⁸ The kind of feminism that is practiced by the women combatants in the LTTE is argued by Schalk to be a type of 'martial feminism' that describes the kind of ideas that were emanating from a time of transitional change aimed at involving women amongst its combatants. Schalk defines martial feminism as a form of "civil right for women and on the taking up of arms, and connect the demand for the liberation of the 'homeland' from what is regarded as an illegitimate occupying force" (Schalk 1994:165).

forego for the benefit of others, especially men. The women combatants are sufficiently aware of the male dominance effecting women that makes their task harder.

How Civic women see the combatant women

The civic women I met were not 'for' the war, nor were they 'against' the war. This mindset needs to be understood in a time, place and space context whereby a long and hard thirty years had changed their views about the war. That is not to say that they condone it, but rather that they have become somewhat war weary.

Age plays an interesting part in the women's discourse that reflects on their achievements both in the civic state as well as in the revolutionary group. The differences cut across life choices, education and social upbringing.

Unlike the young interviewees, the older combatant group (age 30 years and more) are far more reflective about their experiences. This was also noted amongst older civic women who are cautious in saying anything overtly negative about the LTTE's claims of their pioneering contribution to the empowerment of women in civic society. The cautious approach may well be due to an awareness of safety of self as well as family members, as they are very aware of the early demise of those who criticise the LTTE¹⁷⁹. The younger women (both civic and combatant) have an approach to life that is neither cautious nor reflective, and their abrupt style may be a result of only ever knowing war and the instability it brings.

Delving further into the differences between the women reveals that the older group of civic women feel much more indebted to the women combatants than the younger women in civic community. The respect shown to combatant women by civic women appears to be due to social changes that have taken place since the beginning of the war, as the older civic women understand the gender development that has ensued since women joined the LTTE. The younger civic (and combatant) women grew up knowing that the LTTE had women combatants hence they did not see it as a phenomenon that ought to be recognised.

¹⁷⁹ Thiranagam's colleagues have gone underground due to fear of reprisal as discussed in chapter 1. It must also be noted at an earlier stage of fieldwork I became quite aware that Thiranagama and the University Teachers on Human Rights in Jaffna (UTHRJ) are not a line of inquiry that I should pursue

There are highly visible levels of confidence that have been built up amongst the young women of Jaffna even though some of them claim that the effect on society was not as great as that claimed by older civic women.

The newly gained confidences also make some of the young civic women much more self-assured in their dealing with men, creating a considerable concern amongst the older generation of women who fear that the young women are 'asking for trouble'. This may be due to a change in the code of conduct from the pre-war era governing women's social behaviour with men in the public space. Despite these criticisms, the older women do not openly confront the younger women about their behaviour.

The women aged 30 years and above hold directly opposing views on equality in comparison to those who were younger than 30 years of age and this was reflected across both the civic and combatant women's groups.

The older educated civic women see the word feminism flaunted around as an achievement of modern Jaffna Society, but question the levels of understanding of the term. There are still uncertainties as to what equality or emancipation they have achieved, or need to achieve, in order to gain equality with men. Some older civic women feel that the lack of a formal understanding of equality between men and women makes the current view of equality a self-centred act. This is illustrated by HA who believes that young women join the revolutionary movement to avoid traditional responsibilities as a result of the media and cinema presenting it as a phenomenon that claims 'women are free to do anything'. HA is particularly aggrieved by the lack of a theoretical knowledge of feminism when she states,

"Because here we don't learn the feminism concept theoretically in this soil. In this soil there is no political concept regarding feminism"

(HA*).

It is interesting to note that the younger women (both civic and combatant) are more critical about their current roles. The older civic women were more comfortable in discussing times before the war, and were not at ease when discussing the modern social roles of women and the empowerment that has taken place. My research shows two opposing views on the contributions of combatant women to civic women's social empowerment. GV is in awe of the combatant women for all their achievements in a

highly patriarchal society where women's social roles are very much defined from the time of their birth. The older civic women appear to appreciate the level of self-confidence that the women combatants exert and view this achievement as being due to their engagement in the LTTE. In contrast to this other civic women, especially the younger women such as ES and DK, do not view the achievements of women combatants with any special dispensation but are of the view that global change itself would have altered the roles of women in Jaffna regardless of women joining the LTTE.

The actual cause of women's empowerment is argued by women of civic society to be the result of a prolonged war whilst others give credit to the women combatants of the LTTE stating that their radical lifestyle has been the significant driving force for women's social change.

The non-conformity of women combatants to the social practices in Jaffna challenges the hegemonic masculinities that are implemented in society and often viewed as being nurtured and perpetuated by the women in civic society. The civic women do not always approve of women who so radically break with traditions. Since Balasingham joined the LTTE she has noted,

[p]ublic opinion as a mode of social control of women was an issue that surfaced again and again in various degrees and forms through out my life in India and Sri Lanka....[it] is an issue hugely perpetrated by women themselves

(Balasingham 2003:85).

The view of civic women condoning or colluding with dominant power relations to continue traditional cultural values and practices needs to be viewed within the context of the complex nature of social interactions women (both civic and combatant) have in society. A closer analysis of the difference between the combatant and civic women reveals that combatant women are more critical about the other group (civic women). When questioned whether being a combatant woman had affected their status in civic society, Arasi responded that,

"we [combatant women] are not affected in any way. We are well respected in the society. Whatever we ask they [those of civic society] are doing. They have faith in us that we will do everything well. We are not just fighters only. We do fight but at the same time we take part in all other aspects of the society. Our ideology is a very wide one".

(Arasi)

The description by Arasi is representative of how the combatant women believe they are viewed by civic society. However within civic society the women are identified firstly as combatants, and secondly as women. Being identified in a masculine role of a combatant means that they are placed outside the traditional feminine roles of the patriarchal society which are clearly defined. Whilst the LTTE has maintained some of the patriarchal views of femininity, it has also placed combatant women in a socially complex location which is also an ambivalent position both culturally and socially. The women combatants fail to notice that they are seen differently to male combatants by the civic society. Whilst the combatant women have earned respect from the civic society, it has come at a price, which they appear to be unaware of.

“And in each and every place they have to fight and they are not getting anything very easily. And you know in the society also they praise them and treat them as very high-level people. But they don’t move with them closely. With the men [in civic society] LTTE cadres they move freely but with the girls still they have difficulty. What I am saying is there is a problem in interaction between the society and these cadres. Because they are very much apart from the society up. The society feels something like that. Because in this society girls can’t achieve that level very easily. Very much separated from the society. [They are] so different. The difference, from my point of view the difference is very good. Their achieving is very good. That is a need for this society. These people [civic society] are you know, it will take sometime to realise it. Yeah! Sure[admire them for what they are doing]. Even so many girls in the society admire them.. But they [civic women] are restricted no?”

(DK*)

There is much recognition by the civic women of combatant women’s achievements. As stated in DK’s narrative much of the admiration is based on an understanding that combatant women are breaking restrictions in society to fulfil a role. Her narrative reveals that the male combatants are able to move freely with men in civic society, in the external social spaces (as opposed to internal domestic spaces). Whilst the women combatants appear to have been accepted on a certain level to be in the male social space, they are not fully embraced as equals by male society. The very same achievement that has earned the combatant women admiration from civic women of being in the male space, has distanced them from the civic women too.

Whilst it is generally accepted among civic women that women combatants have contributed to a substantially elevated social position for women as a whole, civic women do not acknowledge the hierarchy assumed by the women combatants. It must also be noted that the civic women who do not acknowledge the hierarchical position of

combatant women do not necessarily criticise the women combatants either. The role played by the combatant women is still seen by women in civic society as a major sacrifice, following the traditional path of women as 'givers' rather than 'takers'.

"They [women combatants] don't concentrate on how fair it is or what they want. Sacrificing is a main character of the women. There is no surprise in sacrificing. Anyway she is sacrificing wherever she is no?"

(HA*)

As previously stated in AH's discourse to become a woman combatant is in effect to become a self-less woman. She will not debate about unfairness or personal needs but rises to the role of the combatant who sacrifices her own needs for the benefit of others. The self-sacrifice by the women combatants in effect embraces a role that is similar to the traditional role dictated by society.

The civic women insist that although the combatant women are attending to what is essentially a male activity as a protector they are by no means masculinised by this action or experience. "We don't see them [women combatants] as men. We see them like brave ladies who are fighters" (ES*). This view is also shared by other civic women such as BP.

"I don't think [women combatants are masculine]. Masculine means rough type what you see. I don't think they [combatant women] are rough. Some places they should have [dealt with] that rough things, in a war they should be very rough, otherwise they will get killed. But normally we are talking with them they are not so rough"

(BP*).

While the civic women acknowledge the work conducted by combatant women to be masculine, they have also retained the combatant women in a feminine role. This is reflective of the complexity of women combatant's gender identities, which are constantly negotiated. The civic women's views on combatant women are particularly pertinent for the women combatants who negotiate new identities, and shift paradigms in order to remain as a part of the civic society. The shifting of paradigms in effect creates 'the new women', able to fit into the circumstances they find themselves in.

Summary

Tamil women in civic society have the dual roles of being an all-powerful woman in the inner realms of the domestic sphere of *Akam*, and a powerless dependent in the public sphere of *Puram*. Whilst the power of *Akam* is recognisably within the home, it is still subject to masculine authority. Within the past three decades women's social roles changed. Some civic women have credited the visible changes in women's social roles to the LTTE, and others to the war itself. The women combatants claim that it is the LTTE that has paved the way for social change by actively enforcing initiatives in society such as the discouragement of the dowry system and the repatriation of widows into society.

The engagement of Tamil women as combatants dates back to the mid-1980s when during this period they were continuously being compared to male combatants, which created a need for them to prove themselves as competent as male combatants. The women were trained to the same standard as, and fought alongside, their male counterparts. The role of gender equality amongst combatants is referred to in Arasi, AK, and Kavita's narratives where they had to work hard and undertake arduous tasks in order to prove themselves worthy in a masculine organisation. This need to prove their worth was not seen amongst the younger women combatants, such as Roja and Mallika, who entered an organisation that already accepted women as equals.

However this perceived equality needs to be seen in the context of women who attain leadership positions. It is estimated that one third of the LTTE organisation is made up of women combatants, however proportionally the number of women reaching the senior ranks is extremely low, which brings into question the true level of equality in the movement. It must none the less be recognised that gender relations in the LTTE are a series of complex negotiations in transition.

The women of civic society, as well as the combatant women, have recognised Prabhakaran to be a champion of women's social progress. A close analysis into Prabhakaran's relationship with his wife Mathy presents a different picture, whereby the traditional role of the supportive wife and auspicious mother is practiced. However the women combatants view their *ah-lu-mai* (empowerment) is a direct result of Prabhakaran's faith in women, which in turn has created *Puthumai Pen*, the new woman. *Puthumai Pen*, who has emerged from the war period is both tough and

fearless and above all sexually pure. These qualities have contributed to the public image of combatant women as 'Armed Virgins'.

Undoubtedly, the role played by combatant women within the LTTE revolutionary organisation challenges the existing patriarchy and existing gender norms in Tamil society. The gender (re)construction within the revolutionary movement has so far had a great social impact, the result of which is also seen amongst the confidences and empowerment gained by women in civic society. Whilst this chapter discusses the achievements of combatant women it also notes the limited numbers of women in senior positions of the LTTE, and their lack of contribution to high level decision-making. This however is negated by the major social impact women combatants of the LTTE have had upon civic women and Tamil society in Jaffna as a whole.

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this thesis is to analyse how gender is (re)constructed within the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam movement (LTTE). As the moment was founded upon a society that is steeped in a masculine culture which historically defines socially marginalised positions for women, it was important to identify how women become part of the LTTE. The engagement of women in the LTTE challenges the existing social formation in Jaffna's Tamil society.

In analysing this challenge and the historical roles of women in the light of issues that arise from conducting research across an ethnic divide and the complexities involved in representing the Other, I identify several catalysts that influence women in the decision-making process that pushes them towards the revolutionary organisation. The non-consanguine kin family that the LTTE is able to successfully construct overrides familial ties, and tight bonds form between combatant women through kinship. I conclude that these attachments may be extended into acts of suicide bombings where combatant women believe they are giving a gift of self to the greater good of the Tamil nation and for the cause of the separate state of Tamil Eelam. Gender roles are being (re)constructed within the LTTE Revolutionary organisation, and combatant women gain a form of equality for themselves, and for women in Tamil society as a whole.

I have made a number of key contributions in this thesis. The main body of the thesis analyses the way gender is constructed within the LTTE through in-depth interviews with LTTE combatant women. The thesis also analyses the way such constructions impact upon the civic society as a whole and in particular the Tamil women of Jaffna. This knowledge is further developed as a tool to assess the ways in which the conflict effects Jaffna women and in particular women who become combatants.

Ah-lu-mai or empowerment, as described by women combatants, has become the foundation of *Puthumai Pen*, a (re)constructed gender identity that is created through a series of events that challenge the gendered attitudes of Tamil society. In the LTTE movement the women combatants have opportunities for equality and empowerment.

The conflict has enabled Tamil women to embrace a new identity that is needed to survive in the extreme conditions of a civil war and is far removed from traditional roles and a traditional female identity based on subordination.

As new women, the combatant women perform many traditionally male activities that may ultimately end in self-sacrifice, an act that they see as giving a gift to society. I would argue that these acts and deeds must be seen within the context of a culturally restrained female social position and an ethnic war. The women combatants see the opportunity to be in the frontline of battles or to participate in suicide missions as recognition of their ability, their agency and above all their *Ah-lu-mai*, their empowerment. Whilst it may be argued that the LTTE has manipulated the situation of female fear and anxiety to gain much-needed human resources, it can also be seen that Tamil women feel more empowered and valued in the highly gendered Tamil society.

The achievements of combatant women have earned them the name of Armed Virgins that is both reflective of their new identity as women warriors and symbolic of the sexual purity that is valued in patriarchal society. However the fact that it is a symbolic 'virgin' that has been created within the confines of the armed struggle raises a question as to the extent of emancipation that the combatant women have achieved due their symbolisation continuing to rely on traditional metaphors of women as protectors of the nation and homeland (future mothers of the free).

Another major contribution of this thesis focuses on women's involvement in suicide bombings. Through empirical research, it is evident that the combatant women see the act of suicide bombing as an obligatory act of altruism. This is an interesting development as at first their view appears to contradict the traditional view of women's roles as life-givers. However through the narrative interviews it becomes clear that in fact the combatant women's discourse shows the act of suicide bombing to be an extension of nurturing and giving. The argument of giving is described by the combatant women as *Thatkodai* (giving self as a gift) as opposed to *Thatkolai* (suicide). The dynamism of the role of carer is thus extended into caring for the whole of Tamil nation in Jaffna.

Some feminist academics base an argument on biological essentialism, and claim that the combatant women have no agency of their own, and act against the nurturing and preserving instincts of women. I would argue that combatant women transpose this

same familial nurturing instinct into one of protecting the nation as a whole. The wide range of views about combatant women arises because of their new identity. Some of these views debate whether women's involvement in the conflict leads to emancipation whilst some suggest that women play only supporting roles. However if these new roles are viewed free from any preconceived notions, it is clear that combatant women have moved from historical 'support' roles to modern 'active' roles.

The thesis further contributes to the discussion of feminist methodology in representing the Other. My contribution as discussed earlier arrives from a basis of multiple identities that includes myself as the researcher and the participants of the interviews. I discuss issues of multiple identities (British, Sinhalese, and Tamil) that require constant negotiation throughout the time spent in the field and away from it as challenging. These negotiations form a strong basis in the thesis on reflexivity that link me as the researcher to the women combatants through our shared Sri Lankan identity, but also separate us through ethnicity and language.

The combatant women of the LTTE are aware that their social roles and gender identity are negotiated through hard work and are respected by civic society. They engage in community work and are driven to change the social position of civic women. The new identity seen in combatant women appears to create a complex social interaction between the combatant and civic women. The combatant women view civic women to be overly dependent on men, whereas the civic women do not always approve of women who so radically break with traditions, which causes civic women to distance themselves from combatant women. Women combatants raise issues of negotiated identities and question their binary position within the normative femininity practiced in civic society. This challenge to traditional normative femininity has become a catalyst for the separation between the two groups of women. Paradoxically, the combatant women have achieved a higher social position than civic women have but are not recognised at the same level as male combatants. Tamil society views combatant women differently as they are not included in society in the way that male combatants are, and the combatant women appear not to be aware of this difference.

Civic women show their support and allegiance to combatant women whenever they are criticised. Civic women are notably united in preserving combatant women's feminine identity, disregarding their non-feminine external appearance. Their visible appearance,

where culturally feminine symbols such as jewellery and saris are replaced by a masculinised image of shirts, trousers and combat fatigues, presents an overt picture of liberation and emancipation. Taking part in a nationalist conflict, wearing perceived masculine clothing, and becoming willing combatants to share the burden of war, does not change combatant women into men. Nor do they become men by developing a conscience that is contrary to the traditional female social positioning of *Kula Makal*, the good woman who stays within the confines of *akam* (the inner realm). It is their decision to become combatants and they determine their own agency.

A significant part of the gendered theory about the LTTE's discourse (and revolutionary groups in general) requires women's engagement in the building of a nation state. Prabhakaran is aware of this requirement, and a critical look needs to be taken at his motives. This reveals two key points; a short-term objective highlighting the grave need for trained combatants to continue the armed conflict against the Sri Lankan State army, and a long-term objective requiring the engagement of women in the process of nation-building. Some view the short-term objective, which forms the foundation for the long-term aim, as 'using' Tamil women. Combatant women claim that Prabhakaran has enabled them to challenge the patriarchy that keeps them as subordinate beings to the men in their households (father, brother, husband and son). Prabhakaran, with one foot firmly placed in patriarchal civic society, continuously states his support for combatant women and their *Ah-lu-mai* (empowerment) that enables them to achieve many things within a Tamil patriarchal cosmology. However his view of building a nation state supersedes his support and recognition of women for their abilities, and rather than achieving both simultaneously, takes priority over female emancipation.

The question of whether the women combatants have achieved equality by their active participation in the war needs to be seen within the context of how female emancipation is constructed and, more importantly, understood by combatant and civic women. The feminist teaching that Nithyanathan tried to introduce to the LTTE is dismissed as being too westernised for both combatant women and Prabhakaran to accept. In dismissing a developed argument of female emancipation, Prabhakaran successfully presents *his version* of feminism and female emancipation, which is acceptable to combatant women, and has been adopted and adapted by them. To claim that Prabhakaran's version of female empowerment is not emancipatory would be to disregard all that has been achieved by women as combatants. Therefore it is important to recognise that

women combatants have made achievements and sacrifices in changing the face of Tamil women in Jaffna, however the ability to sustain or maintain such changes is not clearly identifiable. The global history of women's involvement in revolutions highlights the risk that much promised equality eventually gets lost in the pursuit of nationalistic goals (see Helie-Lucas 1988, Wilson 1991, Hale 2001a and 2001b).

Whilst the women combatants are convinced of their equal status to men both in the movement and in society, there is a lack of female representation in senior LTTE positions. Culture and upbringing may result in an acceptance of being led but these two issues do not in themselves prevent women combatants from leading men. The next step is for women combatants to enter the political arena and use the skills and abilities of decision and debate. They are still in need of training to engage in the greater nationalist debate on a global stage to avoid being overlooked in this arena.

The reality of women's emancipation within the confinements of war, displacement and changing social roles as discussed in this research are complicated. Displacement leads to the breakdown of familial structures so paving the way for many other social systems to fail. These include the parental inability to provide safety and security for the family, women being violated or the continuous threat of sexual violence with the associated loss of purity and honour, and children being denied the normalcy offered by schooling. These all culminate in a situation where the LTTE can step in as a protector who restores their lost agency. By joining the LTTE movement the women gain a new kinship and become a part of the LTTE family. Displacement clearly acts as a catalyst in a notable number of combatant women's lives, pushing and pulling them towards the revolutionary organisations. The LTTE movement is seen as the only party that can protect the individual women combatants, as the family unit no longer provides a basic safety and sense of security, and parents or elders lose their authority over the young who seek alternatives to their fear and anxiety and lack of future prospects. Through empirical evidence I illustrate a previously unrecognised link between displacement to the LTTE controlled areas of Vanni and the voluntary enlistment of women. The importance of this link contrasts the sense of security with no comforts felt by the women in Vanni, to that of other areas that had comforts but no security. This finding is key to understanding how displacement has acted as a catalyst to those who later became willing combatants.

This thesis provides an insight into the way the LTTE revolutionary organisation has constructed gender that is acceptable to both those within the movement and those in civic society. This is a specialised piece of research around a small group of participants, and so its findings are not generalised across the whole organisation, but contributes to the currently limited knowledge of the women combatants of the LTTE. The limitations of the research has in fact opened up possibilities for further research and development.

One question is whether women's involvement with the LTTE has accelerated the social process of raising both groups of women's awareness of their social position within a gendered society, or whether social change is a side effect of a prolonged war that sweeps women towards a new gender identity irrespective of their individual beliefs and values. It is apparent that the war and the LTTE's recruitment of women may each have changed social roles on their own, but together they are a more powerful force for social change and have radically altered the perception of women in society. From the evidence gathered during my research it is clear that the rate of social change seen in today's Tamil society would not have been possible without women's involvement in the LTTE.

The combatant women of the LTTE express a desire for women to make a difference in society. They harbour strongly held beliefs that they can and do make a difference. They hold a keen sense of obligatory altruism and an awareness of being effective. They have achieved a form of equality that is unique within the historical framework of Tamil women in Jaffna. The (re)constructed gender identity has taken women from an identity of a 'Beautiful Soul' to that of a 'Just Warrior' (Elshtain 1987) or an 'Armed Virgin' (Schalk 1997a). This new (re)constructed identity combines both existing traditional normative femininities with newly created ones to form a new woman, *Puthumai Pen*.

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APPENDIX 1

THE THREE MAIN TAMIL REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS AND THEIR INTER-AGENCY RELATIONSHIPS

LTTE – Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Started in: 1972

Leader: Vellupillai Prabhakaran

Can be described as an urban guerrilla movement with a great deal of military significance.

PLOTE – Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam

Started in: 1980

Leader: Uma Maheshwaran

(Maheshwaran was a leader in LTTE prior to starting PLOTE).

Second largest revolutionary group.

TELO – Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation

Started in 1979

Leader: Sri Sabaratnam

The group was destroyed by the LTTE in 1986.

Relationships between the LTTE, PLOTE and TELO revolutionary organisations

Uma Maheswaran, a known orator of a sound political background developed at the TULF, joined the LTTE in 1977. Unlike other members of the early LTTE he was not a long-term friend of Prabhakaran. The general perception of Prabhakaran was that he “was a practical man but without any grasp of ideology which ‘Towards a Social Eelam’¹⁸⁰ was seeking to convey (Narayan-Swamy 2002:69). Prabhakaran viewed blood shedding as a primary part of a revolution and disagreed with those who said that the people must be politicised before taking up arms. He counted killing not only as important but also as necessary for a revolution to be recognised, and maintained that he did not kill without reason and if he had to kill there would be no hesitation (Narayan-Swamy: 2002).

Prabhakaran and Uma continued in their revolutionary cause until the severance of their relationship amidst scandal and bitterness. This severance was primarily due to different visions of the future of Tamil militancy, however it manifested itself as Uma’s alleged sexual relationship with Urmila¹⁸¹, a non-combatant woman within the LTTE organisation. Sexual relationships between men and women were counted as a very serious crime in the LTTE. Prabhakaran’s disapproval of all sexual relationships is reflected in the LTTE constitution at the time, as love affairs and family life were viewed as impediments to the commitment to revolutionary politics. In 1984 Prabhakaran made a statement referring to the relationship breakdown, as “....a leader of a revolutionary movement should commit himself totally to the discipline of the organisation. If a leader violates the basic rules and principles, then there will be chaos and the organisation will crumble” (Narayan-Swamy: 2002:67). This whole episode became an embarrassment to the LTTE office in London who decided to introduce Anton Stanislaus Balasingham to Prabhakaran and the organisation in the late 1970s. The LTTE had no strong affiliation to any one political ideology until Uma brought in Marxist ideologies. Prabhakaran was not known to have an interest in Marxism, however in the 1980s when Anton Balasingham joined the LTTE, Prabhakaran would listen to lectures on Marxism given by Balasingham. Balasingham was also committed to the Tamil cause, and eager to play

¹⁸⁰ in 1979 Balasingham wrote this major piece of LTTE theoretical work giving a visionary perception of how Tamil Eelam should be)

¹⁸¹ There have never been any witnesses to the alleged alliance between Uma and Urmila.

a more significant role. He is now viewed as the LTTE's theoretician and political ideologist. Uma was eventually expelled from the LTTE in 1979 after many altercations especially as he viewed himself as the inheritor of the LTTE legacy.

Upon leaving the LTTE Uma formed the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE). PLOTE has been defined as a '*bunch of contradictions*' (Narayan-Swamy 2002:178) because of its regular voicing of unity between the Tamils and Sinhalese whilst simultaneously conducting a series of offences against the state. As a young man Uma harboured many idealistic views that helped develop his Marxist theories. Uma's ability to campaign against individual revolutionary groups and his ability to call '*mass work*' (meaning the Tamils should join in the organisation and commit themselves to the cause) attracted many young Tamils to the PLOTE movement. In July 1983 PLOTE was believed to have in excess of 10,000 combatants¹⁸² (Narayan-Swamy: 2002). However it is interesting to note that although PLOTE were credited with having the largest number of combatants it appears not to have the same power to recruit and retain members as the LTTE. Uma's inability to lead caused much discontentment amongst its members, resulting in escapes and executions. Recruits who ran away from the organisation's isolated training camp in Tamil Nadu were captured and executed¹⁸³ as a strong deterrent to others. PLOTE was credited with killing over 150 of its own men¹⁸⁴. The politics of Tamil Nadu and the favours that were bestowed upon the organisation further contributed to its downfall. Uma fell out of favour with the leading Indian Politician M.G.Ramachandran, who supported the cause of Tamil Eelam. Many viewed this disfavour as self-inflicted, which would have severe repercussions on the organisation (such as a lack of support for collecting arms, etc). PLOTE is said to have favoured an easy life during its latter stages of power and turned to drug smuggling, further contributing to Uma's own despotisms (Narayan-Swamy: 2002).

During this period Sabarattinam, who was also known as 'Tall Sri', became the leader of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO) after the arrest and imprisonment of

¹⁸²Unfortunately Narayan-Swamy does not state his source.

¹⁸³ It is believed that all the revolutionary groups involved in the Tamil struggle had resolved into the practice of executing their own members who run away from their respective organisations.

¹⁸⁴ PLOTE had a number of ways in which they conducted executions. One was to get the victims to dig their own graves and get others to throw grenades. A second favoured method was to put the victim inside a cauldron of boiling oil (Narayan-Swamy:2002)

the former leaders, Thangadurai and Kuttimani (who were subsequently killed in prison during the 1983 riots). The demise of two out of the three leaders would have ended the TELO as a revolutionary group, had it not been for the intervention of the Indian government who provided support including finance and arms (Narayan-Swamy 2002:184). The Indian government adopted TELO as it lacked any formal ideology, which aided the Indian political mechanism to mould the TELO organisation as they wished. During August and September 1983 the TELO began mass recruitment, sending the new recruits directly to India for training. However Sri lacked the personality of both Parabhakaran and Uma, and resolved to raise his personal status amongst other revolutionary groups. He publicised that he was wanted in connection with the Neelavelli Bank robbery, which carried a reward of 200,000 Lankan Rupees and also a life sentence. This was Sri's way of showing that he too was a key player amongst the revolutionary leaders. Sri further lacked the foresight needed to stay involved on the right side of the Indian politicians who were providing support for his revolutionary organisation, even enraging M.G.Ramachandran (known as MGR) who was the main supporter of an autonomous Tamil Eelam¹⁸⁵.

TELO lacked the experience in guerrilla warfare that may have allowed them to build a close relationship with the civilian population. In his doctrines Mao emphasises the need for support from the civilian population in order to succeed in battle endeavours. The Jaffna-based TELO leader was of the opinion that getting closer to the civilian population might create problems of over-familiarisation, and he strongly believed that the civilian population must have some fear of the 'boys'¹⁸⁶.

In *Broken Palmyra* Thiranagama, Hoole et al (1990) states,

¹⁸⁵ MGR was also an ardent supporter of the LTTE.

¹⁸⁶ 'Boys' is a term used to describe the combatants.

“ as time went by they realised that the struggle would be on for much longer than two years. They developed a grievance against those of their erstwhile colleagues who had gone for careers and studied abroad and had prospered. While having come to realise the shortcomings and limitations of their organisations, they were too proud to leave it and join another. They would rather work to bring TELO into prominence as against other groups, for their personal ambitions and prospects of power now hinged on the success of the organisation to which they committed. Their grievances extended to contempt for those who pursued ordinary civilian interests. They regarded themselves as superior to civilians who were obliged to accept their [TELO] idea of what was good for them [the civilians] ” (pp48).

TELO as an organisation ceased to exist after April 1986 when the LTTE attacked all 24 TELO camps simultaneously. TELO and PLOTE both suffered from lack of firm leadership. The TELO were very soon eliminated by the LTTE. Subsequently PLOTE and all other Tamil revolutionary groups were simply wiped out by the stronger and more disciplined body of the LTTE.

Table 1 - A Glossary of Revolutionary Groups Involved in the Conflict

ENDLF	Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front
ENLF	Eelam National Liberation Front (this consisted of EPRLF + TELO + EROS)
EPRLF	Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front
ERCP	Eelam Revolutionary Communist Party
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation
GUES	General Union of Eelam Students (student wing of EROS)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PLA	Peoples liberation Army (the armed wing of the EPRLF)
PLOTE	Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
TEA	Tamil Eelam Army
TELA	Tamil Eelam Liberation Army
TELF	Tamil Eelam Liberation Front
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TESO	Tamil Eelam Supporters Organisation
TLO	Tamil Liberation Organisation
TNT	Tamil New Tigers
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front

APPENDIX 2

CHRONOLOGY

Table 2 - Chronology of Events

1948	The Ceylon Citizenship Act no.18 demanded proof of eligibility for citizenship through descent.
1956	The Official Language Act endorsed Sinhalese as the official language of education and commerce.
1957	The Bandaranayake-Chelvanayakam pact was drawn. The aim was to resolve the growing tensions between the Tamil and Sinhalese nationals.
1965	The Senanayake-Chelvanayakam pact was created to address the issue of Sinhalese being the official language.
1971	The 'standardisation' policy was introduced aimed at addressing the education imbalance between Tamil and Sinhalese nationals.
1985	The Sri Lankan government held peace talks with the Tamil revolutionary groups in Thimpu, Bhutan. Negotiations broke down resulting in an escalation of war.
1987	The Indo-Sri Lanka pact was made between Rajiv Ghandi and President Jayawardhane. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was deployed in the Northern parts of Sri Lanka (troops withdrawn in 1990).
1989	Peace talks resumed after Prime Minister Premadasa agreed with the LTTE to remove the IPKF. Talks continued for 14 months, however 3 months after the departure of the IPKF the LTTE and the Sri Lankan State army resumed fighting.
1994	Chandrika Bandaranayake-Kumaratunge became Prime Minister and opened talks with the LTTE. A bilateral truce was agreed. 100 days later the LTTE pulled out of the agreement.
1995 to 2001	War escalated with the LTTE fighting the state armed forces in a bid to capture Jaffna.
2001	Ranil Wickramasingha became Prime Minister and pledged to open a dialogue with the LTTE. A unilateral truce was offered by the LTTE and reciprocated by the government.
2002	The Norwegian government brokered a truce, which was accepted by both the LTTE and the State. The first and second round (16-18 September; 31 October-3 November) of talks on the possibility of a separate Tamil state took place in Thailand. The third round of talks (2-5 December) were held in Oslo and focussed on a Federal Constitution. Both parties then signed a ceasefire agreement (CFA).
2003	The fourth round of talks were held in Thailand (6-9 January) and the fifth round of talks were in Germany (7-8 February), but by April the LTTE suspended talks and demands of interim governance of the North and North East provinces. The sixth session of peace talks were held in

Japan (18 - 21 March). The LTTE refused to attend the seventh round of talks scheduled to be held on 29 April-2 May 2003 in Japan.

2004 to 2005 A fragile ceasefire maintained amidst discussions. Within the LTTE ranks there was a split from one of its commanders known as Colonel Karuna in Batticaloa. The first suicide bomb attack since 2001 took place in July.

2006 A new round of talks takes place in Geneva on 22-23 February 2006 and on 28-29 October 2006. However the ceasefire failed and war resumed whilst both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government claimed they were upholding the CFA agreement.

2007 Negotiations failed and a new wave of violence erupted in the country.

APPENDIX 3

POLITICAL INFORMATION

List of Prime Ministers of Sri Lanka

- Don Stephen Senanayake (February 4, 1948 - March 26, 1952)
- Dudley Shelton Senanayake (March 26, 1952 - October 12, 1953)
- John Lionel Kotalawela (October 12, 1953 - April 12, 1956)
- Solomon Ridgeway Dias Bandaranayake (April 12, 1956 - September 26, 1959)
- Wijeyananda Dahanayake (September 26, 1959 - March 21, 1960)
- Dudley Shelton Senanayake (March 21, 1960 - July 21, 1960)
- Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranayake (July 21, 1960 - March 27, 1965)
- Dudley Shelton Senanayake (March 27, 1965 - May 29, 1970)
- Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranayake (May 29, 1970 - July 23, 1977)
- Junius Richard Jayawardhane (July 23, 1977 - February 6, 1978)
- Ranasinghe Premadasa (February 6, 1978 - March 3, 1989)
- Dingiri Banda Wijetunge (March 3, 1989 - May 7, 1993)
- Ranil Wickremesinghe - (May 7, 1993 - August 19, 1994)
- Chandrika Bandaranayake-Kumaratunga (August 19, 1994 - November 14, 1994)
- Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranayake (November 14, 1994 - August 10, 2000)
- Ratnasiri Wickremayake (August 10, 2000 - December 9, 2001)
- Ranil Wickramasinha (December 9, 2001 - April 6, 2004)
- Mahinda Rajapaksa (April 6, 2004 - November 21, 2005)
- Ratnasiri Wickremayake - (November 21, 2005 - present)

List of Presidents of Sri Lanka

- William Gopallawa (May 22, 1972 - 4 February 1978)
- Junius Richard Jayawardhane (4 February 1978 - January 2, 1989)
- Ranasinghe Premadasa (2 January 1989 - 1 May 1993)
- Dingiri Banda Wijetunge (2 May 1993 - November 12, 1994)
- Chandrika Bandaranayake-Kumaratunga (November 12, 1994 - November 19, 2005)

- Mahinda Rajapaksa (November 19, 2005: present)

Source: www.priu.gov.lk/Primeminister/formerprimeministers.html, access 17.9.2007

Acronyms of key political parties involved in the conflict referred to in the thesis.

Tamil

- TNT – Tamil New Tigers (pre-runner to LTTE)
- LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
- PLOTE – Peoples Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
- TELO – Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation

Monitoring authorities

- IPKF – Indian Peace Keeping Force
- SLMM – Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission

The following groups were also involved in the nationalist struggle, but were not part of this thesis.

Tamil

ENDLF - Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front

ENLF – Eelam National Liberation Front (this consisted of EPRLF + TELO + EROS)

EPRLF - Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front

ERCP – Eelam Revolutionary Communist Party

EROS – Eelam Revolutionary Organisation

GUES – General Union of Eelam Students (student wing of EROS)

PLA – Peoples liberation Army (the armed wing of the EPRLF)

TEA – Tamil Eelam Army

TEL A – Tamil Eelam Liberation Army

TELF – Tamil Eelam Liberation Front

TESO – Tamil Eelam Supporters Organisation

TLO – Tamil Liberation Organisation

TULF – Tamil United Liberation Front

Sinhalese

JVP - Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (means –peoples liberation front)

Ruling political parties

NSSP - Nava Sama Samaja Party

SLMP - Sri Lanka Mahajana Party

SLSSP - Sri Lanka Sama Samaja Party

UNP – United National Party

APPENDIX 4

LIST OF INTERVIEWS.

Some dates are withheld due to safety reasons as my movements have been recorded by the Armed Forces at check-points.

Table 3 - List of Interviews (in alphabetical order)

NAME	DATE OF INTERVIEW	STATUS
Roja - Mallika	*Date withheld for safety reasons-October 2003	translated by BP
Yalini – Arulvili -Aruna	*Date withheld for safety reasons-March 2003	translated by Kavitha
Yalini	*Date withheld for safety reasons-October 2003	no translator used
Kavitha	11.10.03	translated by BP
Arasi	10.03.03	translated by BP and Gatekeeper
Arasi	*Date withheld for safety reasons-October 2003	translated by Kavitha
AK	09.10.03	translated by Gatekeeper
BP	6.10.03	no translator used
CH	10.10.03	translated by BP
DK	11.10.03	no translator used
ES	07.10.03	no translator used
FP	14.10.03	translated by BP
GV	08.10.03	translated by HA
HA	08.10.03	no translator used

APPENDIX 5

JOURNEYS

The Journey to LTTE controlled area (Vanni District)

Undertaking trips to areas that researchers may consider as dangerous often have hidden benefits. The visits I made to the territory in both March and October 2003 granted me an opportunity to view how the region was governed, and to encounter the difficulties that Tamil people endure on a daily basis, such as the army checkpoints on entering and leaving Jaffna. Visits allow you to see the environment surrounding the location and how it has changed. The journey to Kilinochchi was undertaken in a three-wheel taxi. The experience of riding in a vehicle that exposes you to the elements, brings home the reality of the dangers of research in these circumstances. We travelled through empty countryside with notice boards in three languages (Tamil, Sinhalese, and English) warning that the land on either side is mined. There were towns with homes and a local hospital in ruins. Against the backdrop of a giant causeway we crossed into the heart of LTTE territory, Kilinochchi, which was similar to the LTTE camp at the border with neat and clean streets. Each time I visited Kilinochchi I noticed changes to the landscape. My first visit was made in April 2003 before the rainy season, when the roads were still in an excellent condition, which had changed drastically by the time of my October visit when there were holes in the road. On my second visit the billboards recruiting young schoolgirls to join the LTTE were no longer on the roadside. This may have been due to the SLMM bringing pressure to bear on the LTTE to cease their recruitment of children and young people.

The arrival at the border crossing was rather unsettling. Both checkpoints have similarities and differences. For instance, at Muhamalai the army checkpoint is large-scale and the checks conducted are much more extensive (e.g., the army will check under vehicles for bombs whereas the LTTE checkpoints will not although both keep details of the individuals and vehicles that pass through). Another difference is that no photographs can be taken at the army checkpoints, where there are no such restrictions

in place at the LTTE checkpoint. After the Red Cross hut there is approximately a one-mile stretch of 'no-mans-land', which is monitored by the both parties of the conflict, in addition to the SLMM and the Red Cross. When crossing over to the Kilinochchi side there is an immaculately neat and tidy LTTE camp area where all passengers and luggage are checked and various kinds of taxes imposed on goods brought over to Kilinochchi from other areas.

First visit

On my first visit, the young taxi driver who drove me was clearly fearful of entering the first of three camps that day. I remained in the vehicle until the LTTE combatant on duty ascertained my identity through the driver and then directed both of us to another impeccably well-kept hut, which acted as an office. Here I was questioned as to what I was doing there and whom I was going to see (by then the same information had been given by the driver to the LTTE guard). As I had already secured this visit beforehand, I was able to mention that the visit was recommended by Arasi. However as I was a British person, I had to pay a slightly higher entry tax than a Sinhalese would have paid to enter Kilinochchi. Goods are taxed based on the items brought in or travelling through the LTTE held territory. The taxes are invariably higher on luxury goods such as foreign produced bottles of whisky than the locally brewed Arrack.

When the driver and I left the political wing office we were instructed to go to another office to obtain an exit visa. At this place the driver and I were questioned at length, with the driver (and his limited knowledge of English) acting as an interpreter. The questions extended to my domestic circumstances and residency. They requested addresses of my home and my parents, their dates of birth and their occupation, number of siblings and their details. I felt these questions were intrusive and I answered in the most economical fashion with incorrect answers given to some as I was concerned about the safety aspect of some of my family still living in Sri Lanka, as well as those in England. I felt uncomfortable and uneasy, which may have because I was on an open veranda with three rather intimidating male combatants and one very frightened driver. I smiled and kept my voice steady, and maintained eye contact, so as not to appear discourteous, secretive or challenging in any way. When we were finally told we could leave, it was a great relief.

By then it was getting dark and we needed to be across the border before the gates closed for the evening. This is an area where there is only one guest house run by the LTTE in Kilinochchi itself, and no other guest accommodation anywhere else in the area. Often those who fail to cross the border before the gates close spend the night in a nearby house, and the Gatekeeper reported to me that people who live near the border welcome and are accommodate strangers with kind hospitality.

The second visit

The second visit was relatively *bureaucracy-free* in comparison to the first visit to Kilinochchi and I had a different driver. However the army checkpoints were still time-consuming, in contrast to the LTTE checkpoints that were not. Interestingly on my second visit there was no tax payment, and I was able to cross the camp without any delay. Being pleasantly surprised I asked the driver what his conversation with the LTTE consisted of that got us through the checkpoint so easily. The driver said he had introduced me as an LTTE supporter from London who had come to see Arasi. This information made me feel quite uncomfortable, but I understood that the reality of the situation was to *appear* to be partial to the organisation that I was researching.

APPENDIX 6

ANTECEDENCE

Combatant Women

Arasi (age 30) is from Jaffna. She is the Head of Women's Political Wing and is the highest-ranking female of the LTTE. She is based in Kilinochchi and is an exceptionally articulate woman. She has a great deal of battle experience and is held in high esteem by both her fellow combatants and the civic women such as BP, CH and others who were not participants in this research. Her father's occupation was a mechanic and he allowed Arasi some freedom of movement. He encouraged her to study with a view to going onto university for a higher education. The only obstacle to her freedom in her home life was her grandmother who was very much a matriarch who preserved traditional women's gender roles.

Arasi had six siblings: four sisters and one brother. The sister nearest to her age also joined the LTTE and died in the Kilinochchi battle at the age of 23. The death of Arasi's father had meant the family had to move to live with an uncle, as it was not socially acceptable for a family to live without a male head of household.

Arasi's political conscience developed around the age of 14. Arasi's narratives reflect that her appreciation of the LTTE was not limited just to herself and her family but were shared by those in the community. The hardships endured by the combatants were very much appreciated. She joined the movement at the age 18 whilst studying for her Advanced Level examinations. The police arrested Arasi's Father whilst she was still in her mother's womb. This part of the narrative may have been conveyed perhaps to impress upon me that law, repression and incarceration had begun early in her life and that she was no stranger to hardships of such kind.

Kavitha (age 30) is from Jaffna. She is currently in charge of the Jaffna District LTTE Political office. Her father was a fisherman, and her mother a housewife. She is fifth in a family of seven siblings, two older brothers, two older sisters and two younger sisters.

No other sibling of Kavitha's family had joined the movement – except for a cousin brother. Kavitha's first politicisation about the LTTE came in 1985 at the age of 13. She has been successful in education as she passed her advanced level exams with good grades, but was prevented from attending university because she was five marks below the entry requirements. She then joined a teacher training school and became a primary school teacher in the government sector. The continual displacements acted as a major catalyst in her decision to join the LTTE. Her parents were not surprised by her decision to join at the age of 25.

Aruna (age 24) is from Kokuvil area of Jaffna. She has a twin brother who is also an LTTE combatant. He joined the movement before Aruna in 1995. Aruna joined the LTTE in 1998 at the age of 19, some 3 years after her twin brother. She also has an older brother and a younger sister. She was studying for Advanced Level examinations when she decided to join the movement at the age of 19. Since then she has gained battle experience.

Yalini (age 23) is from Arialai area of Jaffna. She is presently working as part of the team engaged at the LTTE's Political Wing in Kilinochchi. Yalini's father was a shopkeeper in Thinnavelli, near Jaffna University. She is the middle child with an older sister and an older brother as well as two younger sisters. Yalini was in the advanced level class for six months before she decided to join the movement. She was an academically gifted student. Her joining the LTTE created a great deal of confusion amongst her family and her school. She has stated that there were no problems for her at home but she found the continuous displacement and disruption to her education hard to deal with. Though Yalini's parents did not approve her joining the movement early on, it now appears that they are rather proud of her involvement. The fact that Yalini's family is proud to have a daughter in the movement also meant that they will not ask her to return home, which in a way seem to have severed the tightly constructed family ties. Yalini is not experienced in battle but has been to the battlefield once as part of her training to assist those who were wounded. Yalini left home under the pretext of going for tuition classes and went over to the LTTE camp to join the movement in 1998 at the age of 18.

Arulvili (age 23) is from Nallur area of Jaffna. She was the former head of the LTTE Political office in Jaffna (Currently run by Kavitha). She is the eldest sibling of seven

brothers and two sisters. She is unable to separate the politicisation of her adolescent life with the turning point of joining the movement. She sees the major displacement of civilians in Jaffna as a key turning point in her political awareness. She was attending Advanced Level classes for three months when she decided to join the LTTE. Arulvili was 18 years old when she joined the movement.

Mallika (age 21) is from Vanni. She is a combatant whose main role in the LTTE is to play music for the burial ceremonies at the graveyards of combatants who have died in battle. Her father had a business in Colombo and suffered a financial loss during the 1983 riots. She is the eldest of three children and joined the movement at the age of 15 years, on the day when an air strike killed and injured a number of schoolchildren in her school. Due to Mallika's young age both her parents and the LTTE wanted her to return home, but she refused to go back. As she had left school at an age when she should have been studying she attended the basic schooling given by the LTTE up to the age of 18, when she was given an option to stay in the LTTE as a combatant or to return home.

Roja (age 22) is from Alavetty. She is currently a combatant. Her father was a farmer who died (in 1999) when Roja was 19 years old after receiving continuous beatings from the army for having his children enrolled in the LTTE. She is the second child of a family of five female children. Roja and her older sister joined the LTTE at separate times. Roja's sister joined the movement at the age of 12 and Roja joined at the age of 15. Roja claims her reason for joining was not due to a sibling connection, but due to many displacements (Roja was displaced 6 times). Roja's education was disrupted and she left school to join the movement long before her ordinary level exams, therefore she joined the LTTE's own school until the age of 18 when she was offered a position in the LTTE or a move back home.

AK (age 34) is originally from Puloly in Jaffna, and is the eldest sibling in a family of seven children, four girls and three boys. She was a combatant commander in the LTTE before she left the organisation due to a serious injury received in the Elephant Pass battle. She is now married to a non-combatant man and has one boy aged five. Both AK and her sister joined the LTTE by invitation from the movement. AK's father was a businessman in Kurunegala. He was beaten up and returned to Jaffna after the racial riots of 1958 and 1972, but the 1983 riots completely ruined him both financially and emotionally. Being unable to go back to his business resulted in him spending more time

with Tiger combatants. AK came to know the organisation and Prabhakaran through her father's involvement with LTTE. The combatants were welcomed in his home. They were often fed and given a place to stay when they needed it. In addition, the LTTE camp that was behind the house contained many wounded combatants from Mullateevu battle and the family used to attend to the sick at the camp. This involvement was the beginning of AK's interest in the LTTE. Though her father was a very strict man who controlled the family and all its movements, he allowed his children to become involved with the LTTE. AK and her friend Navamani (who later became a combatant and died in battle) used to collect food parcels from other houses and deliver them to the sick combatants in the hospital under the watchful eye of the army. She was re-sitting for her Advanced Level examinations when she joined the movement.

Once AK recovered from wounds she received during the battle of Elephant Pass, she was involved for the next two years in The Rehabilitation of Women Programme run by the LTTE. The rehabilitation programme is similar to a therapy group, where war traumatised women are cared for, but their main focus is to find them a safe place to live. AK was involved in setting up 'Pannai', co-operatives where women and children were trained in sewing and agriculture. AK left the movement in 1998 (her own decision) as she had been in the movement 10 years and "desired to come out and do some work outside". By this time she had started to work in the TAG (Theatre Action Group) a therapy group who helps those affected by war through theatre and drama). AK was also interested in a man named Z and her friends proposed marriage to him, which he accepted. Though AK has been a combatant and Z a non-combatant, they were both doing the same work within the TAG. This appears to have been a common basis for their relationship. AK was against the idea of giving a dowry and Z did not like the idea of receiving one. In her discourse she states how it was difficult for her in-laws to understand her due to her views being different to women in civic society. An example of this was her unwillingness to conform to traditional images of a married woman by wearing jewellery, a big pottu on her forehead and a sari. Though she would occasionally wear all those things to appease her in-laws, it was done with resentment. AK has a son, but she says that if she had a daughter she would bring her up the same way as her son.

Civic women

BP is middle-aged (age was not given) and is from Jaffna. She used to be a teacher at a prestigious girl's school. BP had six siblings in her family, five sisters and one brother. Her brother lives in London, one sister in Australia, another in Sweden and two in Colombo. She worked until major displacement in 1998 when she resigned from her employment. She did not come back to her house in Jaffna, as she would have to live alone as her husband was conducting research for his PhD in the Batticaloa and Trincomalee areas. She referred to Jaffna being an "open prison" with army everywhere, and lacking basic facilities such as transport and food.

At this time BP started getting involved with the Theatre Action Group "TAG". The Group was first known as the Drama College where they promoted plays because the founder of the group was only interested in acting. BP refers to "Cultural Caravan", an event that took place c.1998 when women from the North and North East war zones went to Colombo and preformed stories reported by those living in war zones. BP counted this as a political act. Many young men wanted to join the LTTE to get away from the army persecutions. This theme was one of several taken up as a play. BPs activities and the support she provided for the LTTE has brought her to the army's attention and she tends to get harassed at checkpoints. BP regards the TAG and herself as not being affiliated to the LTTE. But they do provide services to the LTTE if asked. BP sees parallels between the work of the TAG and the provision of social support within the community by the LTTE.

CH (age 26) is originally from Colombo, and was the only Christian in the interview group. She has one brother who is two years older. CH's father worked as a cook at a club in Colombo. CH states that her lineage originated from Trincomalee. Her mother and father have a mixed Tamil and Singhalese racial identity and were born and brought up in Colombo. CH does not identify with her Singhalese identity and concentrates solely on the Tamil identity. Whilst in Colombo, she and her brother were brought up in relative isolation by her mother, as she never trusted her Singhalese neighbours. Her mother was fully aware of the depravity in the neighbourhood. CH believes this was the reason why her mother kept the children away from others. Her mother's unwillingness to socialise with neighbours extended to taking her children to bath at the common water tap at 5am, long before the neighbours woke up. Her mother had always had a fear of Singhalese neighbours ever since the previous race riots in 1970s. CH grew up

within the war period c.1983 when the family moved to Trincomalee, but she was unaware of the full effects of the war until much later on, when she joined the TAG. This is mainly due to being shut away in a Catholic Boarding school and to an extent being in Trincomalee, which suffered in a different way to that of Jaffna, due to its mixed communities. Without having a home of their own CH and her family moved around amongst members of her mother's family until they were able to buy a piece of land and built a house of their own.

Her brother joined the LTTE at the age of 14. CH never saw her brother in LTTE uniform, as she was boarding at a convent school. On one visit, her mother informed her that her brother had left home and joined the movement, but the mother had gone to the camp and brought him back. In 1990 when the LTTE were in Trincomalee, the brother had witnessed them digging out a stash of hidden arms. Prior to that he had drawn a detailed sketch of the tiger symbol on a book and had hidden it (he clearly idealised and admired the Tigers). Her brother was interested in bodybuilding where he would have had the opportunity to meet and befriend those who were in the movement. When he got older, he joined the LTTE again and became a combatant (she also mentioned in passing that he had developed mental health problems during his time with the LTTE). She further stated that female combatants did not go to Trincomalee at the time. It was always male combatants who attended towns for recruitment purposes. They did not wear their LTTE uniform and so were inconspicuous, with all recruiting carried out through underground connections.

In 1996, when she completed her Advanced Level examinations, she became involved in working for the community by assisting in the delivery of polio vaccine. During this period she met a woman named 'S' who was an NGO that dealt with the civic population who were disrupted in the war. S got CH involved in a political workshop, where the attendees let their emotions out and cried for the losses they had suffered. This session gave CH a sense of having grown up very much unaware of the circumstances surrounding her life and times. CH felt angry at the political climate, at the Sri Lankan soldiers, her own family and society at large. This anger made her understand why her brother had joined the LTTE. The anger felt by CH was channelled into working with the workshop group, but she admits it could well have been channelled into fighting for the LTTE. It became a question of who was with her at the time to direct her and help her cope with anger she felt. CH blames the war of "tricking" her into having no grand ideas.

Her ambition was to pass her Advanced Level examinations, be employed in a small job and be married by the age of 25.

[n.b. CH died of misdiagnosed throat cancer in 2004]

DK (age 27) is from Jaffna, and is a professional middle-class woman living and working in Jaffna with her mother and one female servant. She is unusual in many respects, firstly by living in an all female household, secondly working in a highly male work environment and thirdly she is in charge of the family business. DK's older sister is an accountant and lives overseas. DK's father was a professional in charge of the family business and died of hepatitis during the war period due to lack of medical facilities in Jaffna. DK went to school in Jaffna, and then went to Colombo University. She dislikes the lifestyle and racial tensions in Colombo, which she views as a Sinhalese area. DK describes her business as being hard at best of times, but being doubly hard for her as a Tamil and a woman, where tenders are issued in Colombo, and often include bribery, sexual favours and corruption.

HA is middle-aged (age also not given) from Jaffna. She is an unmarried professional woman who holds a Master's degree. She is from a financially affluent middle-class family who owned land. HA is the eldest child of three younger brothers and three younger sisters. The father wanted the children to study and experience life, but he did not want the girls to work. HA explains that in Tamil culture it is the men who go out to work and not the women. Hence when she was told she can only study but not work, she told her parents that she wanted nothing from them and she would support herself with her good education. None of HA's brothers or sisters joined the LTTE. They were much more focused on their studies. At the time of the LTTE coming to power in Jaffna HA was an undergraduate. The recruitment of women as combatants was formulated late on in 1984. As her main aim was education, she felt that she was too old for battle training and she was going to study for her Master's degree in India. She viewed the war as a form of social liberation.

GV is middle-aged (age also not given) from Jaffna. She is a married, middle-aged wealthy middle-class professional woman who holds a masters degree. She admits that as the only child she was brought up in a narrow-minded environment. However coming from a relatively well-educated and wealthy middle-class has meant that she knew what she wanted then and for the future. She identifies herself as a typical Jaffna woman with

deep attachment to her house and her garden which carried a great deal of symbolic meaning in her life. GV was married for only 45 days before her displacement. GV's social background made it possible for her to delay marriage until she was much older. She saw being displaced as both educational and liberating.

ES (age 27) is from Jaffna and is an academic attached to a university. She is the second child of a family of two brothers and one sister, and neither she nor her siblings are married. Her Father was an engineer who died of a heart attack just before the start of war. After the death of her father her mother, who was educated to graduate standard (attended Peradeniya University), decided to run the family without any male support. Her elder brother and younger sister are medical students; her younger brother is an undergraduate studying Computer Science. She believes that the many displacements have caused her to lose out on a medical degree but she has ended up graduating with a degree in agriculture.

FP (age 40) is a housewife with two sons aged 10 and 11. She was born in Anuradhapura as the ninth child (her twin brother died at birth). Her father was a farmer originally from the village of Kopai in Jaffna, and her mother came from the village Punguditheevu in Jaffna. Her parents had an arranged marriage. Her father's family moved to Anuradhapura to farm when he was a small child and he grew up there and subsequently became a farmer himself. There were ten children in the family, six boys and four girls. Her mother made it a point to bring up all the children equally, however the female children were educated to Ordinary Level standard only and the male children beyond this, as it was seen that the male children needed more education in order to obtain gainful employment. FP states that she would allow a female child to continue studies as times have changed. She regrets not studying as she wishes to work now. FP was actually aware of racial tensions at the age of 14 years when she and her family fled from Anuradhapura during 1977 race riots. They moved from Anuradhapura to Thirunelveli. FP's father did not work in Jaffna but her brothers found employment there and supported the family. Her father died in 1987 after being shot in the foot by the IPKF after being mistakenly identified as another combatant's father. Her mother died some four months after her father's death. By this time she was registered in an arranged marriage to a man she already knew and she got married in 1989. After her marriage she moved into her husband's house as he had been living alone since the death of his parents. Her husband is employed but not in the government sector hence

FP views his job as "not a good job". This very reason has prompted her to educate her children. In 1991 she was pregnant with her eldest child when she had to leave home and run for safety. This was during a counterattack conducted by the LTTE in Jaffna, which was occupied by the SL Army. FP is pleased that her child was born without any of the medical complications that many babies born during this period suffered. FP found it difficult to live with the problems of not having enough money or basics such as soap, kerosene oil to cook, sugar, milk etc, as they were either unavailable or very expensive. FP and her family survived by borrowing once the dowry money finished under the extreme living costs.

APPENDIX 7

TERMINOLOGY

Table 4 - Familial Consanguine Terminology

Father	<i>Appa</i>
Mother	<i>Amma</i>
Brother	<i>Sahothran</i>
Older Brother	<i>Annay</i>
Younger Brother	<i>Thambi</i>
Sister	<i>Sahothari</i>
Older Sister	<i>Akka</i>
Younger Sister	<i>Thangachchi</i>
Aunt	<i>Anty</i>
Father's Sister	<i>Marmie</i>
Mother's Older Sister	<i>Periya Amma</i>
Mother's Younger Sister	<i>Chinna Amma</i>
Uncle	<i>Mama</i>
Father's Older Brother	<i>Periya Appa</i>
Father's Younger Brother	<i>Chithappa</i>
Mothers Brother	<i>Mama</i>
Grand Father (Maternal and Paternal)	<i>Appapa /Pattah</i>
Grand Mother (Maternal and Paternal)	<i>Appamma /Ammamma</i>

APPENDIX 8

DATA ON DEAD WOMEN COMBATANTS.

Data in relation to dead women combatants

The following tables illustrate the total including number of female combatant deaths from the beginning of the conflict to the current cease-fire period (from 27th November 1982 to 31st October 2002).

Table 5 - Total deaths from 27/11/1982-31/10/2002

Year	Number of deaths	Comments
1986	1	The body was unidentifiable
1987	14	
1988	11	
1989	2	
1990	72	
1991	208	
1992	75	
1993	125	
1994	12	
1995	288	
1996	285	
1997	507	
1998	648	
1999	493	
2000	743	

2001	270	
2002	15	

TOTAL 3,768

Source: Tamil Eelam Heroes Office Political Wing, Tamil Eelam Liberation Tigers, located in Mulathir district, Pudukudiirupu, collected during field trip to Jaffna in 2003.

*Total number of women killed 3,768*Total number of men killed 17,651*

**Above figures also include deaths occurred as killed in action as well as illnesses –*

which is counted as 'heroic death' based on being fighters at the time of illness and death.

There have been other deaths since the cease-fire, some due to illness and others being shot by the army – but no female deaths since this record was made.

Table 6 - Details of the number of deaths of female Black Tigers, 27/11/1982-31/10/2002

District	Land Black Tigers	Sea Black Tigers
Jaffna	12	38
Batticaloa	2	-
Vanni	2	2
Trincomalee	-	2
Mullativ	1	2
Mannar	1	1
Other districts	-	1
TOTAL	18	46

Source: Tamil Eelam Heroes Office Political Wing, Tamil Eelam Liberation Tigers, located in Mulathir district, Pudukudiirupu, collected during field trip to Jaffna in 2003.

Table 7 - Total Number of Male and Female Black Tiger Deaths, 1987-2001*

Year	Total Number of Black Tiger Deaths	Number of Women Black Tiger Deaths	Number of Black Tiger Accidental Deaths**
1987	1	0	0
1988	0	0	0
1989	0	0	0
1990	4	0	0
1991	4*	1*	0
1992	0	0	0
1993	18	0	0
1994	12	3	0
1995	31	7	0
1996	26	7	0
1997	21	6	9
1998	29	13	0
1999	30	7	9
2000	41	11	3
2001	24	10	5

Total	241	65	26
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Source: Sri Kantha (2004) based on Sooriya Puthalvargal 2003, LTTE's Memorial Souvenir 2003:

**I have included Dhanu in this list, which was not reflected in the original source*

***accidental deaths occur during training and on rehearsal runs for specific missions.*

Table 8 - Women Black Tiger Participants by Age, 1991-2001

Age	Number of Participants
19	5
20	8
21	16
22	7
23	1
24	7
25	7
26	3
27	4
28	1
29	2
30 and 31	0
32	1
Age not known	3*
TOTAL	65

Source: Sri Kantha (2004) based on Sooriya Puthalvargal 2003, LTTE's Memorial Souvenir 2003

** Dhanu is included in the unknown age category. She was not included in the originating source.*

APPENDIX 9 – MAPS & PHOTOGRAPHS

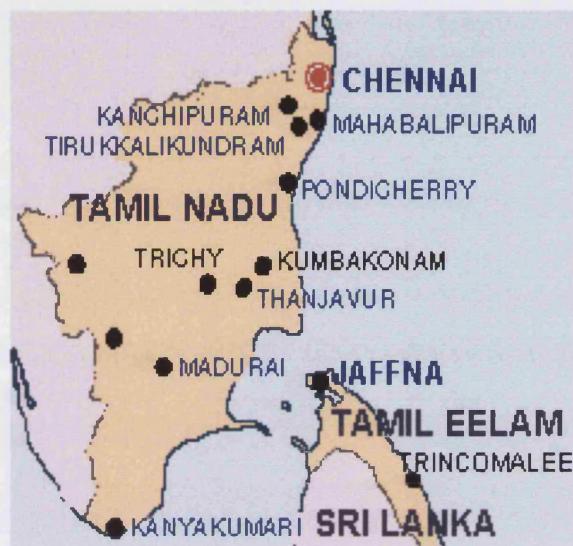


Figure 1 - Map of Sri Lanka in relation to India (1)

Source: tamilnation.org. access 17.9.2007



Figure 2 - Sri Lanka in relation to India (2)

Source: tamilnation.org. accessed 17.9.2007



Figure 3 - Map of Jaffna, Northern Sri Lanka

Source:



Figure 4 - Map of Tamil Eelam

Source: tamilnation.org. accessed 17.9.2007

Flags



Figure 5 - The Flag of Sri Lanka (depicting a Lion)

Source: geographic.org. accessed 17.9.2007



Figure 6 - The LTTE Flag (depicting a Tiger)

Source: tamilnation.org. accessed 17.9.2007

Photographs of Billboard images



Figure 7 - Schoolgirls and Combatant Women

Source: Author's photograph, October 2003



Figure 8 - Storyboard of Girls and the Effects of War

Source: Author's photograph (October 2003)

Logos and Other Pictures



Figure 9 - The Black Tiger Logo

Source: Eelam web page. Access 11.3.2006

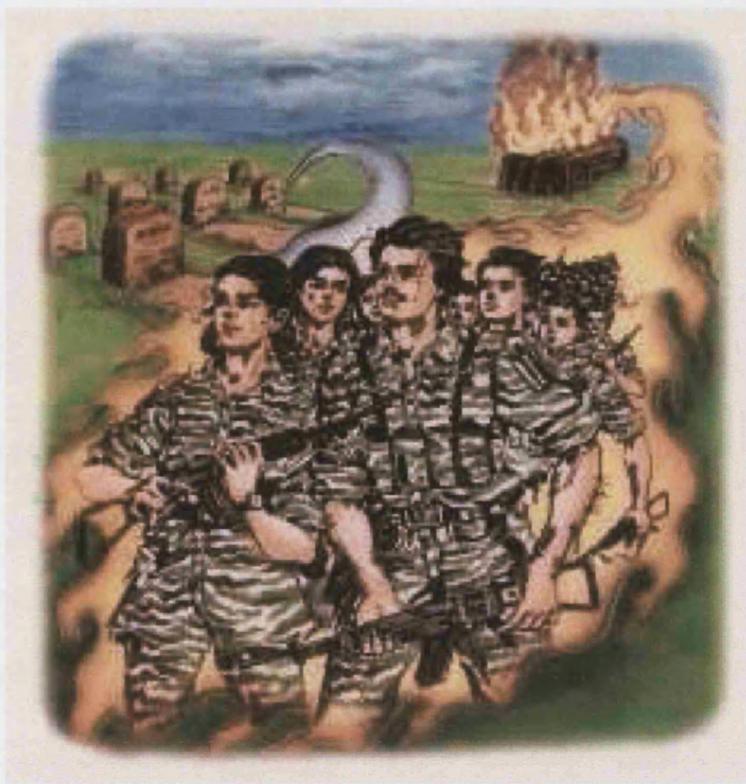


Figure 10 - Martyr's Together (Picture)

Source: Eelam web page. Access 11.3.2006



Figure 11 – Kuppi –the cyanide capsule (Picture)

Source: *Hindu News*. Access 12.5.2006



Figure 12 - Martyr's Day Card

Source: Eelam webpage. Accessed 7.9.2007: Basic Translation of the script for woman with gun and flowers “You who gave your life to Eelam, You appear now as tombs, We have come to follow you, We praise and worship your ways.”



Figure 13 - LTTE Cemetery, Pudukiirupr, Mulathiv District

Source: Author's photograph, October 2003