

# **Males and Females in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam: Why They Joined**

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I am reminded of words said by a particularly illustrious long-bearded wizard: "It is our choices...that show what we are, far more than our abilities." This process was less about what was learned through research and more about the choices one makes in the pursuit of knowledge. With that in mind, DFTBA!

## ABSTRACT

Both males and females were actively involved in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE.) The thesis analyses whether males and females joined the LTTE for different reasons. The methodology used examines statements from interviews conducted by various journalists and academics that contain references to security and identity, themes central to the conflict, to determine its conclusions. In addition, this thesis uses reports conducted by NGOs, interviews with the civilian population, and academic research. The thesis finds that males and females had different reasons for joining the organization. However, these motivations are surprising and call into question some traditional assumptions of how men and women (should) behave.

When females joined after the 1983 Black July riots, a massacre that left approximately 400-3000 Tamils dead, they did so at a time of heightened physical risk for the Tamil minority. Female LTTE members joined because of increased risks to bodily integrity, the experience of being displaced due to war, and after witnessing the effects of violence on their communities. Unlike men, however, women were less likely to speak of their own encounters with the Sri Lankan Defence Forces. Instead, females cited the experiences of their families and ethno-cultural community. Female recruits believed in the LTTE's definition of gender equality, one which constructed female emancipation as the right to engage in combat. Many recruits felt stifled by Tamil society, but they also needed an avenue to defend their people once non-violent protest became ineffective and their ethno-cultural identity became targeted for oppression

When males first joined the LTTE in 1972-1976, they did so because their access to education and employment was compromised. Until 1983 the LTTE violently protested against what they viewed as unjust educational and language policies directed towards Tamils. These educational and language policies prevented males from securing stable employment and post-

secondary education. In the beginning, men conceptualized security as the ability to secure a livelihood, but in response to male militancy the Sri Lankan government responded with military force. As the conflict grew the number of male casualties increased. In an attempt to seek protection from physical harm, males joined the LTTE, an organization they believed would grant them physical security. They relayed to interviewers stories of personal injustices committed by government security forces. Instead of describing the conflict using a gendered framework, male LTTE members believed that the lack of economic opportunity and the increased risk of bodily harm, which included death, detention, and torture, were the consequences of their marginalized ethno-cultural identity.

Though males and females joined the LTTE for different reasons, with females believing that gender equality and physical safety were paramount (freedom from fear) and males first joining because they needed access to education and employment to survive (freedom from want), both sexes were led to the LTTE because of Sri Lanka's institutional decay. LTTE members believed that the Sri Lankan government protected the Sinhalese at the expense of the Tamil population.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores why men and women joined the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and whether they did so for different reasons. The historical context for the study is the period of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict that occurs from 1976 to 2009. The conflict has been well documented by a number of prominent Sri Lankan scholars. The thesis is situated in wider discussions that focus on gender and militancy. It does not assume that men are the rightful bearers of political violence; nor does it deem female violent participation as abnormal. Both men and women have spoken of their reasons for joining the LTTE, and comparing these statements allows us to assess whether certain reasons for engaging in political violence were specific to males or females. The thesis finds that, for males and females in the LTTE, there were indeed gender and sex-specific motivations for joining the organization. However, these motivations are surprising and call into question some traditional assumptions of how men and women (should) behave. Female LTTE members joined because of increased risks to bodily integrity, the experience of being displaced due to war, and after witnessing the effects of violence on their communities. Female recruits liked the LTTE's definition of gender equality, one which constructed female emancipation as the right to engage in combat. Many female recruits felt stifled by Tamil society, but they also needed an avenue to defend their people once non-violent protest became ineffective and their ethno-cultural identity became targeted for oppression. When males first joined the LTTE in 1974-1976, they did so because their access to education and employment was compromised. These educational and language policies prevented males from securing stable employment and post-secondary education. In the beginning, men conceptualized security as the ability to secure a livelihood, but in response to male militancy the Sri Lankan government responded with military force. Since males formed a

large portion of these civilian casualties, male participants expanded their conceptualization of security to include the absence of physical harm. Males believed that they were targeted by the Sri Lankan government because of their marginalized ethno-cultural identity. Though males and females joined the LTTE for different reasons, with females believing that gender equality and physical safety were paramount (freedom from fear) and males first joining because they needed access to education and employment to survive (freedom from want), both sexes were led to the LTTE because of Sri Lanka's institutional decay.

The LTTE has been described by some analysts<sup>1</sup>, in addition to being an ethno-nationalist group, as Marxist-Leninist in ideological orientation. This possibility was considered seriously throughout the data collection process and merits comment. The literature reviewed does not indicate that a significant number of LTTE recruits found Marxism-Leninism appealing, even if certain key prominent members were explicitly committed to the political ideology. Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the LTTE, admired notable revolutionary socialists like Che Guevara and Sumara Bose. Prabhakaran has argued that Tamil Eelam should be a socialist state and that “there will be only one party supported by the people...In a socialist constitution the needs of the people will have priority.”<sup>2</sup>

Stephen Hopgood describes the characterization of the LTTE as Marxist-Leninist organization as an “overstatement.”<sup>3</sup> The research for this thesis supports that conclusion. While high profile members of the LTTE spoke hopefully of socialism, interviews indicate that neither females nor males used Marxism to justify their participation. The Sri Lankan government

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<sup>1</sup> DeVotta, Neil, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 327.

<sup>2</sup> M. Narayan Swam, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran* (Colombo: Vijitha Yappa Publications, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Hopgood, “Tamil Tigers, 1987—2002,” in *Making Sense of Suicide Bombing* ed. D. Gambetta, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 48.



labelled the LTTE as Marxists and leftists. But this label ignores the complexity of the LTTE's organizational makeup, the fact that there were many non-Marxist elements in the LTTE's leadership, and the presence of even more non-Marxist elements amongst lower-ranking combatants.<sup>4</sup> The LTTE espoused a Marxist ideology when it was useful, a practical tactic considering that much of the organization's existence occurred during the Cold War. The LTTE used Marxist imagery to obtain money and arms from India and high profile Indian supporters. The LTTE argued that, as both the LTTE and India were ideologically aligned as socialists, sympathy with the militant organization instead of the Sri Lankan government (considered pro-American) would be more beneficial to India's interests. India, a regional hegemon, took interest in influencing Sri Lankan affairs.<sup>5</sup>

There is little doubt that the LTTE leadership contained Marxists. However, as Ravi Vaitheespara once said: "Sincerely as it is peddled, [socialism] is at best a thin veneer over a profoundly indigenous nationalist movement..."<sup>6</sup> Unlike other Tamil militant groups, the LTTE did not employ Marxism as a recruitment method. When large groups of male youth began enrolling in Tamil militant organizations, they were, as one observer described, "demanding automatic rifles, not lessons in Marxism."<sup>7</sup> Militant organizations that were strongly Marxist were eventually destroyed by the LTTE in its quest for dominance. However, the few surviving groups realized that indoctrinating new recruits to political ideology was ineffective and counterproductive. Indeed, one militant recruiter stated that the influx of youth after the 1983

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<sup>4</sup> Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 327.

<sup>5</sup> E Nissan and RL Stirrat, "The Generation of Communal Identities," in *Sri Lanka: History and Roots of Conflict*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Ravi Vaitheespara, "Beyond 'Benign' and 'Fascist' Nationalisms," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 29 (2006): 3.

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Narayan Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas* (New Delhi: Knorak Publishers, 1994), 105.

riots destroyed their “desire to train boys politically”<sup>8</sup> and that many of the recruits threatened to leave the organization if they spoke of revolutionary socialism.<sup>9</sup>

The possibility remains that there may have been some males and females who joined the LTTE because they were attracted to its Marxist-Leninist ideology; however, the thesis demonstrates that socialist ideology did not feature prominently in the organization’s recruitment process. Further evidence would be needed to make a persuasive counter-argument. Instead, the goal of this thesis is to conduct an in-depth exploration on whether males and females joined the LTTE for different reasons.

### **A History of Sri Lanka’s Ethnic Conflict**

Sri Lanka has a population of approximately 21 million people.<sup>10</sup> Though there has been no census conducted since 1983, estimates indicate that approximately 74.6 percent of Sri Lankan inhabitants are Sinhalese.<sup>11</sup> The Sinhalese are mainly Buddhist, but include a sizable Christian minority. Sri Lankan Tamils comprise approximately 20 percent of the country’s population and they are Sri Lanka’s largest minority.<sup>12</sup> Most Tamils are Hindus, Christians or Muslims. (The Muslims consider themselves a distinct minority, though they share a common language with other Tamils.)

Sri Lanka has a long colonial history and has been colonized at different times by the Portuguese, Dutch and British. As with many of its colonial “assets,” Britain granted Sri Lanka independence shortly after the Second World War, in February of 1948. The transfer of governance further complicated ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils, already

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*,106.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>10</sup> Miranda Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,” *Civil Wars* 6 (2003): 4

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> K. M. De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 25.

evident prior to and during colonization. Sri Lankan political parties have usually been divided along ethnic lines, with Tamil elites largely holding political power prior to independence and Sinhalese parties dominating the political process post-independence.<sup>13</sup> British colonization in Sri Lanka saw the Tamil minority and certain high-caste Sinhalese elevated to positions of power within government and other important institutions, although Tamils only accounted for approximately 20 percent of the population.<sup>14</sup>

For many Sinhalese, national independence simply meant that the British would be replaced by elite British-educated Tamils, who were more westernized, English-speaking, and urban than the rural Sinhala-speaking doctors, monks and students.<sup>15</sup> These rural Sinhalese were elites in their own right and respected by their own communities, but did not usually occupy government positions. Sinhala Buddhist nationalism appealed strongly to them. In 1956 a coalition government called “The People’s United Front” was formed by mobilizing rural Sinhala elites. Communal identity became integral to the success of the coalition’s political campaign and it won by promising the adoption of a Sinhala-only official language policy and that Buddhism would be returned to its rightful dominant position in Sri Lanka.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after the government declared Sinhala as the sole official language of Sri Lanka, one of the Tamil political parties organized a non-violent protest outside of the parliament in Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka. There were violent clashes between Tamils and Sinhala-Buddhists. This clash took place in 1956. In 1958, another clash occurred, also perpetuated by

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<sup>13</sup> Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Kristen Stokke, “Building the Tamil Eelam State: Emerging State Institutions and Forms of Governance in LTTE Controlled Areas in Sri Lanka,” *Third World Quarterly* 27 (2006): 6.

<sup>15</sup>R.A Gunawardana, “The People of the Lion: the Sinhala Identity and Ideology in History and Historiography,” in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* ed. Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge,1990), 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

unfavourable language policies towards the Tamils. Tamils refused en masse to include the “Sri” (of Sri Lanka) on their vehicle license plates. Sinhala activists retaliated by defacing Tamil language signs in Sinhala-dominated areas. The conflict escalated when a train carrying Tamils was ambushed and the passengers beaten. Consequently, Sinhala villagers attacked local Tamil shopkeepers and the rioting spread to Colombo and other urban areas where Tamils were the minority. Approximately 400 people were killed and 12,000 displaced. Most of these people were Tamil.<sup>17</sup>

Further grievances included policies, crafted shortly after independence, that saw Tamils issued birth certificates, government documents, and land titles in a language most of them could not understand (Sinhala). All government communications within universities were exclusively in Sinhala.<sup>18</sup> Limiting university attendance to Sinhalese people affected the Tamil minority severely. Traditionally, education has been culturally important to the Tamil minority, and because Christian missionaries in Jaffna (the Tamil-dominated capital city of Sri Lanka’s Northern Province) constructed schools in areas that were heavily populated by the Tamil minority, many teachers were Tamil, and Tamil students always comprised a high proportion of the university population.<sup>19</sup> To rectify Tamil over-representation in universities, and as a way to resolve the imbalances between various districts and the rural-urban divide, a government policy called “standardization” was implemented in 1973. Under the new policy, Tamil students were required to score higher than prospective Sinhalese students to gain admission into science, engineering and medical faculties. In Jaffna, tens of thousands of young Tamils protested in the

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>18</sup> Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran*,15.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*.

streets against the standardization policy. They scrawled anti-government slogans on building walls. In many places government property was attacked and burned. Some Tamils began advocating secession from Sri Lanka.<sup>20</sup> Tamil nationalists fought for their rights in a Sinhala-dominated parliament. The transition from peaceful parliamentary activity to advocating violence by Tamil Eelam was the consequence of government policies that accentuated ethnic polarities on the Island. Sri Lanka has been described as a democracy that has avoided ethnic compromise with its minorities.<sup>21</sup> In addition to periodic violent ethnic skirmishes (that usually occurred at protests by rogue civilians) and the resistance to acknowledging Tamil as an official language equal to Sinhala, one of the earliest government policies to enrage Tamil nationalists was “colonization.” In practice, colonization entailed resettling Sinhalese families in territory where Tamils formed the majority of the population. According to Tamil nationalists, this policy was enacted for two reasons: first, to dilute Tamil power in electoral politics, and second, to erode the persuasiveness of the claim that Tamils occupied a distinct geographic territory and were therefore a nation.<sup>22</sup>

In 1972, small groups of Tamil militants, commonly referred to as the “Tigers” began appearing in northern Sri Lanka.<sup>23</sup> They focused their attacks on representatives of the state and on Tamils thought to be collaborating with the state. In response, the Sri Lankan government moved large groups of troops and police into the northern part of the country, an area heavily populated by the Tamil minority, and introduced the “Prevention of Terrorism Act.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Neil DeVotta, “Control Democracy.”

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> “Tigers” is a reference to multiple Tamil militant groups, not a reference to the LTTE.

<sup>24</sup> Gunawardana, “The People of the Lion,” 37.

In 1981 large numbers of Sinhala police were moved to Jaffna to supervise local government elections. After a shooting incident, the police went on a rampage, setting fires, looting and killing. The Jaffna Library, the second largest library in Sri Lanka and the main library for Tamil material in the country, was burned to the ground. Its destruction was seen as a deliberate attack on Tamil learning.<sup>25</sup> Compared to previous riots in the 1950s that centred on Tamil language and learning and involved civilian on civilian violence, this phase of the conflict saw Sri Lankan state forces attacking Tamil civilians. By 1983, the army was allowed to shoot, kill and bury civilians without requesting an inquest, although this power was later withdrawn.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of the LTTE is an important part of Sri Lanka's turbulent history of ethnic tensions. Prior to its defeat in 2009, the LTTE was an ethno-nationalist separatist group located mostly in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. The organization fought for a separate homeland called Tamil Eelam, a home for the ethnic Tamil minority that historically populated the northern and eastern regions in Sri Lanka. For close to three decades, the LTTE resorted to armed struggle in an attempt to establish self-government. Though the LTTE waged many successful battles, its dissolution was announced and conceded to by its leadership in May 2009 after a prolonged military campaign against the Sri Lankan Defence Forces (SLDF).

Standardization caused much Tamil anger and resulted in the formation of many Tamil militant organizations.<sup>27</sup> One of these organizations was the Tamil New Tigers (TNT). The LTTE were the successors of the TNT, an organization that Vellupillai Prabhakaran formed in 1972 when he was 17 years old. The TNT gained notoriety when, in 1975, Prabhakaran and three

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>27</sup> Stokke, "Building the Tamil Eelam State."

associates assassinated the mayor of Jaffna. This was a city that the LTTE would later control for much of its existence and where Prabhakaran would remain the leader of the LTTE until his death in May 2009.

By 1976, the TNT had become the LTTE. The organization enraged the Sinhala majority when, in 1983, it carried out an attack and killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers. According to the LTTE, this attack was conducted in retaliation for the rape of some schoolgirls by these soldiers.<sup>28</sup> The Tamil minority call the Sinhala reaction to this event “Black July.” In July of 1983 government supported mobs killed an estimated 400-3000 Tamils and destroyed tens of thousands of houses.<sup>29</sup>

Black July, considered the official start date of the Sri Lanka/LTTE war, polarized both ethnicities by destroying inter-cultural ties and any leadership positions Tamils held in Sinhala dominated areas. Nationalist sentiments among the Sinhalese were low prior to the massacre, but their ethnic and cultural identities grew after the event.<sup>30</sup> Tamil survivors living in Sinhala-majority neighbourhoods reported that prior to the event their Sinhala neighbours were courteous, but that after the massacre they became fearful, remained indoors and were prevented from forming cross-ethnic relationships because Sinhala police encouraged civilians to report suspicious Tamil activity.<sup>31</sup> (Many Tamils were reported for engaging in mundane everyday tasks.)<sup>32</sup> Pre-1983, Tamils had been successful traders and industrialists, catapulting them into

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<sup>28</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 12.

<sup>29</sup> A compilation of sources provides different numbers.

<sup>30</sup> Brenner, Francesca, “Fragments of Memory, Processes of State: Ethnic Violence through the life Histories of Participants,” in *Economy, Culture, and Sri Lanka*, ed. Deborah Winslow et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

the middle and upper classes of Colombo families. “Two weeks prior to the riots, Tamils controlled 60 percent of wholesale trade and 80 percent of retail trade in the capital. After the riots the trade was nearly eradicated.”<sup>33</sup> The material conditions that secured their affluent positions and allowed them to integrate culturally in Sinhala-dominated communities<sup>34</sup> were gone.

Before the 1983 riots, Tamil nationalists mostly criticized poor government policy that exacerbated ethnic tensions. Territory that was once historically dominated by the Tamil minority was being colonized, and language and citizenship rights were being eroded. Tamil ethno-cultural identity was being compromised and militants trying to attain these rights were facing violent opposition. Nationalists worked to ensure that the Tamil minority had sufficient economic, employment, and educational opportunities, and cast doubts on whether the state could provide human security to its largest minority. Sri Lankan government transgressions increased militant activity. The military response to these transgressions created physical insecurity for the Tamil civilian population. Tamil political parties used these reasons to justify a sovereign Tamil homeland. Black July became a successful recruitment tool for the LTTE, as many Tamils flocked to militant organizations shortly after the incident. Many of those who asked for admission into these organizations were women. At the height of the LTTE’s power, approximately 30% of its membership was female.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *The Economist*, “Sri Lanka Puts Torch to its Future,” August 20, 1983.

<sup>34</sup> The term “community” in this thesis refers to primordial ties characterized by shared ethnicity.

<sup>35</sup> Hassan, S. Azmat, *Countering Violent Extremism: The Fate of the Tamil Tigers* (New York: EastWest institute, 2009.)



A series of military victories in the 1990s brought certain areas, especially in the north, under LTTE control. During this period there was military parity between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. From 1990-1995, the LTTE created administrative institutions in the territory under its control, and consequently Sri Lanka began to appear as two states confined by one internationally recognized border. Despite LTTE control of this territory, official Sri Lankan government institutions and officials continued to work in LTTE-controlled areas. Therefore there was also a dual state structure that developed within areas controlled by the LTTE. Travelling from a government-controlled area to an LTTE-controlled area resembled crossing the border between two states: travellers were required to show identity cards, have their goods inspected, and pay tariffs. The LTTE aspired to be not only a militant organization but a legitimate government by establishing judiciaries, economic development initiatives, and police services. Solidifying its role as a legitimate governing body, the LTTE also participated as a formal negotiating partner with the Sri Lankan government. From 1983 to 2002, five cease-fire agreements were negotiated by the two parties.

By 1985, the ethnic conflict was causing regional concerns. India sponsored a peace conference in Bhutan where both the Sri Lankan government and several militant Tamil groups (along with Tamil political parties) met to discuss the heightening ethnic conflict. At this conference, the militant Tamil groups provided the Sri Lankan government with a short list of demands and requests, which included acknowledging the right to self-determination and promising to maintain the integrity of traditional Tamil territory. Even during these negotiations, military action continued and hundreds of civilian lives were lost.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 14.

In the circumstances of the Sri Lankan civil war, many young men and women chose to join the LTTE:

Although there are exceptions, the bulk of...terrorist members are not typically part-timers or mercenaries. In general, the ability to commit otherwise unspeakable acts—not to mention giving one's own life—necessitates an unshakable belief that these acts are somehow in the cause of some absolute and worthy purpose.<sup>37</sup>

The thesis explores why Tamil males and females joined the LTTE. Did males and females join the LTTE for different reasons, and did they conceptualize their involvement differently?

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<sup>37</sup> Laurence Miller, "The Terrorist Mind," *International Journal of Offender Therapy* 50 (2005): 2.

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

The research methodology employed in the thesis involves examining verbal justifications made by ex-combatants, the scholarly literature that covers related subjects, and reports by NGOs and advocacy groups.

The analysis of male and female involvement in the LTTE is situated within a wider discussion of why people join militant organizations. Research that focuses on violent women often takes one of two forms. The first form characterizes female involvement in political violence as unusual. In a study of Palestinian suicide bombers, for example, Terri Toles Patkin found that western media coverage tried to search actively for alternate explanations for female participation in militancy.<sup>38</sup> In cross-cultural research on female militancy, researchers Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry found similarities in how violent women were analyzed. They maintain that women, like men, can use violence out of desperation or because they find violence useful to fulfill “some other socio-economic motivation.”<sup>39</sup> Prevailing academic literature and media accounts, they argue, have ignored possible explanations that shift the focus away from female victimization. “[W]omen who commit violence have been characterized as anything but regular criminals or regular soldiers or regular terrorists; they are captured in storied fantasies which deny women’s agency and reify gender stereotypes and subordination.”<sup>40</sup> Following this trend, the Sri Lankan government portrayed female LTTE members as victims and coerced participants.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Terri Toles Patkin, “Explosive Baggage: Female Palestinian Suicide Bombers and the Rhetoric of Emotion,” *Women and Language* 27 (2004):1.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

<sup>41</sup> The Government of Sri Lanka, “Civil Military Coordination Jaffna,” <http://www.cimicjaffna.lk/main.php>.

A second body of research has been conducted by international relations scholars who have sought to provide alternative accounts to the literature that paints violent women as unstable. (Some of these scholars self-identify as feminists<sup>42</sup>.) Scholars such as Miranda Alison, Margaret Trawick, and Peter Schalk have extensively interviewed LTTE females and have spent time in LTTE-dominated areas. Their work chronicles the lives of militant females, and their methodology consists of asking questions of these participants. The responses they received were taken at face value and were not viewed as less credible because the female interviewees were engaged with political violence, traditionally seen as an un-female pursuit. The outcomes of these interviews are often different from scholars who write about violent women as fascinating anomalies. Miranda Alison determined that women joined the LTTE for a number of reasons, including the loss of a family member, anger towards SLDF atrocities, and fear of sexual assault. Margaret Trawick details the daily lives of Tamil youth in her ethnographic accounts and illustrates the profound ramifications to the way people think when they live in war zones. Peter Schalk writes about the LTTE's gender ideology and how its "martial feminism" was appealing to Tamil females. In general, interviews and reports that allow women to explain their own involvement highlight a variety of reasons why women may choose to engage in violence. Often their decisions are influenced by geographical and socio-economic contexts. These reasons, in the cases of voluntary recruitment, do not show militant females to be confused victims; the majority of interviewees explained their violent involvement by giving articulate explanations.

The literature that compares male to female reasons for engaging in political violence is sparse. The lack of critical study is unfortunate because without analyzing the reasons men engage in violence, it is difficult to describe female participation in violence as unique. To

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<sup>42</sup> These feminists include prominent academics like Laura Sjoberg, Caron E. Gentry, Miranda Alison, and Cynthia Enloe.

describe female political violence as unique is to say that women engage in militant acts for different reasons than men. However, that claim cannot be supported without research that focuses on male militants that simultaneously acknowledges gender and sex.

Because there are many methods that could be used to determine why Tamils joined the LTTE, there is a need to clearly enunciate what will be explored when examining the available data. Did different sexes have different motivations? The answer to that question may have wider research implications, including expanding our understanding of modern militant recruitment processes and how governments fail their peoples. This thesis focuses on security and identity as concepts that explain the different perspectives of males and females who made the decision to join the LTTE.

To begin, identity and security need to be defined. The thesis focuses on three sub-categories of identity: ethnicity, culture, and gender. While other forms of identity are important (including sexual orientation and individual identity), limiting the scope of identity to ethnicity, culture and gender allows us to focus on large themes central to the Sri Lankan conflict. Additionally, LTTE recruits often cited identity and security as reasons for joining the organization, thereby reinforcing the importance of these categories.

Ethnic identity is a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by descent-based attributes. Descent-based attributes include skin colour, language, religion, tribe, caste and nationality.<sup>43</sup> Membership in ethnic groups is ascribed by kinship, unlike membership in other political groups (political parties, civil organizations etc.) If an LTTE member were to mention the systematic elimination of the Tamil language from Sri Lankan public life as a

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<sup>43</sup> Kanchan Chandra, "What Is Ethnic Identity?" *Annual Review of Political Science* 9 (2006): 1.

justification for joining the LTTE, then this justification would be an example where ethnic identity was a motivation for violence.

Ethnic and cultural identities often overlap, but there are a few notable differences between them. While ethnic identity is based on the perception of shared ancestry, cultural identity is based on the perception of shared representations, norms, and practices. “One can have deep ethnic differences without correspondingly important cultural differences...and one can have cultural variation without ethnic boundaries.”<sup>44</sup> Using cultural identity as a justification for militancy would include stating, as an example, that Tamil exceptionalism and the nation’s distinct culture were under attack and required a separate state to survive. Because many respondents cited both cultural and ethnic identity without making a clear distinction between them, and because identity and culture are often reinforcing, this thesis will examine both concepts under one sub-category of “ethno-cultural identity.”

Like cultural and ethnic identity, gender identity is “a process of negotiation among people and interest groups.”<sup>45</sup> Like other forms of identity, gender influences how people behave, act and relate to the world. If female combatants argued that they found the LTTE’s female liberation ideology attractive and that they joined partially due to the organization’s stance on gender equality, then this would be an example of gender identity influencing women.

All forms of identity are constantly evolving. Identity is the result of dialogue between the group’s membership and with people outside of the group.<sup>46</sup> It is entirely plausible that

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<sup>44</sup> Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ethnic Identity, National Identity, and Inter-Group Conflict: The Significance of Personal Experiences” in *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Resolution* ed. Richard D. Ashmore et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 42.

<sup>45</sup> Gunhild Gunsen and Svein Vigeland Rottem, “Gender Identity and the Subject of Security,” *Security Dialogue* 155 (2004): 35.

<sup>46</sup> Joanne Nagel, “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Culture and Identity,” *Social Problems* 41 (1994): 1.

combatants would justify their involvement in the LTTE using all three sub-categories of identity listed above. The thesis places justifications relating to ethnicity, culture and gender under the broad category of “identity” and further sub-divides identity into “ethno-cultural” and “gender” to illustrate different themes found in the data sample.

Security is defined in the thesis as “human security.” Human security is a concept that rejects traditional state-centered definitions of security. Traditionally, security is defined as the safety of the state from external and internal forces. But for many people around the world, much greater threats come from hunger and poverty than from external threats to the state. Furthermore, “a greater threat may come from their state, rather than from an ‘external adversary.’”<sup>47</sup> Human security holds that the individual, not the state, is the ultimate referent of security. Community, sub-national and supranational and other groups are also referents of security, “but the individual is the ultimate one, [as] once individual security is assured, so is the security of all other referents.”<sup>48</sup>

Human security is a widely employed concept in political science, but one that is much debated and has many definitions. For the purposes of this thesis, human security will be defined broadly, as first outlined in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme and popularized by the United Nations and certain countries frequently referred to as “middle powers.” The UN definition of human security, “in its broadest sense, embraces far more than the absence of violent conflict. It encompasses human rights, good governance, access to education and health

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<sup>47</sup> Edward Newman, “Human Security and Constructivism,” *International Security Perspectives* 2 (2001): 1.

<sup>48</sup> Alexandra Amouyel, “What is Human Security?” *Human Security Journal* 1 (2006): 1.

care and ensuring that each individual has opportunities and choices to fulfil his or her potential...<sup>49</sup>

The thesis uses the concept of human security instead of other notions of security because it focuses on human welfare and includes but does not prioritize military threats over economic threats or threats to accessing education. The concept allows us to consider, for example, educational disruption as a factor that influenced personal security and motivated Tamil men and women to join the LTTE.

An important challenge for any researcher is gaining access to available data. While the thesis research did not allow for direct interviews with LTTE members, it does cite interviews that were conducted by prominent LTTE and Sri Lankan experts, including Catharine Brun, Narayan Swamy, and Dagmar-Hellman Rajanayagam. Additionally, the LTTE released promotional material such as speeches and videos to be consumed by the general public. The civil war in Sri Lanka is of great interest to NGOs and agencies such as Amnesty International, the Asian Human Rights Watch, and the OMCT (Organisation Mondiale Contra Torture/World Organization Against Torture) have published field reports and assessments readily available on their websites. In total, this thesis uses approximately 39 interviews conducted with women, 26 interviews conducted with men, and 11 separate NGO reports.

As with other studies, the availability of data dictated what sources could be used. Those analysts who interviewed LTTE members faced a number of barriers that likely affected their access to information. The Sri Lankan government prevented journalists and academics from interviewing incarcerated LTTE members who did not adhere to the government's version of

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<sup>49</sup>Annan, Kofi, *Millennium Report* (New York: United Nations), accessed November 2011, <http://www.gdrc.org/sustdev/husec/Definitions.pdf>.



events. Additionally, researchers seeking to interview active LTTE members needed permission from the organization.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, interviews have been chosen to reflect a variety of data collection methods. This thesis uses statements given by members who have received permission from the LTTE and the government to speak with the interviewer, but also draws on interviews conducted with former members who have fled the conflict and reside as refugees in Canada and the United Kingdom. Their status as former combatants is secret and they have consented to interviews without government or LTTE approval.

The variety of sources ensures that themes found throughout interviewee responses are not necessarily the result of members reiterating pre-approved LTTE or government beliefs. Though individuals could have been chosen for interviews because of their demonstrated commitment (or regret, in the case of incarcerated members) to the cause, interviews with members who fled the conflict and who may have been less committed to the organization increases the credibility of the conclusions. Additionally, independent NGO reports are useful in providing supplementary evidence less influenced by government or militant agendas. The conclusions are derived exclusively from this sample. While the thesis may not come to the same conclusions as the authors of such papers and reports, it utilizes their interviews to form part of the data. The same interviews might be used to form different conclusions.

In addition to interviews with LTTE members, this thesis uses research that focuses on the male and female Tamil civilian population. This research is important in understanding the effects of war on the Tamil population. Further, the civilian population was constantly in contact with the LTTE because territory was not exclusively controlled by the Sri Lankan government.

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<sup>50</sup> These challenges were described in interviews conducted by Jan Goodwin and Miranda Alison, and ethnographic accounts written by Margaret Trawick and Francesca Brenner.

Civilians knew of the recruitment and propaganda tactics used by the SLDF and LTTE. Civilians are therefore included in the sample population, along with female and male LTTE members.

Academics and journalists, NGOs and activist groups have interviewed LTTE members. Though the statements used will reflect a variety of people and organizations that have taken an interest in this topic, academics usually base their work on several interviews, and journalists will interview one or two people at a time. Therefore more information will be drawn from academic fieldwork than interviews conducted by journalists.

Because questions posed differ from one interviewer to another, conclusions will be drawn based on common themes found in interviewee responses. For example, while different questions are asked across several interviews, if several respondents mention systematic atrocities against the Tamil people *because* they are Tamil, then a reasonable conclusion could be that Tamil civilians were motivated to join the LTTE in part due to atrocities inflicted on ethnic Tamils. The variety of interview sources is also used, in part, to ensure the validity of the themes found in these interviews. If the same themes are found across NGO reports, interviews organized by the LTTE/government, and interviews given by former combatants who have fled the war, then the justifications given by interviewees become more substantiated.

The LTTE was destroyed by the Sri Lankan armed forces in May 2009. However, the ramifications of the civil war carry on, and Tamil news agencies continue to criticize the Sri Lankan government's treatment of the Tamil minority, including the poor treatment of Tamil women by the SLDF. Therefore, the time period being analyzed within the thesis is limited from the inception of the organization to its defeat--or from 1974 to 2009. Statements made by combatants after 2009 (which would mean that at the time of the interviews they were ex-combatants) are used because they contain information about the 1976-2009 time period.

The thesis takes note of the existence of a Tamil minority in India, as that group has also had their struggles and challenges. Its political struggle, however, is not identical to the Tamil minority's struggle in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the analysis is limited to the civil war in Sri Lanka and the Tamil population within its borders.

### CHAPTER 3: FEMALES IN THE LTTE

Women join militant groups for a variety of reasons. The intent of this chapter is to determine why women joined the LTTE, and then to compare their reasons with those given by male LTTE members in Chapter 4. While women and girls were conscripted into the LTTE, the focus of this thesis is on those females and males who volunteered to become Tigers. Volunteers include those who were recruited (sought by the LTTE) and those who took the initiative and sought out the LTTE. While it is common knowledge that during slow recruitment periods the LTTE conscripted, on average, one member per family into the organization, different sources point out that more recruits volunteered than were conscripted.<sup>51</sup> But the choice to volunteer for the LTTE was influenced by contextual pressures. Domestic burdens, violent conflict, and social location created processes that drove women to join the LTTE.<sup>52</sup> An analysis of the academic research, reports conducted by human rights organizations, and statements given by female Tamil Tigers reveal a pattern.

Women joined the LTTE for reasons relating to group identity and security. They were attracted to the LTTE's stance on gender emancipation and were aware of their gendered positions while simultaneously acknowledging that their marginalized status was also based on their ethno-cultural identity. LTTE females tended to conceptualize security as freedom from threats of physical harm, but many interviewees also believed that gender equality was important to living

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<sup>51</sup> Interviews conducted by magazines and newspapers such as *The Telegraph* and *Marie-Claire* highlight volunteerism, along with academic interviews conducted by Miranda Alison, Margaret Trawick, Kim Jordan and Miriam Denov.

<sup>52</sup> Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 26 (2003): 3.

a meaningful life; women spoke of how the LTTE provided them the opportunity to grow and become protectors of the Tamil Nation.<sup>53</sup>

### **Gender and Ethno-Cultural Identity**

Female LTTE members have a unique history within the organization. In 1983 the LTTE founded the Women's Front for the Liberation Tigers (*Viuthalai Pulikal Munani* in Tamil). Female fighters in the LTTE were often called "Birds of Freedom" or "Birds of Independence." This was not a formal or institutionalized name, but a colloquial term used by the organization to describe the first women who received training in 1985.<sup>54</sup> Giving these women a unique name unshared by men highlighted their revolutionary status.<sup>55</sup>

By October 1987, Prabhakaran had created the first all-women training camp in Jaffna (a district located in the far north of Sri Lanka and occupying most of the Jaffna Peninsula.) The all-women training camp was completely organized and implemented by the existing women cadres. Beginning in the mid-1980s, women cadres in eastern Sri Lanka were engaged in dangerous intelligence-gathering activities as underground guerrillas. Initially, female cadres were organized in units headed by a male commander, though by September 1989 the women headed their own camps and units.<sup>56</sup> In 1990 approximately 75 percent of the second-generation LTTE memberships were below thirty years of age, with approximately 50 percent between the

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<sup>53</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the names of Tamil Tigers are their *noms de guerre*.

<sup>54</sup> Peter Schalk, "Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers in Tamil Eelam: The Martial Feminism of Atel Palacinkam," *South Asia Research* 14 (1994): 2.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

ages of 15 and 21.<sup>57</sup> Most estimates place female membership in the LTTE at approximately 30 percent.<sup>58</sup>

Females were involved in the most violent battles and in the most dangerous tasks. Some of them were Black Tigers (the sub-section of the LTTE that focuses on suicide bombing operations), and they were also involved in land, air, and sea operations. Females participating in these units sustained a large percentage of casualties. For example, within the Black Tigers there were three sub-wings: Military Wing Black Tigers, the Black Sea Tigers, and the Intelligence Wing Black Tigers. From 1987 to 2006, 18 female Military Wing Black Tigers were killed in combat (compared to 58 male cadres). The casualty count, male to female, for the Black Sea Tigers was 48 to 125, and for the Intelligence Wing the number was 9 to 44.<sup>59</sup> While women in the LTTE initially participated in non-violent activities, by the late 1980s they were fighting and dying with men.

Many reasons are offered as to why the LTTE began recruiting women. A popular theory suggests that there was a shortage of manpower in the early 1980s and women were targeted out of necessity.<sup>60</sup> While this explanation is compelling and accurate, it does not explain why women and girls tried to initiate their own participation within the organization. Miranda Alison, an academic who spent much time in LTTE-controlled Sri Lanka and interviewed many female Tigers, argues that young Tamil women wanted to join the LTTE and the organization welcomed

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<sup>57</sup>Ramasubramanian, R., *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka*, (New Delhi: Institute for Peace and Conflict, 2004.)

<sup>58</sup> Nimmi Gowrinathan, "Why Do Women Rebel? Understanding State Repression and Female Participation in Sri Lanka." *Centre for the Study of Women*, UCLA, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/2hk943xk;jsessionid=1E9DB57CFAFD503645F3DD8E010282C#page-5>.

<sup>59</sup> Arjuna Gunawardena, "Female Black Tigers," 81-90.

<sup>60</sup> In nearly every article I have read, including those written by Gunawardena, Alison, Trawick, Jordan and Denov, this theory has been suggested.

them to prove that they were part of an all-encompassing social movement.<sup>61</sup> Adele Ann, a white Australian woman who often acted as an LTTE spokeswoman (and who was also a Tiger—Adele Ann is her *nom de guerre*; her last name is Balasingham) and who wrote several autobiographies detailing her time with the LTTE, also confirms that women urged LTTE leaders to accept women into the movement; the women who joined the LTTE were sending a signal that they were dissatisfied with the status quo. Prabhakaran accepted and encouraged these demands, but had to convince his fellow male cadres who had:

[M]ale chauvinist conceptions of women and their place in society... The emergent aspirations of Tamil women to join the armed struggle brought increasing pressure on the LTTE leadership to step up its policy of inducting women into the armed struggle. Young women demanded their right to self-defence and their right to exercise their patriotic sentiments. The LTTE leadership, committed to the emancipation and equality of women, welcomed such demands and expanded its military programme for training women.<sup>62</sup>

The Women's Front was born out of these negotiations. Their goals were articulated in five points:

1. To secure the right to self-determination for the people of Tamil Eelam and to establish an independent democratic state of Tamil Eelam.
2. To abolish oppressive caste discrimination and divisions, and semi-feudal customs such as the dowry system.
3. To eliminate all discrimination against Tamil women and eliminate all other discrimination; to secure social, political and economic equality e.g., equal pay, equal opportunities in employment and education.
4. To ensure that Tamil women control their own lives

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<sup>61</sup> Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the Wheel."

<sup>62</sup> Adele Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom* (Sydney: Fairmax, 2003), 272.

5. To secure legal protection for women against sexual harassment, rape and domestic violence.<sup>63</sup>

These goals can be divided into two categories. The first goal centres on ethno-cultural identity and nationalism, and the last four goals centre on gender identity and security for women. All females were automatically members of the Women's Front, its existence dedicated to providing LTTE women an avenue to express militant nationalist sentiments, along with creating a gender-sensitive environment that would uphold the tenants of human security. To look at the goals of the Women's Front is to understand what was important to LTTE women. They wanted to establish a Tamil homeland and protect civilian and militant women from "all...discrimination" both inside and outside the Tamil community. Paralleling the desire for national self-determination, goals 2-5 indicate they also wanted women to determine and control their own lives.

As shown by the aims of the Women's Front, many women joined for reasons relating to identity and security. Being attached to the LTTE allowed one to create a meaningful life. Civilians who felt helpless in war sought an avenue to empower themselves. One Sri Lankan activist argued that, after failed political opportunities and Sri Lankan unwillingness to engage women in civil society groups, the LTTE became increasingly more attractive to women. "[W]omen had this romantic notion of emancipation and were looking for a taste of equality, which the rebels were providing."<sup>64</sup>

Women engaged in militant labour to gain their own and/or collective rights. Even though revolutions often substitute one set of male patriarchal rulers with another, militant

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<sup>63</sup> Schalk, "Female Fighters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam."

<sup>64</sup> Nimi Gowarintan, "Why Do Women Rebel?"



fighters are people of all ages who work to challenge established states. When women join liberation efforts, “they participate in social processes that purport to change colonial power relations...Guerrilla warfare provides opportunities for them to change their usual labor, to define and exert their own power, and to influence agendas usually controlled by colonial government and men at home.”<sup>65</sup>

The Women’s Front was influential within the Tamil community. Apart from being involved in the LTTE’s social, economic and military activities, it also coordinated activities with women’s organizations, trade unions and health centres.<sup>66</sup> Due to the considerable time the LTTE effectively functioned as a government, female LTTE members became extensively involved in Tamil civilian life and helped create political and social agendas that affected women. Women stated to various interviewers that they were attracted to inhabiting new roles.<sup>67</sup>

Several women interviewed mentioned their female identities as a reason for joining the LTTE. A pattern emerges when one reads statements by female cadres. Many said that Tamil culture had hindered female potential and that the LTTE had allowed women to reach their potential by disproving that women were weak. Thamilini, the leader of the Woman’s Front Military Wing, stated that, “...[O]ur country’s attitude towards women is different and men are always praised for doing harder and cleverer jobs...”<sup>68</sup> Several interviewees mentioned that Tamil culture frowned on women riding bicycles, climbing trees and going out alone at night.

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<sup>65</sup> Christina Sylvester, *Feminist International Relations: An Unfinished Journey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 221.

<sup>66</sup> Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009), 184.

<sup>67</sup> These interviewers include Peter Schalk and Miranda Alison.

<sup>68</sup> Margaret Trawick, “Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE,” *South Asia* 20 (1997): Special Issue.”

However, the LTTE treated all its soldiers alike and female cadres were allowed to ride motorcycles and armoured vehicles.<sup>69</sup>

The LTTE, and therefore the Women's Front, believed that female induction into combat units was a form of gender emancipation. According to LTTE ideology, any fair society created of revolution was not truly fair without the emancipation of women. In an International Women's Day speech, Prabhakaran stated that, "women's liberation occupies a prominent place in our concept of social liberation...If the women who represent the majority of our population continue to live in suppression, it is difficult to take forward our liberation struggle as a national struggle."<sup>70</sup> The idea that female liberation was won through militant participation was reinforced by official spokespersons. In an interview with Anton Raja, an LTTE spokesman, he stated, "[i]n the old society, women were cultured and nice. We loved them, but they had no major role outside of the kitchen. We went around to the women and told them: "You are the equal of men, you have the same rights, you can join us in the struggle." According to Raja, the message must have resonated with Tamil women because, "hundreds and hundreds of women signed up to fight."<sup>71</sup>

Raja's statements directly contradict Adele Ann and frames men as mercifully granting women their liberation. (Adele Ann insisted that women tried to persuade LTTE leadership into accepting their participation, not the other way around.) His words are telling because they

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<sup>69</sup> Alisa Stack-O'Connor, "Lions, Tigers and Freedom Birds: How and Why the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam Employs Women," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007): 43.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Schalk and A. Velupillai, *Tamil Source in English Translation: Reflection of the Leader, Quotes by Velupillai Pirapakaran*, (Uppsala: Teologiska Institutionen, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Dexter Filkins, "In Sri Lanka, Dying to be Equal," *Los Angeles Times*, February 21, 2000, accessed September 10, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/feb/21/news/mn-1050/2>.

indicate that the LTTE took an official stance on female liberation and that even the organization believed women joined, in part, because they agreed with its stance on gender emancipation.

The organization used female emancipation as a recruitment tool. Even while he did not speak of violent resistance, Prabhakaran dedicated many of his speeches to addressing women's rights.

Women should be awakened from the darkness of an ideological world which makes them believe that their oppressive conditions are the result of their fate, of their actions of former births, of the moral laws enunciated for them, of the cultural configurations that determined their lives. Such an awakening is a necessary condition for their emancipation.<sup>72</sup>

Further comments by female fighters suggest that they found this ideology convincing. “[W]e will never have to cook or clean and that sort of subordinate [task] for the group...for the men.”<sup>73</sup> Rather than staying at home, forgotten in undervalued domesticity, LTTE fighters were described by Prabhakaran as “...rare human beings; extraordinary beings.”<sup>74</sup>

Margaret Trawick, a prominent anthropologist who spent much time with the LTTE, asked the young women whether they found their time with the LTTE fulfilling. In one interview, a fighter named Sita spoke of the personal satisfaction she felt joining the movement, and how she had no desire for marriage because fighting for the liberation of her people was enough. She stated that if she had stayed home she would not have had the same opportunities as the LTTE had given her, and if she was to die today she would be satisfied because, “when people die in the movement, it is a useful death. If I died in the house, there would be nothing

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<sup>72</sup> Vellupillai Prabhakaran, “International Women’s Day, 1992. Last modification unknown, [http://ruralpeople.atSPACE.org/international\\_womens\\_day\\_prabhakaran\\_1992.htm](http://ruralpeople.atSPACE.org/international_womens_day_prabhakaran_1992.htm)1.

<sup>73</sup> Kim Jordan and Myrian Denov, “Birds of Freedom? Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9 (2007): 1”

<sup>74</sup> Schalk and Vellupillai, *Tamil Source in English Translation*.

remarkable about that.”<sup>75</sup> When Trawick asked her, “are you [personally] liberated now?” Sita responded, “[a]bsolutely!”<sup>76</sup>

Another cadre, Thangaci, who was a soldier in the Sea Tigers, stated that without the LTTE she would have been suppressed and would not have had “any awareness about the world.”<sup>77</sup> However, because she joined the LTTE, she now had self-confidence. Geetha, also a soldier, stated that by joining the LTTE she now knew that women were “no less and can do anything and everything” and that before she joined the organization she was afraid of the dark and would not leave her house during the night. Another soldier, Sudarvili, added that she found her time with the LTTE to be fulfilling and said, “through our struggle for liberation we are fighting for the women’s liberation also...[W]e will free the girls in this country, not only within the movement, outside also.”<sup>78</sup>

A common thread appears from the testimonies of these women. They spoke of a culture and a society where different tasks and work were separated by gender. Thamilini mentioned that women had been socialized into believing that they could not make their own decisions and that someone needed to make decisions on their behalf. However, once she joined the LTTE, she realized she could be an active participant in her own life.<sup>79</sup>

While female liberation was an important motivation for many women to join the LTTE, it was not the only reason. One ex-LTTE member stated that while some women joined the LTTE for the purpose of female liberation, “many of them are going as part of the liberation, to

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<sup>75</sup> Trawick, “Reasons for Violence.”

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 165.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel.”

liberate the homeland. Most females join the movement with the purpose to better the situation of the Tamil nation.”<sup>80</sup> In fact, interviews with Alison indicate that over half of respondents joined, in part, due to nationalist sentiment. Participating in the LTTE also created a sense of ethnic pride. Another interviewee reported that, “women feel they are making a positive contribution to their motherland which...instils a sense of pride and makes them feel important for the Tamil nation.”<sup>81</sup>

Tamil ethnic nationalism has a difficult history and begins with Sri Lankan independence. However, there are notable incidents that resulted in the increase of female participation in the LTTE. The 1983 Black July riots left a strong impact on the Tamil community, an event which was the consequence of a government policy that reduced language rights and led to increased militant activity. The Tamil language had been one of the most important rallying cries in the Tamil nationalist movement. But since 1956 it has lost status in Sri Lanka, and because the perceived purity of the Tamil language was what differentiated the Tamils from the Sinhalese, the loss of language rights was a cutting attack on Tamil identity.<sup>82</sup> Sinhalese nationalism also focused on the importance of language<sup>83</sup> The “Sinhala Only” policy, created out of fear that the Tamil language was privileged and would undermine Sinhalese attempts at political and

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<sup>80</sup> Jordan and Denov, “Birds of Freedom: Perspectives on Female Emancipation and Sri Lanka’s Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 9 (2007): 1.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Radhika Coomaraswamy, “Nationalism: Tamil and Sri Lankan Myths.”

<sup>83</sup> Keo Darmadasa, *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 47.

economic advancement, was met with a strong backlash. Subsequently, Tamil nationalism was constructed as directly hostile to Sinhalese identity.<sup>84</sup>

Behind it all there is the realization that where the integrity of language is threatened, the cultural foundation of ethnicity is also threatened...and with that the very survival of the ethnic group. The struggle for the integrity of the Tamil language is identified with and is regarded as identical with a defence of the rights of the Tamils in a hostile environment. It is a response which has brought the Hindus and Christians...together in a common defence of their Tamil culture.<sup>85</sup>

While Tamil separatism was first articulated through non-violent political means (advocated by the Federal Party, the main Tamil party in the Sri Lankan government arguing for Tamil sovereignty) the emergence of the youth-led LTTE interrupted non-violent political discourse. Even prior to the LTTE, arguments for self-determination were based on linguistic difference. The Federal Party argued that “the present constitution of the country is unsuited to a multi-lingual country, and is inimical to the interests of the Tamils living in Sri Lanka. We believe that the only means of ensuring that the Tamils are guaranteed their freedoms and self-respect...[is] to have their own autonomous state guaranteeing self-government.”<sup>86</sup> From the beginning, separatism was tied to ethno-cultural identity.

However, after the LTTE assassinated 13 soldiers and the Sinhalese community retaliated with the Black July massacre, the Sri Lankan government capitulated to Sinhalese nationalist demands. The Sri Lankan constitution was amended to make parliamentary activity that advocated for separatism illegal. Tamil political parties could no longer advocate for separatism because the Sinhalese could not differentiate (the inability to differentiate between civilians and

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<sup>84</sup> Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2004), 210.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 218.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 211.

combatants was not helped by the Federal Party's informal ties to the LTTE) between Tamil politicians and Tamil militants. Though estimates vary on how many Tamils were killed in the riots, what is known is that police and soldiers allowed the violence to occur and did not attempt to quell the crowd. Order was restored after a week of rioting. Tamils were held communally responsible for the death of the 13 soldiers. The attack on the 13 soldiers occurred because of the LTTE's dissatisfaction with government policies<sup>87</sup> and to avenge the rape of Tamil schoolgirls by Sri Lankan police<sup>88</sup>.

Black July only made women more inclined to join the LTTE and reinforced the notion that Tamil civilians were being attacked because their ethno-cultural identity was marginalized. Now, in addition to policies like Standardization and reduced language rights, Tamil nationalists were no longer allowed to pursue separatism through peaceful means. On all issues relating to ethno-cultural identity, Tamils were being violated.

The first female recruits demanded entry into the LTTE shortly after the Black July massacre. At the time the LTTE did not have a policy of allowing women to join but they were eventually accepted through their own persistence.<sup>89</sup> The conflict pitted Sinhalese ethno-cultural identity versus Tamil ethno-cultural identity; books written by Adele Ann emphasized the purity of Tamil identity and how it came under attack. Several LTTE propaganda videos depicted Sri Lankan forces drinking alcohol, watching X-rated films and dancing while the Tamil people suffered.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 339.

<sup>88</sup> Elisabeth Nissan and R.L. Stirrat, "The Generation of Communal Identities," in *Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1990.)

<sup>89</sup> Harrison, "Twenty Years On—Riots that Led to War." *BBC News*, July 23 2003, accessed January 2, 2012, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/3090111.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/3090111.stm).

<sup>90</sup> Catharine Brun, "Birds of Freedom."

Tamil identity was further reinforced and placed in direct opposition to Sinhalese oppression after repeated pleas to stop dropping bombs on the civilian population were ignored. Each year, on the anniversary of Black July, martyrs and victims were commemorated. Commemorating both martyrdom and victimhood fostered Tamil nationalism and the desire for liberation.<sup>91</sup>

Articles examining cross-regional trends confirm that militants are likely to join organizations due to peer influence. Individual identity becomes fused with group identity.<sup>92</sup> Militants, especially revolutionary militants, are not outcasts but are seen as heroes risking their lives for the public's welfare.<sup>93</sup> The LTTE recruited women as they recruited men: with images of heroes and martyrs saving the Tamil nation.

In poetry written by female LTTE members, combatants explicitly linked their own deaths and martyrdom with the land and their people. One poem written by a female cadre finds the narrator speaking at the grave of her brother, who died fighting for liberation, while she promises to join him soon.<sup>94</sup> Tamil militant poetry often centres on death, and how dying for a cause breeds new life and how one's blood revitalizes the earth. "Her lips murmur not useless utterances, but/ the determined oaths of those who died in battle... The bullets that fire from her gun will defeat the enemy without fail!/ It will break the shackles of Tamil Eelam!/ Then our people's lips will/ sing the nation's song!"<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ramasubramanian, "Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka."

<sup>92</sup> J. Victoroff, "The Mind of the Terrorist," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49 (2005): 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> D. Hellmann Rajanayagam, "And Heroes Die: Poetry of the Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 28 (2005): 1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*



The poetry is distinctly non-sexual though it does contain maternal influences, with the nation and earth conceived as the mother, and a death for a cause being seen as a “birthing” process for revitalization. Trawick describes the imagery as “vegetative, horticultural. The enemy who cuts you down creates the conditions for ten others to spring up in your place.”<sup>96</sup> Fighting for the nation meant fighting for the mother(land). The nation was constructed as kin. The female cadre/poet also connected her identity with Tamils who died in battle before her. Her being was connected with the oppression and struggle of previous generations.

Martyrdom was a ritual reinforced by peers that shared the same ethno-cultural identity. This idea was further confirmed when Trawick interviewed Sita. When asked how she felt when one of her friends died, Sita stated, “it is painful! We are taught in training how to accept this loss. As one friend falls, another comes to take her place... We have a funeral in which each friend reads a poem or essay she has written about the friend who has died.”<sup>97</sup>

The LTTE, like most competent military organizations, emphasized peer support and cohesion. Cadres often referred to one another as family and the death of friends merely reinforced commitment to the organization.<sup>98</sup> Perhaps paradoxically, this further attracted women (and men) to the cause. Photographs displaying martyrs in heroic postures were effectively used as recruitment posters.<sup>99</sup>

A common theme was found throughout different interviews and sources: even though Tamil women felt repressed by their own societies and wanted to fight their subservient

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<sup>96</sup> Trawick, “Reasons for Violence.”

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Catherine Brun, “Birds of Freedom: Young People, the LTTE, and Representations of Gender, Nationalism, and Governance in Northern Sri Lanka,” *Critical Asian Studies* 40 (2008): 3.

<sup>99</sup> Debra Zedalis, *Female Suicide Bombers* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004), 1-14.

positions, they also wanted to fight for the liberation of their ethnic community.<sup>100</sup> “Thanks to the movement, our family was saved...I thought if I don’t join the movement, our people will be forced into slavery. That’s why I joined the LTTE.”<sup>101</sup> Ethno-cultural identity was reinforced by loss of language rights and by Tamils becoming violently targeted because of their communal membership.

## **Security**

The chaos caused by the Sri Lankan civil war extended beyond the killing of Tamil civilians. Economic poverty, social displacement, educational/employment disruption, sexual assault, and torture of civilians provided more reasons for Tamil females to join the LTTE.

### *Displacement and Educational Disruption*

Displacement and communal suffering were motivations cited by women across different interviews. Six out of fourteen women Alison interviewed mentioned that family displacement and constant fear of military attack were reasons for joining the LTTE, and eight out of fourteen respondents chose to enlist because of their anger at the suffering of their communities.<sup>102</sup>

Thamilvily, the Women’s Political Wing Leader for Jaffna District, spoke of how her village in Jaffna was bombed and how this persuaded her, one month after the attack, to join the LTTE. She was seventeen. Other female Tigers mentioned that, other from their own personal suffering, they saw the results of the SLDF’s aerial bombing, the results of food deprivation, and the deaths of their fellow students. Sudarvili’s family was displaced more than once and during this time

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<sup>100</sup> Tasha Manoranjan, “Beaten but not Broken: Tamil Women Struggle through ‘Peace’ and Conflict in Sri Lanka,” *Peace Women*. Last modified September, 2010, [http://peacewomen.org/portal\\_resources\\_resource.php?id=970](http://peacewomen.org/portal_resources_resource.php?id=970).

<sup>101</sup> *My Daughter the Terrorist*, DVD, directed by Beate Arnestad (2007; Norway/Sri Lanka: Mortan Daae).

<sup>102</sup> Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel.”

she witnessed a horrific massacre “which contributed to her desire to stop the insecurity and suffering of her community.”<sup>103</sup> Sudarvili maintained:

[W]e feel this is the only way to keep fighting against the military and safeguard the people...our people have been suffering. The common places and the churches and *kovil* [Hindu temples] were bombed by the government, without any reason. We don't have anybody to save us and what we feel is if we have someone to safeguard us then there won't be any problems.<sup>104</sup>

Another female cadre confirmed this report and stated that along with witnessing “the enemy” murder her father, she saw several churches bombed. Tamil civilians were told that the enemy was coming, “and the people rushed to churches for safety. The army bombed the churches, and caused blood to flow within.”<sup>105</sup>

Even during the early years of Sri Lankan civil war, women were likely to cite Sri Lankan military atrocities against Tamil civilians as a motivating factor for joining the LTTE. In an interview with *The Telegraph*, a woman who joined the organization in 1987 (and left voluntarily) stated that by 1985 ethnic clashes had become so severe that the SLDF launched a military offensive in Jaffna to wipe out the rebellion. The disruption of ordinary civilian life, the constant fear, and the indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling convinced her to join the armed struggle. She was a middle-class Tamil and most female LTTE recruits lived in rural areas. Subsequently, the LTTE hesitated when she asked to join, citing her lack of experience with physical labour. She was persistent, however, and they relented.<sup>106</sup> “I tell people the only reason I joined the war was to defend my people, because I felt there was no other choice. I was

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *My Daughter the Terrorist*, DVD.

<sup>106</sup> Reuters, “Life as a Female Tamil Tiger Guerrilla Relived by One of First Female Soldiers,” *The Telegraph*, May 8 2009, accessed January 6, 2012, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/srilanka/5283438/Life-as-a-female-Tamil-Tiger-guerilla-relived-by-one-of-first-female-soldiers.html>.

not coerced to join the insurgency. As an idealistic 17-year-old, I believed in the power of the individual to make a difference.”<sup>107</sup>

Another LTTE woman argued that there was instability in the Tamil nation. “We [women] are part of a society—we are not safe at home because of the military atrocities, so it is that condition that made us believe we need to be part of a group to liberate the homeland, so we volunteer.”<sup>108</sup> LTTE women were alarmed by the disruption of public order. Other than the heavy recruitment that occurred after the 1983 riots, many women joined around 1990, which was one of the worst war-time periods for civilians. One cadre, Prasanthi, stressed that her area was constantly being attacked by the military. Her classmate’s family was killed and she saw people being thrown into fires and others being dragged off buses and killed.<sup>109</sup>

According to these interviews, women joined the LTTE because they saw others suffer and because war created personal and communal insecurity. Malaimalli, a female LTTE cadre, when asked why she had joined the organization, responded that her younger sister had been imprisoned and tortured. During detention Sinhalese policemen had peeled the skin off her leg and rubbed pepper in the wound, and then they pulled off her fingernails. Now she stayed home but was unable to do anything. Her older sister saw her husband shot before her eyes. Malaimalli said that there were sixteen thousand widows in Batticola (the area she resided) and that marriage only made widows. She said that she went to war in search of a peaceful life.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Denov and Jordan, “Birds of Freedom?”

<sup>109</sup> Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel.”

<sup>110</sup> Margaret Trawick, *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood and Play in Batticola*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 115.

It was shortly after the Indian Peacekeeping Forces left Sri Lanka in 1989 that the LTTE came to dominate much of north-eastern Sri Lanka. However, by the summer of 1990 the Sri Lankan Defence Forces resumed aerial bombing LTTE controlled areas (aerial bombing had stopped once the Indian Peacekeeping Forces entered Sri Lanka.) Most of the casualties were civilians. The LTTE, however, avoided mass casualties by hiding in protective bunkers in the jungle.<sup>111</sup> Indiscriminate civilian targeting, often with the aid of local gangs, turned many local Tamils into LTTE supporters.<sup>112</sup>

Adele Ann argued that women had tried to instigate peaceful political change for nearly two decades. Only when that failed, when the Sri Lankan government ignored their demands for a peaceful solution, did women turn to militancy. She argued that female political involvement existed before the LTTE and so it made sense that women would continue to defend their homeland violently. She argued, therefore, that their participation in the LTTE was not an aberration.<sup>113</sup>

Adele Ann's autobiographies described the Tamil people as victims of Sinhalese state oppression. Her writing emphasized the LTTE's beginnings as a peaceful movement and described how the organization adopted violence when all other options were exhausted. Adele Ann's arguments, therefore, centred on the need to defend the Tamil people and how an ethnic minority had been systematically targeted for oppression. She cites these arguments as major reasons for women joining the LTTE. Her writing is especially important because, as a native English speaker, she was one of the most prominent LTTE spokespeople. She writes that "the

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<sup>111</sup> Emilia Fagerlund, "The Tiger's Roar: Insurgent Violence against Civilians in Sri Lanka," *Psychology and Society* 4 (2011): 1.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom*, 279.

[c]onstant exposure to oppression has had a profound effect on the life and thinking of young Tamil women.”<sup>114</sup> There is also a strong correlation between security and ethno-cultural identity. Many statements, while explicitly referencing security, also allude to the idea that communal oppression builds ethnic solidarity and that ethnic identity is reinforced through oppression.

There was a strong correlation between experiencing physical insecurity and joining the LTTE. Most of the women in the LTTE came from northern Sri Lanka, a heavily militarized area where daily civilian routines were interrupted by warfare. “The permanent insecurity of this environment inculcated a desire for freedom and statehood, which included the motivation to take up arms.”<sup>115</sup>

When interviewed by Alison, many women cited a sense of communal suffering as a reason for joining. Alison found that one motivation to enlist that fuelled nationalist ideology was the experience and perception of Tamil suffering. “Sometimes this...[was]... related to a personal family experience; sometimes it has been received as part of the Tamil narrative of oppression and suffering, borne out by the experiences of one’s friends and neighbours.”<sup>116</sup> The testimonials given by female cadres often involved witnessing the death of a loved one; four of the fourteen women Alison interviewed mentioned the death of a family member as a reason for joining the LTTE.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Adele Ann, *Women Fighters of the Liberation Tigers* (Jaffna: Thasan Printers, 1993), 23.

<sup>115</sup> Manoranjan “Beaten but not Broken.”

<sup>116</sup> Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 131.

<sup>117</sup> Alison, “Cogs in the Wheel.”

Other studies confirm that former female LTTE members conceptualized liberation both individually and collectively.<sup>118</sup> Females either felt the loss of security intimately, usually in the loss of a family member or friend, or the loss of security came through a sense of communal suffering: being Tamil meant having a life usurped by civil war. Female Tamil Tigers joined the LTTE, in part, to end Sri Lankan military action that mainly affected civilians. Female Tigers hoped to achieve in least one tenet of human security—civilian security against domestic military aggression.

However, women also joined the LTTE to achieve human security, defined broadly in Chapter 2. A basic right that is included in the concept of human security is the right to education. Clearly, war disrupts education and prevents children from finishing secondary school and entering university. It also interferes with a person's economic security by, for example preventing an individual from pursuing professional training or some other specific means of securing his/her livelihood.

At the time of the Sri Lankan civil war, Tamil civilians were unable to pursue education because of “standardization,” a policy seeking to correct ethnic imbalances that existed prior to Sri Lankan independence. Standardization effectively prevented many Tamils from gaining admission into university. Though the Tamil minority placed great value on post-secondary education, educational disruption began prior to secondary school and during childhood.

In one study, young men and women told the interviewer that going to school was at the centre of their childhood memories and that educational disruption meant having to carry their school books over long distances or otherwise keeping up with the hardships of studying during war. “Tamil youth in Jaffna were very conscious about the number of rights they had been

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<sup>118</sup> Cunningham, “Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism.”

denied, particularly in relation to education, employment and language. In their view, this deprivation of rights was the chief cause of the conflict.”<sup>119</sup>

Educational disruption continued into late adolescence, a time when Tamil children would be studying for university entrance exams. Many women joined the LTTE because the war destroyed their educational prospects. For example, Thamilini was studying her A Levels (Advanced Levels—senior courses required to determine university placements) in 1990, but the war made studying extremely difficult and she was unable to go to university. One cadre (Banuka) further stated, “only when we have a peaceful country, we can study safely and have freedom to do our own things; without that we cannot do our schooling safely.”<sup>120</sup> When speaking of education, many female cadres argued that the physical insecurity of their environment prevented them from going to school.

Studying for university in the midst of war was exceedingly difficult. State policies erected barriers against Tamil education. The LTTE, however, provided practical skills and training for women. LTTE photographers were given lessons in photography and middle-aged women received computer training. Women who had lost a child in the service of the LTTE were given simple employment (such as being a cook for recruits.)<sup>121</sup> The Eelam police, the LTTE’s de facto police force, actively recruited women and paid better wages than what they were likely to receive working for the state.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Catherine Brun, “Women in the Local/Global Fields of War and Displacement in Sri Lanka,” *Gender Technology and Development* 57 (2009): 9.

<sup>120</sup> Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 128-134.

<sup>121</sup> Trawick, *Enemy Lines*, 172.

<sup>122</sup> Alison, Miranda, *Armed Violence and Poverty in Sri Lanka: A Mini Case Study for the Armed Violence and Poverty Initiative*, (Stanford: Centre of International Cooperation and Security, 2004.)



One female Tiger stated that she simply could not study when people around her were suffering. She had worked in the political wing of the LTTE, where they had tried to resolve problems relating to inadequate food and clothing. The job of her division had been to help alleviate suffering. They could not simply hand out food and clothing, she said, because they were not a government; they had been struggling to form a government so they could resolve problems relating to education and poverty.<sup>123</sup> In other words, displacement had created barriers to education and employment.

Even though the LTTE provided women with practical training and employment, it would be a mistake to assume that the recruits saw the organization simply as a path to economic security—or that they underestimated their chances of dying. Rather, the attitude amongst supporters and members was inevitable resignation—they were all going to die one day, so better die this way.<sup>124</sup>

Sumantra Bose argues that, like men, women were alienated from the state.<sup>125</sup> The country's war torn status appears to have strongly influenced female involvement with the LTTE. Women joined to “escape numerous societal insecurities.”<sup>126</sup> When, in retaliation to LTTE military tactics, the Sri Lankan government cut off electricity and telecommunications, thereby denying the civilian population mobility, communication, and heating, Tamils were even more likely to flock to the LTTE and blame Sinhala oppression for destroying their livelihood.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Trawick, *Enemy Lines*, 174.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>125</sup> Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India, and the Tamil Eelam Movement* (New York: Sage Publications, 1994), 110.

<sup>126</sup> Jordan and Denov, “Birds of Freedoms.”

<sup>127</sup> Fagerlund, “The Tiger’s Roar.”

The LTTE advertised itself as an organization that offered women protection from Sri Lankan abuse while also providing them with an opportunity to eradicate social injustice. Displacement and the disruption of ordinary civilian life motivated women to join the LTTE.

### *Sexual Assault*

Much has been written about the relationship between violence and increased militancy.<sup>128</sup> Many writers have argued that witnessing and hearing about rape, even if one has not been raped oneself, creates a feeling of communal helplessness. This was one of the main reasons females joined the LTTE.<sup>129</sup>

Using rape as a narrative structure, as a justification for women's violence, can potentially portray women as either biologically or psychologically handicapped. Their womanhood frustrated (in this case by sexual assault), their justifications for violence become largely apolitical and framed as seeking vengeance for lost femininity.<sup>130</sup> This thesis does not take the position that sexual assault is an apolitical act.

The official position of the LTTE Women's Wing was that rape was a political act and that society needed to be restructured in order to emancipate women. However, the Wing's first goal was to achieve an independent Tamil state. Such goals formed the dominant narrative, representative of female cadres collectively. They had political goals and fought the Sri Lankan state, but they also talked about their personal lives. Seemingly then, Tamil women became angry when public order (defined here as lack of war) was frustrated. Nevertheless, many observers outside the LTTE believe sexual assault is an *apolitical* motivator, reinforcing the

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<sup>128</sup> Mia Bloom, "Death Becomes Her: Women, Occupation, and Terrorist Mobilization," *Political Science and Politics*, 43 (2010): 3.

<sup>129</sup> Mia Bloom, "Female Suicide Bombers: a Global Trend," *Daedalus* 136 (Winter 2007): 1.

<sup>130</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women's Violence in Global Politics* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), 175.

belief that war is something men do, that men are political creatures, and women are private domestic creatures uninterested in military politics.

Avoiding this problem, however, is simple. Constructing motivations for violence as either political, in the public sphere sense, or as experiences resulting from the frustrated private sphere (and thus opening the way for psychoanalyzing women) reduces complex motivations to false dichotomies. To understand female involvement in the LTTE, and to understand the narratives employed by the organization, there cannot be a strict separation between actions committed in the public and private spheres. War infiltrates homes and creates public disorder. War does not stay in what is traditionally defined (by Aristotle, Hannah Arendt, and Jürgen Habermas, to name a few) as the public realm.

Adele Ann, for example, spoke of a desire for self-defence and its connection to rape. She argued that on an individual level, rape is experienced as a despicable and gross violation of personal autonomy and as an act of mental and physical torture. On the collective level, “rape aims to violate and humiliate the norms of society. The violation of women outrages the dignity and deeply offends the national sentiments and feelings of a nation. While women may be used as mediums to humiliate the feelings of a nation...the overall objective is the genocide of the people.”<sup>131</sup>

According to Alisa Stack-O’Connor, the LTTE used fear of rape by the enemy to recruit, motivate and control Tamil women and to denigrate its opponents. A U.S official who served in Sri Lanka reported seeing an LTTE billboard aimed at recruiting women. The billboard was split in two, with one side depicting a woman being raped by Sri Lankan soldiers and on the other half a woman in an LTTE uniform with the caption, “[Y]our daughter will meet Sri Lankan soldiers

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<sup>131</sup> Balasingham, *The Will to Freedom*, 284.

one way or the other.”<sup>132</sup> The LTTE publicized reports of rape and sexual assault to delegitimize the Sri Lankan and Indian governments. Both male and female leadership used the sexual victimization of Tamil women by the SLDF and Indian Peacekeeping forces to justify violent attacks. It has never been proven whether this propaganda functioned as a successful recruitment tool.

In her interviews, Alison discovered that the threat of rape did provide a reason for women to join the LTTE. Thamilini, for example, believed that rape and sexual violence affected a minority of women, but that the climate of fear that these acts created affected all girls and women. Thamilini joined the organization, in part, from fear of sexual violence.<sup>133</sup>

Female combatants were aware that their violent participation as women placed them in a uniquely treacherous position. One fighter told a journalist that the reason she wore the cyanide capsule around her neck was because suicide was especially important for a female. “A man can be tortured...but a woman has more to lose—her virtue.”<sup>134</sup> The Sri Lankan army’s reputation for sexual assault was well known to LTTE members and Tamil civilians. These recruitment tactics were particularly convincing because they matched reality. Enough empirical evidence exists to say that Tamil civilians faced systemic sexual assault.

In comparison to the SLDF, the LTTE was a haven for female activism. In 1999, two Sri Lankan officers entered a household with ties to the LTTE. They inquired about one male LTTE member, named Napoleon, who was not home at the time. However, his sister, also an LTTE member, was home. Her name was Ida Carmelita and she was repeatedly raped, shot in the

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<sup>132</sup> Stack-O’Connor, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds.”

<sup>133</sup> Alison, *Women and Political Violence*, 137.

<sup>134</sup> Q. Dalrymple, “After the Ghandis.”

genitals, and mutilated. According to autopsy reports, her lips and breasts were bitten off.<sup>135</sup> Amnesty International reports that torture (including sexual torture) was among the most frequently cited human rights violations in the Sri Lankan civil war.<sup>136</sup> In the north and east, where the LTTE was dominant for several years, Tamil civilians were arrested and tortured on suspicion of being LTTE sympathizers. There were usually high numbers of arrests after LTTE military operations. Most of these allegations of torture concerned the SLDF, the Sri Lankan navy, and Special Task Forces.<sup>137</sup>

For every year of the conflict (and now, post-civil war) Amnesty International received several reports of cases involving sexual torture. In most of these cases, investigations were slow or had collapsed because victims or witnesses feared reprisals. Some victims were compelled to withdraw police statements after being offered large sums of money.<sup>138</sup>

Additionally, the OMCT (World Organization Against Torture) has several extensive reports on the misuse of state authority against LTTE members and Tamil civilian women . The Sri Lankan authorities are known for their arbitrary arrests and torture of Tamil activists. They have abducted parents and family members who are related to LTTE cadres. The OMCT has found that Tamil women and girls were continuously abducted during the war, and most cases of

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<sup>135</sup> Asian Human Rights Commission, "Rape and Murder of Ida Carmelita in Pallemunai." Last modification unknown, <http://www.sangam.org/TORTURE/Ida.htm>.

<sup>136</sup> Amnesty International. *Sri Lanka: Torture in Custody* 1999. Last modification unknown, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA37/010/1999/en>.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

violence against women have not been thoroughly investigated. “Few prosecutions have resulted in proportionate or dissuasive punishments being applied to the perpetrators.”<sup>139</sup>

Similarly, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) writes that criminal investigations have not been conducted regarding most cases of sexual assault, torture, and disappearances of Tamil women and men. As late as January 2000, the AHRC reported that Sri Lankan Security forces were systematically sexually assaulting and murdering Tamil women to subjugate the Tamil population. What the AHRC called a “familiar method” was to transfer the accused soldiers from the area of the attack to prevent action being taken against them.<sup>140</sup> The Sri Lankan Supreme Court has frequently confirmed that a “climate of impunity” exists in relation to torture. “The fact that police officers continue to commit such unlawful acts, including torture, despite regular judicial condemnation of such acts, shows that the authorities have permitted such acts by their failure to impose effective sanctions.”<sup>141</sup>

According to Elizabeth Jean Wood, the Sri Lankan army never explicitly ordered its soldiers to sexually assault Tamil women, but sexual violence was still prevalent. There were two patterns of state-sponsored sexual violence of girls and women (and also boys and men, to be discussed in the following chapter.) Sexual torture in detention usually occurred at police stations and army bases. Torture took a myriad of forms and included rape with plantain flowers soaked in chillies, bottles or other objects, electric shocks, the application of chillies to the genitals, piercing of male genitals, forced sexual relations with other prisoners, and slamming

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<sup>139</sup> OMCT, “Sri Lanka: Suspect of Rape Held in Custody.” Last modified August 27, 2001, <http://www.omct.org/violence-against-women/urgent-interventions/sri-lanka/2001/08/d15448/>.

<sup>140</sup> Asian Human Rights Commission, “Sri Lanka: Systematic Detention, Torture, Rape and Murder as Weapons of War.” Last modified January 12, 2000 <http://www.sangam.org/NEWSEXTRA/AHRCAppeal.htm>.

<sup>141</sup> Amnesty International, “Sri Lanka: Torture in Custody,” 5-6.

testicles in a drawer. The second pattern of state-sponsored sexual violence targeted women at checkpoints and during military or police operations. One SLDF officer stated, "...it depends on the *field* commanders: Good commanders don't allow it, keep tight rein on discipline...At road blocks and check points, rape happens because of a lack of supervision and monitoring."<sup>142</sup> Another serving officer said, "I can't control my troops...they open fire on everyone, they destroy everything in sight, they rape and torture people they catch on the streets or in their homes...I've tried to stop them, I try to control the situation. I can't. None of the commanders can—though God knows some don't try."<sup>143</sup>

Indeed, stories about the horrors of passing through checkpoints are shared amongst the Tamil community. In a particularly infamous case, an 18 year old Tamil woman named Krishanthi Kumaraswami was arrested while passing through a Sri Lankan Army checkpoint in 1996. Her mother, younger brother, and a neighbour went to the checkpoint to find her and refused to leave until the soldiers released her. The soldiers killed all three of them, and an hour later they gang raped Kumaraswami and buried her body. One Tamil school teacher speaking to the *Washington Post* said, "[e]very Tamil remembers the Krishanthi case...For us, the checkpoints are sort of a slow-motion thing, the trauma and the fear that we go through."<sup>144</sup>

Wood writes that there are several reasons why troops might ignore their superiors and perpetuate sexual violence. In the case of Sri Lankan troops, Wood argues that if leaders judge sexual violence to be counterproductive to their interests and if the hierarchy is strong enough,

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<sup>142</sup> Elisabeth Jean Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?" *Politics and Society* 37 (2009): 1. Emphasis in original.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Manoranjan, "Beaten but not Broken."

then sexual violence will be limited. She judges the organizational hierarchy in the Sri Lankan army to be weak and believes that officers did not have full control of their troops.<sup>145</sup>

SLDF sexual abuse against Tamil civilians had severe ramifications. Particularly vicious attacks by female cadres were justified as being revenge for rape. The Women's Front justified a particularly infamous night attack that killed 15 police officers and wounded 20 by stating, "[W]e wanted to avenge the rape of Koneswary Murugesupillai. We are proud that we are able to destroy the police station where she was raped and killed."<sup>146</sup>

Similarly, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a female LTTE suicide bomber. Known only as Dhanu, the LTTE reported that she had been gang-raped by the Indian Peacekeeping Forces and had volunteered for the mission as a form of revenge. Her personal security—her ability to live without violent interference and loss of human dignity—was robbed.<sup>147</sup>

According to Adele Ann, rape is to be equated with murder, as it destroys a person's mental and emotional personhood. Collective retribution, in the form of women attacking and destroying a police station, as in the case of Murugesupillai, was a method of restoring dignity to society and to women. Adele Ann used this narrative to explain why women fought and joined the LTTE. Her explanations were further reinforced by former LTTE members. One female cadre reported that, "our anger is at our impotence and powerlessness. We feel that our physical

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<sup>145</sup> Wood, "Armed Groups and Sexual Violence."

<sup>146</sup> Nelfour De Mel, "Body Politics: (Re)Cognising the Female Suicide Bomber in Sri Lanka," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 11 (2004): 75.

<sup>147</sup> Bombardier Alexander Howe, "What Motivates Suicide Attackers?" *The Australian Army Journal* 7 (2008): 1.



selves, our womaness are under control of these marauders, who take what they want as their will and pleasure.”<sup>148</sup>

Another soldier reported that fear of rape was part of the reason she joined the LTTE. She said that everyone had to protect themselves and that she had to protect the Tamil people, indicating further that some female members had viewed the organization as an important means of creating security for women, and that these members played a vital role in protecting themselves and other women.<sup>149</sup> In these operations, women perceived themselves as vital protectors of women and Tamil society and saw the LTTE as giving them the opportunity to be protectors.

Further, within the LTTE, unlike the SLDF, there was an absence of sexual violence. Even though the LTTE was responsible for much violence against civilians, the recruitment of children for military duty, and attempts at ethnically cleansing northern Sri Lanka of Muslim and Sinhala civilians (global patterns reveal that sexual violence is often used as a form ethnic cleansing), they had a strict policy against sexual violence. The University Teacher for Human Rights (Jaffna), a prominent Sri Lankan organization that evaluates allegations made against both the LTTE and SLDF, has corroborated reports that the SLDF was responsible for systemic sexual violence. However, the group reports comparatively few, if admittedly horrific cases by LTTE cadres. The most specific allegations concern two cases, the first which occurred on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2002, when an LTTE cadre raped a girl who had managed to escape after being forcefully conscripted into the LTTE.<sup>150</sup> In the other case, four cadres gang raped a 13-year-old girl. “As

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<sup>148</sup> Stack-O’Connor, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds.”

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Wood, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence.”

punishment, their hands were bound [by the LTTE] and they were dragged behind a tractor. At the end their bodies were torn up, and they were crying for water when they died.”<sup>151</sup> In a 1991 interview with Peter Schalk, female cadres enjoyed relaying the story about a student who slapped his girlfriend and was immediately detained by the LTTE for six months, although he had a father in a high position within the organization. Appeals from his father to Prabhakaran did not alter his punishment.<sup>152</sup> Also worth noting is that, according to Adele Ann, regular Tamil society usually blamed women for their own rape. She said that the LTTE did not view rape this way and instead described sexual violence as an ‘accident,’ meaning that it was not the victim’s fault.

Even though there were a large number of child recruits, including a large number of girls, there have never been any allegations of child sexual abuse against the organization. The LTTE, therefore, not only provided women a chance to be *enablers* of security, but also created a militant group that functioned as a safe space against sexual violence. From its early days, the LTTE was seen as an advocate of women’s equality and rights, goals that were not seemingly promoted by the SLDF or Sri Lankan Government.

Even closer to the end of the war, when the LTTE prevented civilians from leaving heavily targeted areas, Tamils were still fearful of seeking safety in government-controlled areas. Tamils who fled LTTE controlled areas were often detained by Sri Lankan armed forces. Many civilians remained in locations that were heavily shelled and bombed. They saw no use in seeking security from the Sri Lankan government.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Trawick, “Reasons for Violence.”

<sup>152</sup> Schalk, “Women Fighters of the LTTE.”

<sup>153</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Trapped and Mistreated: LTTE Abuses against Civilians in the Vanni,” Last modified December 2008, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/12/15/trapped-and-mistreated-0>.

Armed groups can prevent their members from engaging in sexual violence if the armed group sees itself as “the embryo of a new, more just social order.”<sup>154</sup> Such groups are unlikely to violate the norms of the just society they seek to create. Acts of sexual violence de-legitimize the armed group’s ideology in the eyes of its members and its constituents. The LTTE accepted women into its ranks, in part, because of their symbolic power in persuading outside observers that the organization was an all-encompassing social movement. The LTTE saw itself as a harbinger of social justice, and women in the LTTE constructed a just society as one that respected gender and ethnic identity while also fulfilling the basic tenets of human security.

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<sup>154</sup> Wood, “Armed Groups and Sexual Violence.”

## CHAPTER 4: MALES IN THE LTTE

Sri Lanka has been mired in ethnic conflict since 1956, when the first racial riots erupted over constitutional language issues. However, while an unorganized Tamil minority would sometimes retaliate violently against perceived oppression, formalized militant groups did not exist until the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>155</sup> The LTTE was officially formed in 1974-1976 (the exact date is uncertain) with membership restricted to males until 1983.<sup>156</sup> Until the end of the organization's existence, Tamil males sixteen years and older were the most likely demographic to join the LTTE.<sup>157</sup> LTTE members were called "the boys," a reflection of their gender and age, and largely came from a disaffected group of university youth. The label also referred to their rebelliousness against established Tamil norms, as illustrated by their adoption of violent methods to achieve political gains.<sup>158</sup>

### **Gender and Ethno-Cultural Identity**

Women in the LTTE joined after the Black July massacre, an event unrivalled by previous ethnic riots. Men in the LTTE have a different history; while women framed their reasons for enlisting by speaking about protecting the nation, their ethno-cultural and gender identity, and racial divisions that hurt the Tamil people, men were more likely to speak of their personal experiences with pain, humiliation, and deprived employment opportunities. According to the literature sample, males in the LTTE were more likely than females to have experienced SLDF brutality

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<sup>155</sup> Swamy, M.R Narayan, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerillas* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1995), 179.

<sup>156</sup> Dagmar-Hellmann Rajanayagam, "The 'Groups' and the Rise of Militant Secessionism," in *The Sri Lankan Tamils*, ed. Bryan Pfaffenberger et. al. (Boulder: Westview Press), 171.

<sup>157</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights Jaffna, "Information Bulletin no. 25: Women, Continuing Violations, and Accountability." Last modified July 11, 2001, [http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul25.htm#\\_Toc519425445](http://www.uthr.org/bulletins/bul25.htm#_Toc519425445).

<sup>158</sup> Rajanayagam, "The 'Groups' and the Rise of Militant Secessionism."

when they were civilians. Females joined because of the insecurity felt by their communities and families, but did not go into detail about their own individual pre-LTTE encounters with the Sri Lankan forces. In addition to speaking of their families and communities, men spoke of themselves.

Depending on the rank of the interviewee, the LTTE's male members gave different reasons for enlisting. The LTTE leadership, comprised mainly of men, spoke often of ethnic and cultural identity and racial hatred. Ethnic differences were cited in recruitment speeches and many lower-ranking males found these appeals persuasive. Lower-ranking members were also likely to explain ethnic alienation by citing their compromised personal safety, lack of economic prospects, and educational disruption. In fact, unlike women who joined after and as a result of the 1983 riots, men first joined after their educational prospects were compromised by government policies that placed university quotas on Tamil youth. They continued to join after the government's military response compromised their physical security. The spark that ignited militancy in both sexes was different.

### *Gender Identity*

Often, the terms 'gender' and 'women' are conflated.<sup>159</sup> Traditionally, literature on gender has focused on women and how women's contributions and knowledge have been neglected in political and historical accounts. However, 'gender' and 'women' are not synonyms because men also live their lives in gendered ways. Gender is an analytic category for "how we categorize, think about, and 'know' the world."<sup>160</sup> Men are not excluded from a gendered analytical

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<sup>159</sup> Joanne Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism."

<sup>160</sup> Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart, *The "Man" Question in International Relations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 15-16.

framework. However, because men are the standard to which all are compared, they are often omitted from accounts that focus on gender, further contributing to the otherness of ‘femininity’ and reinforcing the naturalness of ‘masculinity.’ Additionally, there are multiple masculinities (there is not only one type of man) as there are multiple femininities. Men follow normative ascriptions that dictate how they should behave and identify themselves. Hegemonic masculinity (hegemonic males are often colloquially referred to as “alpha males”) varies based on time and place. Traits that define the “ideal male” are not static and depend on culture and time period.

Hegemonic masculinity is the culturally idealized form of manhood and encompasses a set of behaviours and beliefs that, when put into practice, work to undervalue and often dominate other masculine identities. Hegemonic masculinity is often treated as natural, though it encompasses a set of normative prescriptions. Because male militants are considered the norm, their gender is precluded as a motivation for enlisting. Female militants are not privy to this mixed blessing because femininity is constructed as peaceful and non-aggressive. Subsequently, when journalists and academics asked women why they joined the LTTE, gender was central to the questions interviewers asked.<sup>161</sup> The female militants, as explained in the previous chapter, were aware of and highlighted their gender as a reason for joining the LTTE. In interviews conducted by Margaret Trawick and M. R. Narayan Swamy, males in the LTTE did not speak of their gender as a reason for involvement. The silence on gender was apparent throughout interviews conducted by both journalists and academics and was reinforced by NGO reports that did not cite gender as a reason for males joining militant organizations. The silence may have been because the interviewers did not ask questions about gender or because interviewees felt it was not worth stating. There are, however, significant gendered experiences that contributed to

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<sup>161</sup> Jan Goodwin, “When the Suicide Bomber Is a Woman,” *Marie Claire*, September 1, 2007.

males joining the LTTE. Men and boys who live in periods of social change and disruption are more likely to “suffer domination...and other forms of discrimination from other men due to issues such as ethnicity, sexuality, class and religion.”<sup>162</sup>

While men were unlikely to cite gender identity as a reason for joining the LTTE, gender still affected the ways in which they were militarily targeted by the Sinhalese. Tamil males were more likely than females to disappear and face torture at checkpoints and in prisons because the Sinhalese assumed that Tamil men were more likely to be violent than Tamil women. Tamil masculinity was problematized by the Sinhalese because of the assumption that men were more likely than women to become militants. The Sinhalese armed forces made a gendered assumption.

Men and boys were systematically targeted by the SLDF and killed. Some Tamil women specifically harnessed their maternal identities to seek accountability for their “disappeared” sons, men and boys who never returned to their homes.<sup>163</sup> The Sri Lankan government’s ethnic and gender profiling has consequently resulted in a dramatic increase in female-headed households (defined as the absence of a male adult who contributes financially to the household) in Tamil-dominated areas and Tamil refugee camps. In Sri Lanka, a fifth of households are female-headed, a much higher percentage than surrounding countries.<sup>164</sup> Men formed a higher percentage of casualties, whether they were militants or civilians. Tamil men were targeted

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<sup>162</sup> Alicia Michelle Butterfield, “Gender in Crisis: An Anthropological Perspective on Internally Displaced Persons and Humanitarian Initiatives in Sri Lanka,” (MA Thesis, San Diego State University, 2009), [http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/Butterfield\\_GenderinCrisis\\_SriLanka.pdf](http://www.gdnonline.org/resources/Butterfield_GenderinCrisis_SriLanka.pdf).

<sup>163</sup> Nanthini Sornarajah, “The Experiences of Tamil Women: Nationalism, Construction of Gender, and Women’s Political Agency,” *Lines* 4 (2004): 3.

<sup>164</sup> Kanchana Ruwanpura and Jane Humphries, “Mundane Heroines: Conflict, Ethnicity, Gender and Female Headship in Easter Sri Lanka,” *Feminist Economics* 10 (2004): 2.

because of the intersection of their ethnicity and sex, though this practice later changed when women became involved with the LTTE.

There is a model of masculinity that is hegemonic and specific to Tamil culture. Most male LTTE members were young (18-35), unmarried, and had no children.<sup>165</sup> They were meant, according to Prabhakaran's prescriptions that he modelled on historical expectations, to be ascetics. Males in the LTTE were required to be chaste, an important cultural concept known in the Tamil language as *karpu*. LTTE members<sup>166</sup> were also described as *maravar*. *Maravar* is an honorary designation given to LTTE fighters, and is a term that has its basis in Tamil folklore and the ideal male warrior. *Maravar* are expected to be selfless, self-sacrificing, and separate from worldly pleasures.<sup>167</sup>

However, like the nearly unreachable female ideal, hegemonic masculinity is rarely attained and practised by men. Hegemonic masculinity is a set of prescriptions that, while idealized, does not accurately reflect men's lives. Male LTTE members revealed to interviewers that these normative prescriptions were not being met. Men joined specifically because of their worldly problems, which included a lack of economic opportunity and the fear of being physically targeted by Sinhalese police and army forces. The *maravar* and the ideals this designation signifies were not mentioned by male respondents.

Masculinity is not only inward looking, but forms a set of prescriptions that focuses on relationships between men. In opposition to the chaste male Tamil warrior and following the

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<sup>165</sup> Peter Schalk, "Historisation of the Martial Ideology of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 20 (1997): 2.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*



wartime trend of masculinity being constructed along ethnic lines,<sup>168</sup> the LTTE constructed Sinhala men as sexual assaulters who were immoral and oversexed.<sup>169</sup> “Jaffna Tamils extend the characterization of unchastity and uncivility to the Sinhala people, who are likewise thought to exemplify the pitfalls of a more easygoing sexual life.”<sup>170</sup> Similarly, the Sinhalese viewed Tamils as inherently dangerous, “creatures who excesses from time try even the saintly patience of majority Buddhists.”<sup>171</sup> Violent reactions to Tamil transgressions became acceptable and understandable to the majority population.

Male members did not mention joining the LTTE based on their own perceptions of male inadequacy amongst the Sinhalese, though a few did mention that the Sinhalese were “bad.”<sup>172</sup> That does not mean that gender was irrelevant and that male soldiers cannot be judged using a gendered perspective. It means that the LTTE placed heavy focus on female liberation; the organization constructed gender awareness as women “waking up from the darkness”<sup>173</sup> and not as something which impacted male behaviour or their involvement in the LTTE. LTTE elites framed gender as something women, not men, did. Male LTTE members were silent on how gender influenced their decisions to join the organization. Throughout the various interviews used in this chapter, males did not cite gender as a reason for joining the LTTE, though many spokespeople and observers have noted that Tamil males faced specific challenges living in a conflict-zone.

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<sup>168</sup> Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism.”

<sup>169</sup> Brun, “Women in the Local/Global Fields of War.”

<sup>170</sup> Bryan Pfaffenburger, “The Cultural Dimension of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka,” *Asian Survey* 21 (1991): 11.

<sup>171</sup> Jonathan Spencer, *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1984), 190.

<sup>172</sup> Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2004), 130.

<sup>173</sup> Schalk and Veluppillai, *Tamil Source in English Translation*.

Male militancy has been constructed as the norm and consequently male motivations for joining militant organizations have been seriously under-researched or integrated into theoretical approaches that treat them as sexless.

[I]n comparison to other institutions in society, defense and military institutions have been associated with specific gender stereotypes, surprisingly consistent across both cultures and time. ..Once a particular set of behaviors has been established as the norm for appropriate conduct within any institution, it becomes difficult to critique, in part, because normativity makes certain practices appear ‘natural’, beyond discussion. In the history of most military institutions, masculinity has been normalized and regularized.<sup>174</sup>

According to the literature, male silence on gender is to be expected because male violence is normalized and therefore more difficult to question. However, Tamil males had significant gendered experiences, as evidenced by their increased chances (in relation to females) of facing physical torture and arbitrary detention at Sri Lankan checkpoints. The silence on the issue, therefore, should not be interpreted to mean that gender was irrelevant, but points to a more systemic bias found in international relations.

### *Ethno-Cultural Identity*

It is not by chance the LTTE called itself the “Liberation Tigers.” Ancient Tamil kings used the tiger as part of their royal emblem during a time when Jaffna was a conquering kingdom and the Tamil language, culture, and Hinduism flourished.<sup>175</sup> The LTTE’s tiger emblem can also be understood as a reaction to the lion on the Sri Lankan flag. One of Sri Lanka’s earliest post-British independence ethnic controversies surrounded the national flag. The lion has symbolic and cultural resonance with the Sinhalese. “Instead of choosing a flag with a secular, neutral

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<sup>174</sup> Annica Kronsell, “Methods for Studying Silences: Gender Analysis in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity,” in *Feminist Methodologies for International Relations*, ed. Brooke A. Ackerly et al.

<sup>175</sup> D. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, “The ‘Groups’ and the Rise of Militant Secessionism,” in *The Sri Lankan Tamils* ed. Jonathan Spencer (London: Routledge, 1990), 173.

symbol which would evoke equal loyalty from all the people of Sri Lanka, the UNP government decided to choose the Lion flag of ancient Sinhalese kings with colored stripes for the minorities.”<sup>176</sup> The symbols and language employed within the conflict emphasized ethnic and cultural tensions, which, in turn, facilitated the growth of violent Tamil nationalism. Tamil elites and militants criticized government education and language policies in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but quickly shifted their criticisms to include the escalating military violence inflicted on the Tamil minority during and after Black July. These ethnic tensions were reasons many young men became militants. Tamils males were recruited using ethno-cultural appeals.

Lower-ranking males discussed the ethnic conflict by citing physical insecurity caused by military atrocities and oppressive educational and employment public policy. These reasons are related to ethno-cultural identity because government policies were enacted that were based on a politics of ethnic differentiation. In contrast, LTTE male elites justified their violence by speaking more generally about racism, the nation and “Sinhalese chauvinists.” Prabhakaran would often emphasize the differences between the two ethnic groups by saying, for example, that the Sinhalese and Tamils were “two distinct nations...two separate peoples with divergent and mutually incompatible ideologies, consciousness and political goals.”<sup>177</sup> The LTTE mimicked this language from nationalists that protested peacefully before the organization was created.

Tamil political parties used strong language when arguing against policies like colonization and standardization. In May 1976, a coalition of Tamil political parties (the TULF) issued a resolution charging that the Sri Lankan government and the country’s constitution aimed

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<sup>176</sup> Islam, Nasir “Tamil Separatism, Government Policies and Decentralisation in Sri Lanka” (working paper, Faculty of Administration, University of Ottawa, 1985), 85-65.

<sup>177</sup> Vellupillai Prabhakaran, “Hero’s Day Speech, 2004.”

to make Tamils “a slave nation ruled by the new colonial master, the Sinhalese, who are using the power they have wrongly usurped to deprive the Tamil nation of its territory, language, citizenship, economic life, opportunities of employment and education thereby destroying all the attributes of the nationhood of the Tamil people.”<sup>178</sup>

The LTTE’s demands were reinforced in press conferences, news releases and celebratory speeches where Prabhakaran would state that, in order for a peaceful solution to become viable, the Sri Lankan government would have to acknowledge the Tamil right to a homeland, a distinct nationality and self-determination.<sup>179</sup> The LTTE refused to accept the Sri Lankan government as a legitimate representative of the Tamil people, and in a press conference the LTTE ideologue Anton Balasingham stated that while Sri Lanka had a Prime Minister, Vellupillai Prabhakaran was the “Prime Minister and President of Tamil Eelam.”<sup>180</sup> Nationhood and governmental legitimacy were divided on ethnic lines. Some Tamils viewed the Sri Lankan state as a government reserved for the Sinhalese and consequently, the LTTE appeared to be a legitimate governing body. An LTTE spokesman compared Sri Lankan governance over the Tamil people as “the story of the wolf caring for the sheep” and argued that the Sinhalese government (the LTTE referred to the Sri Lankan government as the “Sinhalese government” even though not all elected members were Sinhalese) had plans for “racial annihilation ... thereby...[destroying]...the freedom struggle.”<sup>181</sup> The government was viewed as being unable

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<sup>178</sup> Pffaffenburger, “The Cultural Dimension of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka.”

<sup>179</sup> Nirupama Subramanian, “Time Not Ripe To Give Up Eelam Goal: Prabhakaran,” *The Hindu*, April 11, 2002, accessed February 27, <http://hindu.com/thehindu/2002/04/11/stories/2002041103800100.htm>.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Shan Thavarajah, ““Tigers Are the Leading Force of the Tamils”: Tamil Elam Political Chief Mr. P. Nadesan,” *Sri Lankan Guardian*, December 20, accessed February 27, 2012, <http://www.srilankaguardian.org/2008/12/tigers-are-leading-force-of-tamils.html>.

to provide social justice for the Tamil people, thereby diminishing its claim to be the legitimate representative of all Sri Lankans. It was for these reasons Prabhakaran and his group of close male associates formed the LTTE and became violent.

While the young men who were first involved in the LTTE told interviewers that they agreed with the TULF's sentiment, they still found parliamentary politics ineffective in advancing their goals. Prabhakaran, in particular, agreed with the Tamil intellectuals who rejected the idea that non-violent politics would secure the goal of a Tamil Eelam. "My natural inclination makes me lay less emphasis on words. In serious politics, it won't do to concentrate on talking; you must grow through action and then talk... Words must be matched and indeed preceded by content."<sup>182</sup> Disenfranchised from the political process, revolutionary struggle became the path to reasserting group identity and establishing a self-determined state.<sup>183</sup> As leader of the LTTE, Prabhakaran stated that a "fair and reasonable solution" could not be expected from "the Sinhala nation...buried in the mud of racist policies."<sup>184</sup> Militancy became the main path for youth participation in Sri Lankan society. The alternatives to militarization were the youth clubs and sports meetings arranged by NGOs, spaces where opportunities for political change were minimal.<sup>185</sup>

Even though Tamil intellectuals and politicians provided ideological justifications for violence, young Tamil men became disillusioned with politicians and felt that the main Tamil

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<sup>182</sup> Qadri Ismail, "Boys Will be Boys: Gender and National Agency in Frantz Fanon and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *South Asia Bulletin* 11 (1991): 1 & 2.

<sup>183</sup> Hassan, S. Azmat, *Countering Violent Extremism: The Fate of the Tamil Tigers* (New York: EastWest institute, 2009.)

<sup>184</sup> Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran*, 102.

<sup>185</sup> Catherine Brun, "Birds of Freedom: Young People, the LTTE, and Representation of Gender, Nationalism, and Governance in Northern Sri Lanka," *Critical Asian Studies* 40 (2008): 3.

political parties were elitist, too willing to condescend to Sinhala demands, and too moderate. According to the LTTE, TULF members were “betrayers” and their habit of talking about an independent homeland and then going to the capital for talks with the Sri Lankan government was “ineffective and opportunistic.”<sup>186</sup>

The previously English-educated Tamil elites were replaced by radical youth informed by the Marxist politics of the 1970s-- and it was ineffective government policy that acted as a radicalizing force.<sup>187</sup> Perhaps the most interesting difference between the formally recognized Tamil political parties and the LTTE were the profiles of participants of each group. Unlike higher-caste participants of the TULF, LTTE youth were lower middle-class from lower caste backgrounds who felt that their interests were not represented by elected politicians.<sup>188</sup> However, both elites and lower-caste Tamil militants agreed, as one LTTE member stated, that there was “no democracy in the North and East [of Sri Lanka],” areas of Sri Lanka that were Tamil dominated. The allegedly democratic Sri Lankan government benefited only the Sinhalese.<sup>189</sup>

In his book *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers*, Anton Balasingham argued that the militant groups of the 1980s were popular because they had become a space for resisting the Sinhalese state. He wrote that traditional Tamil political actors could not offer concrete political venues for youth participation.<sup>190</sup> Tamil youth shared the belief that the LTTE worked on their behalf. In a study on Tamil youth and their perceptions of the

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<sup>186</sup> Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran*, 102.

<sup>187</sup> Vaithesspara, “Beyond ‘Benign’ and ‘Fascist’ Nationalisms.”

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>189</sup> Ahilan Kadirgamar, “Interview with Ananda Sangari.”

<sup>190</sup> Anton Balasinghama, *War and Peace: Armed Struggle and Peace Efforts of Liberation Tigers* (Sydney: Fairmax, 2004), 64.

LTTE, Catherine Brun found that Balasingham's statement was representative of how many youth (males and females) felt. One young man told her that, "they [LTTE] are working with a lot of devotion and commitment on behalf of the Tamil race."<sup>191</sup>

While Prabhakaran and the early members of the LTTE felt that non-violent protest was ineffective, press releases (a form of peaceful political communication) used to convince Tamil civilians to enlist were written carefully to characterize the conflict on ethnic lines. The men who initially joined the LTTE were not coerced, but persuaded by the LTTE's Central Committee. The Central Committee, responsible for creating policy, was a twelve-person group dominated by men until the destruction of the LTTE, though female participation was more prominent during the LTTE's later years (Thamilini, the leader of the Women's Military Wing said there were five women on the committee as of 2006 and stated that because women were newer to the organization, their political influence was not as prominent in the early years of the organization but grew as time passed.<sup>192</sup>) The Central Committee often justified the LTTE's violence by referring to the Sri Lankan government and the SLDF as "entrenched oppressor forces" and speaking explicitly of "Sinhalese oppression."<sup>193</sup>

These statements were persuasive because state atrocities against the Tamil people were far-reaching and systematic. Black July, for example, was referred to by the LTTE as a "holocaust...[that]...united all sections of the Tamil masses."<sup>194</sup> A Black Tiger, in a statement he wrote before his death, compared Tamil oppression with Jewish oppression carried out by Hitler. "The intensity of destruction unleashed against our people exceeds that of similar acts by Adolph

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<sup>191</sup> Brun, "Birds of Freedom."

<sup>192</sup> Alison, "Cogs in the Wheel."

<sup>193</sup> Shan Thavarajah, "Tigers are Leading Force."

<sup>194</sup> Swamy, *Inside an Elusive Mind*, 79.

Hitler...I urge you to strengthen our leader's hands, and join this inevitable last battle against our enemy."<sup>195</sup> Following trends common across multiple ethnic conflicts, Tamil communal bonds were reinforced when facing government persecution.

By retaliating against an ethnic...group, the state not only creates hostility towards the government but also heightens awareness of a cause that may otherwise have remained obscure...[T]hrough their violence militant Tamils have given intellectual Tamils and Tamils in general a greater sense of respectability and reduce their perceive subordination to the Sinhalese political establishment.<sup>196</sup>

In martial poetry written by LTTE males, references to a common Sinhalese enemy are common. Cadres described their enemies as "bloodthirsty Sinhala,"<sup>197</sup> and "murderers hunting our nation."<sup>198</sup> One member, Kunan, said that as part of his training with the LTTE, an hour of time a day was devoted to instruction that explained how the Sinhalese oppressed the Tamils. It was through this knowledge that he acquired the anger to fight his enemies, something he later regretted.<sup>199</sup>

As a result of constant government persecution, there was almost unanimous support for the LTTE amongst male interviewees, and many stated that if the army came again they would join the Tigers and subsequently die. They had no illusions about combat or growing up in a conflict zone. One male youth reported that if the army attacked again he would join the LTTE,

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<sup>195</sup> Sheela Bhatt, "We Are Like Jews, Says LTTE's Suicide Bomber," *Rediff India Abroad*, February 22, 2009, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2009/feb/22colombo-ltte-tells-tamil-nadu-people-to-fight-for-its-battle.htm>.

<sup>196</sup> Daniel Byman, "The Logic of Ethnic Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 21(1998): 1.

<sup>197</sup> Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "And Heroes Die: Poetry of the Tamil Liberation Movement in Northern Sri Lanka," *Journal of South Asian Studies* 28 (2005):1.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> Kunan, "Thinking Back," *I Am Not a Terrorist*. Last modified May 2, 2011, <http://www.iamnotterrorist.com/newsthinkback.php>.



and if it did not he would complete his education.<sup>200</sup> Another stated that the Sri Lankan army routinely entered people's homes and demanded to know if any of the family members were Tigers; he had been beaten severely, taken to a labour camp, and later released. "All Tamil people are affected by the war. At the checkpoints they check our ID cards, they check our clothes and parcels, and so forth. They ask if we are Tigers."<sup>201</sup>

Violent riots like Black July reinforced ethnic difference. Since its beginnings, the LTTE had been speaking of discrimination and the July massacre only reinforced the truth of these claims. While, prior to Black July, Tamils had been content to live in Colombo, the massacre and post-massacre environment left the Colombo Tamil community obliterated, creating unease amongst the survivors and only increasing youth militancy. One fighter who had joined as a result of the 1983 massacre stated that "[l]arge numbers of Tamil men, mostly teenagers, reacted to what they saw as the Sri Lankan government's indiscriminate persecution of innocent Tamils and joined the insurgency, which was rapidly gathering support."<sup>202</sup>

The LTTE also used the riots to highlight ethnic differences and persuade Tamil males to join the organization. One recruit mentioned that the LTTE had approached him (he used the word "pestered") and convinced him to join by arguing that everyone had to make a sacrifice. "[T]hey had been telling me about all the terrible things that have happened to our people and how bad the Sinhala people are."<sup>203</sup> The LTTE political wing would routinely urge students and former cadres to join (or join again, for those who had left the organization) and to fulfill, as one

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<sup>200</sup> Margaret Trawick, *Enemy Lines: Warfare, Childhood and Play in Batticola*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 165.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>202</sup> Reuters, "Life as Female Guerilla."

<sup>203</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why they Choose to Fights*, 59.

press release stated, their “duty... to the motherland.”<sup>204</sup> These recruitment drives occurred in schools and many male school-aged youth joined voluntarily after hearing speeches by Tamil Tigers.<sup>205</sup>

From an early age we have been told that the Sinhalese people are not good. [The] LTTE produce films, ballads and street dramas to recruit the soldiers. They would say: Sinhalese did this, they did that, you can join us. They came to schools and tuition centers.<sup>206</sup>

Other male cadres corroborated this story and added that the LTTE would lecture students on how the Sinhalese were “devils” and how they “trampled” the Tamils.<sup>207</sup> “When I think of my time with the LTTE, the situation was such that I thought I was doing the right thing. There was so much excitement and intensity of purpose. Why? Because we constantly heard how bad the Sinhalese were and how bad the government was.”<sup>208</sup>

It was not only the language used by the LTTE that reinforced ethnic differences, but the language used by the Sri Lankan government after the Black July massacre. When addressing Sri Lankan citizens, government officials addressed the Sinhalese and not the Tamil victims of violence. There was, in general, no acknowledgement of Tamil suffering. Instead, government spokespeople pointed to how the violence had inconvenienced and harmed the Sinhalese.<sup>209</sup> In an address to the nation, the Sri Lankan president addressed Black July’s aftermath by stating that,

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<sup>204</sup> “Sri Lankan Tamil Political Wing Urges Ex-Cadres to Join,” *BBC Monitoring International Reports*, August 19, 2008, accessed February 16, <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/article-1G1-188314825/sri-lanka-tamil-tiger.html>.

<sup>205</sup> “LTTE Suicide Cadres Sought Asylum in US,” *Lankasri News*, May 14, 2012, accessed February 27, 2012, <http://eng.lankasri.com/view.php?22BmSac3MA34eSY53031O4dd2Old20V5Y3e4eMCca3mB52>.

<sup>206</sup> Brun, “Birds of Freedom.”

<sup>207</sup> Kumaran, “What Did We Get from the Organization?” *I Am Not a Terrorist*. Last modified July 27, 2011, <http://www.iamnotterrorist.com/NewsWhatweneed.php>.

<sup>208</sup> Kunan, “Thinking Back.”

<sup>209</sup> Spencer, “Popular Perceptions of the Violence,” 177.

“that Sinhalese will never agree to the division of the country which has been a united nation for 2,500 years.”<sup>210</sup> The Prime Minister excused Sinhalese behaviour and made their violence acceptable when he stated, “[w]e see that our people who have been misled by such rumours are enraged and frightened. As a result they have been led to violent acts.”<sup>211</sup> The government’s response to the riots ensured that the LTTE could use Black July as an effective recruitment tool.

Further reinforcing ethnic separation was the make-up of the Sri Lankan army. Tamil men formed 40% of the armed forces in 1956 and were reduced to 1% by 1970.<sup>212</sup> The armed forces were overwhelmingly Sinhalese and firm believers in “hegemonistic ideologies that succeeding administrations had espoused. They went into the campaign, not as a professional army fighting a war on behalf of a supracommunal state, but as an army asserting the interests of the Sinhalese against Tamils.”<sup>213</sup>

Both the Tamil militants and the SLDF were comprised of youth from lower middle-class backgrounds. However, while Tamil youth were denied access to university and language recognition, the Sri Lankan government had recruited rural middle class Sinhalese youth into the army as a way of widening their employment opportunities.<sup>214</sup> The State used Sinhala nationalism when communal tensions arose to justify educational and employment policies that favoured the Sinhalese.<sup>215</sup> Tamil and Sinhalese youth were almost identical in profile save for

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<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>212</sup> Islam, “Tamil Separatism.”

<sup>213</sup> Siri Gamage, “Radicalization of Tamil Middle Class and Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 34 (1994): 2.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*.

their ethnic backgrounds, and one group was benefiting from government policy while the other was facing its selective ramifications. The profile of the Sri Lankan army provided further evidence that the government only served the Sinhalese. Not until the conflict ended in May 2009 did the Sri Lankan government consciously integrate Tamil males into the armed forces<sup>216</sup> and create job opportunities for Tamil youth and ex-combatants by holding job fairs.<sup>217</sup> Opportunity was divided on ethnic lines. Tamil males were deprived of the opportunity to seek financial stability because of their ethnic background, something that will be further explored in the following section of this chapter.

The success and growth of the LTTE was a consequence of the government's failure to integrate Tamils into the democratic process and provide them with the benefits of social programming afforded to the Sinhalese. Black July accentuated Sri Lanka's institutional breakdown and was especially apparent when the Sinhala--dominated security personnel inflamed the mob's aggression. While race riots against Tamils had been occurring since the 1950s, security personnel never aided or abetted the rioters. Their discipline and impartiality even earned them a high reputation amongst northern Tamils, the group that had been most affected by violent conflict. "Such perceptions of impartiality and professionalism had disappeared by the 1960s when the police and army came to be viewed as part of the Sinhalese vanguard designed to subjugate the Tamils."<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> "Lanka to Recruit Rehabilitated Ex-LTTE Men into Civil defence," *IBN Live*, June 24, 2012, accessed February 20, 2012, <http://ibnlive.in.com/generalnewsfeed/news/lanka-to-recruit-rehabilitated-exltte-men-into-civil-defence/1016051.html>

<sup>217</sup> Sri Lanka Ministry of Defence, "Jobs for Ex-LTTE Cadres." Last modified July 17, [http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100907\\_02](http://www.defence.lk/new.asp?fname=20100907_02)

<sup>218</sup> Neil Devotta, "Control Democracy."

While the LTTE's press releases reiterated that the conflict was a result of ethno-cultural discrimination, in practice ethnic discrimination meant depriving Tamil youth of access to education, employment, and non-violent lives. The organization spoke of ethno-cultural divisions because they were part of the reason Tamil males chose to fight back against the Sri Lankan state. The organization believed that these appeals were persuasive or else it would not have used them in an effort to recruit members. While male LTTE members spoke of ethnic discrimination to their interviewers, they were also likely to mention how their rights had been contravened. The factors that resulted in feelings of ethnic alienation, and subsequently reinforced ethno-cultural identity, were based on elements of human security.

### **Security**

Tamil men have been affected by the war differently than women. They formed the majority of casualties in the civil conflict and were more likely than women to leave war-affected areas (whether to go abroad or to Colombo) in search for employment as the war affected the employment prospects of Tamil men.<sup>219</sup> Conflict-affected areas, mostly in the north and east of Sri Lanka, had high rates of unemployment and low levels of economic activity.<sup>220</sup> As one Tamil Internally Displaced Person (IDP) said, "you know, we are *women* and therefore used to being nobody. This is why we can cope better than the men."<sup>221</sup> Joke Schrijvers goes as far as to say that "in terms of status and self-esteem men have lost more than women."<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Kanchana and Humphries, "Mundane Heroines."

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> Butterfield, "Gender in Crisis," 32.

<sup>222</sup> Joke Schrijvers, "Fighters, Victims and Survivors: Constructions of Ethnicity, Gender and Refugeeess among Tamils in Sri Lanka," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 12 (1999): 3.

Common themes found in interviews with male militants were the deaths of loved ones, the physical insecurity of their environment, and the lack of educational and employment prospects as reasons for joining the LTTE. Subsequently, interviewees who spoke with male LTTE youth routinely found that their commitment to an independent Tamil Eelam was sincere, but that most of them also had, to paraphrase Trawick, other aspirations related to leading a life absent of war.<sup>223</sup>

#### *Educational and Employment Disruption*

The previous section on women highlighted how the LTTE provided additional training and employment opportunities for those with minimal alternatives. Interviews and NGO reports indicate that male LTTE members were more likely than females to cite joining the organization for employment opportunities. In fact, lack of employment prospects figured prominently as reason for joining the LTTE and was often cited as frequently as the loss of a family member.

Of these reasons, it was educational disruption and lack of legal rights that caused Prabhakaran to form the TNT in 1972 (which was later renamed the LTTE in 1976.) Before the Standardization policy was implemented, the average Tamil believed that ethnic alienation could be overcome peacefully.<sup>224</sup> From the moment Standardization was implemented in 1973, students would stage protests whenever ministers visited Tamil-dominated areas like Jaffna, vandalize town walls with anti-government slogans, and stone government buses and property, occasionally torching them.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Trawick, *Enemy Lines*, 185.

<sup>224</sup> Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka*, 25.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

The Standardization admission policy hindered economic mobility for Tamils by limiting their access to higher education.<sup>226</sup> Further decreasing economic mobility and chances for employment was the “Sinhala only” policy, which ensured that speakers who spoke only Tamil became professionally illiterate overnight.<sup>227</sup> Following the end of the conflict, the Sri Lankan government created a commission designed to re-habilitate LTTE fighters. The Commissioner General found that most LTTE fighters believed that problems with the country lay in class distinction and the lack of economic opportunity given to Tamil youth.<sup>228</sup>

Both Standardization and the “Sinhala Only” policies were divided on ethno-cultural lines, causing young Tamil youth to have their livelihoods and abilities to pursue employment and education compromised. “We...thought it was natural to join the LTTE since there were no standard jobs on offer; my brothers have done the same, and so have most others.”<sup>229</sup> While the war provided much needed income to poor rural Sinhalese with limited opportunities, it stifled development in war-affected areas.<sup>230</sup> In her interviews, Brun found that young people joined or considered joining the LTTE during times of adversity. When alternatives were scarce, when there was not enough food or studying became too hard, the LTTE became the most attractive option.<sup>231</sup> Human Rights Watch also corroborated Brun’s conclusions and agreed that many

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<sup>226</sup> Amita Shastri, “The Material Basis for Separation: The Tamil Eelam Movement in Sri Lanka,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 49 (2001): 1.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>228</sup> Dinouk Colombage, “Ex-LTTE Rebels Warned,” *The Sunday Leader*, June 11, 2012, accessed February 7, 2012, <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2012/01/15/ex-ltte-rebels-warned/>.

<sup>229</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*, 22.

<sup>230</sup> Camilla Orjuela, “The Bullet in the Living Room: Linking Security and Development in a Colombo Neighborhood,” *Security Dialogue* 41 (2010): 1.

<sup>231</sup> Brun, “Birds of Freedom.”

young people joined due to reasons relating to poverty.<sup>232</sup> One cadre, who called himself “S,” described how he was forced to stop his education and then went to the LTTE in search of employment.

I wanted to do a job because of my security. One day my friends told me that there were some vacancies in a garage that the LTTE vehicles were repaired...I worked there about one year...I joined them because my brothers could study further and my family can live happily. For all these [reasons], I worked for them.<sup>233</sup>

Educational and employment disruption caused by the war exacerbated the serious economic problem faced by Tamils. No alternative had been left for poor Tamils other than to turn to the LTTE.<sup>234</sup> One militant, Sabesan, stated that he “faced terrible problems because of the war. If not for the war we would have lived happily. My family and most of the village suffered badly due to the economical problems. At the time it was very difficult to earn money. We suffered a lot due to this.”<sup>235</sup> Another militant stated that as a result of the poor economic climate he was struggling to “earn a little money, to exist,” but then the Sri Lankan army detained him and many other male Tamils in labour camps.<sup>236</sup>

I worked for them without money, then I cannot earn anything for my family...[W]hat wrong had I done? Only thing was we were Tamil and young. Many of the men and young boys like me had to go...We felt helpless because there was no one to turn to for justice and relief...I had to be free, so I decided to join the LTTE who were fighting against this type of situation.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Canada’s Tamils Must Rethink LTTE support.” Last modified December 20, 2004, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2004/12/19/canadas-tamils-must-rethink-ltte-support>.

<sup>233</sup> Devarajan, “I Wanted to Protect My Family Members,” *I Am Not a Terrorist*. Last modified January 3, 2012, <http://www.iamnotterrorist.com/Newsiwantprotect.php>.

<sup>234</sup> Orjuela, “The Bullet in the Living Room.”

<sup>235</sup> Trawick, *Life in South Asia* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 394.

<sup>236</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*, 40.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*



Employment searches and school operations continued in spite of the war. Universities and other public institutions expected students and employees to attend class and work regularly, causing stressful challenges to those already suffering the consequences of living in a war zone.<sup>238</sup> When thousands of Tamil students were preparing for their government scheduled A-Level exams in August, war broke out in June and the Sri Lankan government announced that the exams would not be rescheduled. Not until the LTTE took advantage and used the situation as a successful recruitment tool did the Sri Lankan government offer other exam centres unaffected by war as an alternative.<sup>239</sup>

While women mentioned educational disruption as a reason for joining the LTTE, Black July, a time of high physical insecurity, drove them to join the organization. The men and boys who formed the LTTE first joined in response to government policies that denied them access to education and employment. The differences between sexes may stem from traditional Tamil culture that emphasizes the male as breadwinner and family provider.<sup>240</sup> By looking at statements made by “S” and those who had been detained in labour camps, there is some evidence that males in the LTTE felt they had a responsibility to provide financially for their immediate relatives.

These traditional Tamil concepts, however, evolved as a result of the conflict. War created opportunities for women to redefine their labour.<sup>241</sup> Men faced with war, however, were

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<sup>238</sup> University Teachers for Human Rights, “Special Report 5, no.4”

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> Kanchana, “Mundane Heroines.”

<sup>241</sup> Gowrinathan, “Why Do Women Rebel?”

likely to lose their responsibility, employment, and property.<sup>242</sup> By 1980, a conservative estimate placed unemployment for Tamil youth with Advanced Level or Ordinary Level qualifications at forty percent.<sup>243</sup>

According to Newton Gunasinghe, a Sri Lankan sociologist and Tamil rights activist, male Tamils usually relied on the public sector for employment, but the discriminatory admissions procedures for universities and government jobs forced many of them to seek work outside Tamil dominated areas or to stay and organize protests.<sup>244</sup> Further, the neoliberal economic policies adopted by the Sri Lankan government flooded the market with cheap agricultural goods and ruined the Jaffna middle class and peasantry, one of the most productive sectors of the Sri Lankan agricultural industry.<sup>245</sup>

### *Physical Insecurity*

Though poor education and economic prospects were what prompted student anger and propelled males to militancy, the level of physical insecurity that steadily increased over the duration of the war also motivated males to join the LTTE. The government response to militancy was to perceive Tamil males as terrorist threats that required a military response instead of a response that addressed the underlying causes of their protests.<sup>246</sup> This created further physical insecurity for Tamil men and only provided greater motivation for them to join the LTTE.

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<sup>242</sup> Joke Schrijvers, "Internal Refugees of Sri Lanka: The Interplay of Ethnicity and Gender," *The European Journal of Development Research* 9 (1997): 2.

<sup>243</sup> Gamage, "Radicalisation of Tamil Middle Class."

<sup>244</sup> Newton Gunasinghe, "Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Perceptions and Solutions," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 6 (1982): 2.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>246</sup> *Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka*, (New York: United Nations, March 2011), [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri\\_Lanka/POE\\_Report\\_Full.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Sri_Lanka/POE_Report_Full.pdf).

The Sri Lankan government implemented emergency rule from 1983 to 2001, and again in 2005. Human rights violations, including unlawful killings and torture, have not been legally addressed, even though provisions for accountability are constitutionally required.<sup>247</sup> Males, in particular, were especially vulnerable. As Tamizh Kavi, Prabhakaran's speech writer stated, "[d]uring the war, Tamil men could not venture out to army controlled areas because the army would arrest them on some pretext. Many civilians were killed in custody."<sup>248</sup> Male interviewees have also mentioned that even during ceasefires they had to restrict their movements because, as males, they were more likely suspected to be LTTE militants.<sup>249</sup> The 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act dictated the laws governing emergency rule and allowed security forces to arrest and detain a suspected militant for 18 months without charge. The act was applied retroactively and resulted in the widespread torture and human rights abuses of Tamil youth.<sup>250</sup> Women reported witnessing their husbands being pulled into white vans, "the archetypal vehicle of abduction in Sri Lanka," in full view of nearby army checkpoints.<sup>251</sup> Kavi explained that because men became security targets and had to restrict their movements, new opportunities arose for women to travel for work and business--and to become militants.<sup>252</sup>

In interviews conducted by Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, males reported that they understood the risk of being captured by Sri Lankan armed forces and joined the LTTE to protect

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<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Tamilnation.org, "Tehelka interviews Tamizh Kavi: Prabhakaran's Speech Writer." Last modified November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005, [http://tamilnation.co/lte/tamizh\\_kavi.htm](http://tamilnation.co/lte/tamizh_kavi.htm).

<sup>249</sup> Brun, "Birds of Freedom."

<sup>250</sup> Neil DeVotta, "Control Democracy."

<sup>251</sup> *The Economist*, "The War Dividend," May 15, 2008.

<sup>252</sup> Tamilnation.org, "Tehelka Interviews Tamizh Kavi."

themselves from violent physical threats. For example, one male youth stated that “[t]he risk of being taken by the army was bigger as we grew older, and when we joined the LTTE, we had guns to protect ourselves and other Tigers to protect us.”<sup>253</sup> The risks of torture under detention were well known to male militants and the threat of pain induced many militants to carry cyanide capsules, even before it became mandatory within the organization.<sup>254</sup>

Because the LTTE controlled significant territory in northern Sri Lanka, aerial bombing in Jaffna was preferred to sending in ground troops. Subsequently, the civilian population, instead of the LTTE, became the primary victims of its aerial bombing campaigns.<sup>255</sup> In addition to the increase in violence, the Sri Lankan government imposed economic sanctions that were also mainly felt by the civilian population.<sup>256</sup> Nearing the end of the war, the Sri Lanka government expelled aid organizations from LTTE-controlled territory, resulting in severe scarcity of food, fuel and medicines. One LTTE spokesman alleged that the Sri Lankan government was trying to starve the population.<sup>257</sup>

The majority of interviewees stated that, because the Sri Lankan government chose aerial bombing as a military tactic on Tamil dominated areas, they were personally affected by the war and they knew someone who had been killed by the SLDF. While the LTTE has a poor human rights record (the organization has been accused of recruiting children and attempting to ethnically cleanse Muslim Tamils from northern and Eastern Sri Lanka) they managed to provide

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<sup>253</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*, 40.

<sup>254</sup> Swamy, *Tigers of Lanka*, 29.

<sup>255</sup> Fagerlund, “The Tiger’s Roar.”

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> “Tigers are the Leading Force of the Tamils,” *Sri Lankan Guardian*.

their own constituents with some protections.<sup>258</sup> Many male Tamils stated that the SLDF murdered their siblings and friends<sup>259</sup> and while some joined because of its revolutionary ideals, others joined because they felt safer as members of the LTTE than as unprotected civilians. There were two reasons for this feeling of safety. First, young males felt stronger knowing they could fight back (even though they were well aware they could die.) Secondly, the LTTE knew in advance when the SLDF would attack and managed to evacuate most of its members to the jungles where they would remain unharmed.<sup>260</sup> Joining the Tigers became a safer option than remaining a civilian. Kunan stated that he joined the LTTE during the IPKF's mission in Sri Lankan. "They [IPKF soldiers] used to trouble me when I walked along the streets. I wanted protection so I joined the movement. I worked for the movement for many years, and enjoyed the power, the dignity, and the protection."<sup>261</sup> Another member reported that he joined the LTTE in 1991 because there were frequent roundups and arrests of innocent people in his village, which subsequently lead him to becoming a long-term LTTE member.<sup>262</sup>

Moreover, Tamils had more reason to trust the LTTE than the SLDF: the LTTE did not randomly attack and kill Tamil civilians.<sup>263</sup> Further, as another interviewee stated, the presence of the LTTE deterred SLDF military attacks. "Now the army won't come. The LTTE are here,

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<sup>258</sup> Hassan, "Countering Violent Extremism: The Fate of the Tamil Tigers."

<sup>259</sup> Rick Westhead, "Born To Be a Tiger: A Child Soldier's Tale," *The Toronto Star*, February 17, 2009, accessed January 25, 2012, <http://www.thestar.com/article/588507--born-to-be-a-tamil-tiger-a-child-soldier-s-tale>.

<sup>260</sup> Trawick, *Life in South Asia*, 389

<sup>261</sup> Kunan, "Thinking Back."

<sup>262</sup> "Sri Lanka: Thayasevan, I'm Starting to Feel Normal Again." *IRIN New*, June 15, 2011, accessed July 20, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/HovReport.aspx?reportID=92983>.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid*, 386.

after all.”<sup>264</sup> Unlike the Sinhala-dominated armed forces, the LTTE provided protection for Tamil civilians. Though the Sri Lankan government claimed it was pursuing a policy of zero civilian casualties, a UN independent commission on the conflict found that the SLDF intentionally shelled ‘No Fire Zones,’ the United Nations Hub, in close proximity to the International Committee for the Red Cross, and hospitals on the front lines.<sup>265</sup> The LTTE was simply more credible. One Tamil rights activist stated that instead of venturing into ‘No Fire Zones’ the Tamil people preferred to flee into the Jungle with the LTTE, leaving ghost towns behind. “The SLA (Sri Lankan Army) has a long and recorded history of killing Tamils so people do not trust them...”<sup>266</sup>

Consequently, both women and men were prone to citing the loss of a friend or family member as a reason for joining the LTTE. Most LTTE members knew someone close who had died, and an ethnographic study conducted by Trawick reported that civilians who were considering joining the LTTE also experienced personal loss. One young man stated that he joined because his father was killed by the SLDF when he was two years old. His brother was also killed in the LTTE’s service, a death he described as heroic.<sup>267</sup> Another man cited revenge for his uncle’s death as a reason for joining the LTTE. For him, it was a matter of “family honor to take revenge.”<sup>268</sup> Brun corroborates this finding by indicating that many of the young Tamil men she interviewed joined or contemplated joining in order to avenge the death of a loved one.

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, 395.

<sup>265</sup> United Nations, “Report of the Secretary General Panel of Experts.”

<sup>266</sup> Trevor Loudon, “New Zealand ‘Tiger Supporter’ Interviewed,” accessed February 27, <http://www.trevorloudon.com/2009/02/new-zealand-tamil-tiger-supporter-interviewed/>.

<sup>267</sup> Brett and Specht, *Young Soldiers*, 24.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*, 56.

Many who joined also knew friends who were involved in the organization,<sup>269</sup> indicating that the likelihood of joining the organization was sometimes linked to a personal connection.<sup>270</sup>

Male interviewees were more likely to cite personal violations they had experienced, whereas females were more likely to cite violations of others with whom they had relationships; as already demonstrated, no LTTE woman admitted to being sexually assaulted, but instead cited cases affecting the community. In an interview with numerous students (some who were considering joining the LTTE and others who had already joined) in conflict-affected eastern Sri Lanka, Trawick notes that personal humiliation was one of several prominent reasons why young men chose to join the Tigers.<sup>271</sup>

Security and ethno-cultural identity are deeply intertwined. Research demonstrates that minority groups perceive security threats differently than majorities.<sup>272</sup> Members of ethnic groups will say “we need security” and therefore require that “we” be defined, usually in contrast to another more dominant group. Security for one group requires establishing boundaries.<sup>273</sup> In the case of ethnic conflicts, the boundaries are defined on the basis of ethno-cultural distinctiveness. Consequently, men who experienced a loss of security understood that this loss was based on their problematized ethnicity.

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<sup>269</sup> Kathir, “Am I a Hero?” *I Am Not a Terrorist*. Last modified June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <http://www.iamnotterrorist.com/NewsamIhero.php>.

<sup>270</sup> Brun, “Birds of Freedom.”

<sup>271</sup> Trawick, “Everyday Life in South Asia,” 389.

<sup>272</sup> Orjuela, “Bullet in the Living Room.”

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

## *Sexual Assault*

Though men are expected to retain a veneer of invulnerability, the fact remains that men faced violence during war that took aim at their masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity does not only seek to control women, but also seeks to control subordinate masculinities.<sup>274</sup>

The thesis has already discussed Tamil women and their experiences with sexual assault. Women were inclined, in part, to join the LTTE because of the anger they felt towards the SLDF. Sexual assault directed against Tamil women has been extensively documented. However, women were not the only victims of sexual assault in the Sri Lankan civil war. Male sexual violence, overwhelmingly perpetrated by men against other men, was systemically employed during wartime. In one study conducted by a British torture treatment centre, twenty-one percent of Tamil males reported sexual torture while in detention.<sup>275</sup> Tamil males in detention had their testicles trampled, kicked, and slammed in drawers.<sup>276</sup>

In one particular case, a group of Tamil women and men were held in an unauthorized detention centre and, upon learning that the LTTE had killed three Sinhala soldiers, the soldiers began beating the detainees and then forced the men to watch as they pinched and twisted the women's nipples with pliers. The same pliers were used to squeeze the genitals of the male detainees.<sup>277</sup> "Women's bodies can be seen as vehicles through which the nation or group can be reproduced...raping women...is a key weapon in the humiliation of opposing forces."<sup>278</sup> Forcing

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<sup>274</sup> Miranda Alison, "Wartime and Sexual Violence: Women's Human Rights and Questions of Masculinity," *Review of International Studies* 33 (2007):1.

<sup>275</sup> Lara Stemple, "Male Rape and Human Rights," *Hastings Law Journal* 60 (2009):1.

<sup>276</sup> Amnesty International, *Sri Lanka: Torture in Custody*.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>278</sup> Lynn Davies, "Gender, Education, Extremism, and Security," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 38 (2008): 5.



Tamil men to watch the sexual assault of Tamil women was an act specifically designed to hurt and humiliate the male detainees while physically harming and humiliating the women involved

In another study, academics interviewing 23 male Tamils found that the majority of respondents had personal experience with sexual assault. Only two respondents refused to answer the questions. Eight men reported that they had witnessed sexual assault; four men reported that they had experienced it; three men stated they had both experienced and witnessed sexual assault. Only six men responded that they had not witnessed or experienced sexual assault.<sup>279</sup>

Despite these documented cases, men did not cite their personal experiences with sexual assault as a reason for joining the LTTE.<sup>280</sup> Instead, LTTE spokesmen would highlight how women and girls were targeted with sexual assault. As one spokesman stated, when speaking of Tamils sympathetic to the Sri Lankan government, “[i]f you are born in our ethnic group and then destroy our ethnicity by consorting with outsiders, you commit treason and cannot call yourself a Tamil anymore. *Because of that our girls are assaulted and killed.*”<sup>281</sup> Another prominent member (Colonel Karuna, who later defected and provided information to the Sri Lankan government) argued that he and the LTTE regretted the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, but that Gandhi’s assassination was partially in response to the Indian Peacekeeping Forces raping Tamil women.<sup>282</sup> Atrocities against females were highlighted and used as leverage to

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<sup>279</sup> Hillary Weaver, “Reexamining What We Think We Know: A Lesson From Tamil Refugees,” *Affilia* 20 (2005): 2.

<sup>280</sup> Stack-O’Connor, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds.”

<sup>281</sup> D. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity*, (Stuttgart: Stuttgart,1994), 70. Emphasis mine.

<sup>282</sup> Charles Haviland, “Sri Lankan Minister Admits Tamil Tiger Killings,” *BBC News*, December 13, 2010, accessed February 27, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-11985478>.

humiliate the Sinhalese and Tamil defectors, possibly following war-time trend of politicizing female bodies for personal gain. Sexual assault against men was not highlighted or mentioned by LTTE leadership.

While sexual assault is often characterized as occurring due to male-female power relations that seek to subordinate all women, wartime sexual violence is even more complicated because of its intersection with ethnicity. Sexual assault during wartime is not indiscriminate and is committed against targeted men and women, specifically “enemy” men and “enemy” women.<sup>283</sup> LTTE males attempted to subordinate Sinhala masculinity by characterizing Sinhala men as oversexed and felt the need to leverage attacks against girls and women as a reason for protecting the Tamil nation.<sup>284</sup> By doing so they symbolically linked the female body to the integrity of the community and nation. Sri Lankan authorities specifically targeted Tamil men because of their subordinated ethnic status.

Rather than being received as a homosexual (thus less masculine) act, male to male rape is a highly masculinised act for the perpetrator and his audience, whilst the victim is feminised. This reflects the construction of female sexuality as passive and male sexuality as active. In wartime, then, male to male rape (as male to female rape) humiliates and feminises the victim whilst asserting the perpetrator’s dominant (heterosexual, ethno-national) masculinity. The ethnonational element means that symbolically the victim’s national identity is also feminised and humiliated.<sup>285</sup>

There are many potential reasons why males did not report sexual assault during wartime, or why LTTE males did not identify their gender-induced insecurity as a reason for joining the organization. The Refugee Law project, an NGO that deals with male sexual assault victims, states that while female rape is severely under-reported, male rape is almost never reported. Men

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<sup>283</sup> Alison, “Wartime sexual violence.”

<sup>284</sup> Stack-O’Connor, “Lions, Tigers, and Freedom Birds.”

<sup>285</sup> Alison, “Wartime Sexual Violence.”

are afraid to confess because, as men, they are expected to be invulnerable and fear losing support and comfort from those around them.<sup>286</sup> Male sexual assault, in general, is severely under-researched. In one study conducted, over 4,076 NGOs that researched wartime sexual violence were analyzed, but only three percent of these organizations mentioned the experiences of men in their literature.<sup>287</sup>

Following this pattern, while the LTTE was willing to speak directly about sexual violence that affected women, they remained silent on the sexual assault of Tamil men. Similarly, no interviews conducted with Tamil men mentioned their anger with the sexual assault and emasculation of Tamil males as a reason for joining the LTTE, even though these cases were methodically documented and relayed to interviewers by male survivors. Male interviewees did not include sexual assault when they spoke of the physical insecurity caused by the presence of the SLDF.

Consequently, Sri Lanka's weak government policy and its failure to successfully manage its multi-ethnic identity created material conditions that prevented Tamil males from accessing education and employment opportunities—vital components of human security. In response, Tamil males joined the LTTE and engaged in militant acts, causing the Sri Lankan government, in turn, to retaliate violently. The Sri Lankan military response, which included the racial and gender profiling of Tamil men, caused more Tamil males to join because their physical security was further compromised. Men were more likely to understand their marginalized status within the country along ethno-cultural lines instead of as resulting from their gender, even though they were targeted differently because they were male. The LTTE leadership used ethnic

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<sup>286</sup> Will Storr, "The Rape of Men." *The Guardian*, July 17, 2011, accessed September 1, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/jul/17/the-rape-of-men>.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

oppression as a framework to justify violence, speaking in general terms about violence against Tamils, while lower-ranking LTTE men found these appeals convincing because of their personal experiences and deprived ambitions, the experiences of their relatives, and encounters with Sri Lankan forces.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis shows that males and females joined the LTTE for reasons relating to security and identity. However, women and men explained these reasons differently and partially in response to their gendered experiences and cultural expectations. When males first joined the LTTE in 1972-1976, they did so because their access to education and employment was compromised. When females joined after the 1983 riots, they did so in a time of heightened physical risk for the Tamil minority. Thus, when males and females first joined the LTTE they conceptualized security differently, though their reasons overlapped during the organization's later years: males began citing threats of bodily harm after the implementation of the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act and the 1983 riots.

Women spoke of their gender and the LTTE's commitment to gender equality as a reason for joining the organization. Women were also aware of their ethno-cultural identity and of how the Sri Lankan government used ethnicity to justify its policies. Similarly, men understood their lack of opportunity as stemming from their Tamil identity. However, unlike females, males did not cite gender as a reason for joining the LTTE, even though they experienced harm differently and gender expectations were clearly relevant.

The LTTE was a male-only organization until 1983. Until then, the LTTE protested against what they viewed as unjust educational and language policies directed towards Tamils. These educational and language policies prevented males from securing stable employment and post-secondary education. For Tamil males, who were traditionally expected to be the main income earner in the household, the lack of access to financial security was especially frustrating. In 1974 men began joining the LTTE hoping to reclaim these rights and because they perceived non-violent political protest as ineffective.

The SLDF targeted male Tamils precisely because they assumed that males would be more likely to participate in militant acts. The outcome of this policy meant male Tamils comprised the majority of deaths, disappearances, and tortures. Males interviewed by the academics and journalists cited in this thesis spoke negatively of their own experiences with the SLDF during this time. These brutal encounters were partially responsible for their decision to join the LTTE. These statements may be contrasted with statements given by women, who often spoke of their families and communities, but did not mention personal encounters with the SLDF.

Males spoke of themselves often, in addition to talking about the pain suffered by their relatives and friends. They were also more likely than women to chronicle their own humiliations with the Sri Lankan forces. The LTTE male elites first outlined the conflict in ethno-cultural terms to justify their violence, in language that was supported by lower-ranking male members. However, male members were unlikely to join the organization simply because they felt it was their duty to engage in self-sacrifice. They participated in violence because of their poor financial prospects and because they sought physical security. In fact, the *maravar* designation, the ideal fighter stemming from Tamil folklore and idealized by Prabhakaran, was emulated more by female LTTE members. Why men were more willing to speak of themselves and women more likely to speak of their communities requires further research.

Even though Tamil males were violently targeted because they were male and Tamil, in interviews with various sources men omitted discussing gender as a reason for joining the LTTE. Though sexual assaults against Tamil males were documented by NGOs, they are not discussed by Tamil men. However, Tamil male *civilians* were systematically sexually assaulted. While the LTTE spoke of and was willing to issue public statements about the sexual assault directed at

Tamil civilian women, the organization was silent about the threat of sexual assault faced by civilian men. Why the LTTE was silent needs to be further researched. The LTTE did not publicize sexual abuse committed against Tamil men to humiliate the Sri Lankan forces, something it routinely did with sexual assault faced by women. The LTTE, possibly, conflated gender with women and did not address the gendered ways men lived their lives, even though the conflict demonstrably affected men and women differently.

Instead of speaking about their lives through a gendered lens, men understood their deprived rights as stemming from ethno-cultural inequality. While the LTTE leadership spoke of racial inequality in intellectual and philosophical terms, a requirement when speaking for a large organization with a varied membership, lower-ranking males understood that the loss of their families, their own degrading encounters with the Sri Lankan forces, and lack of education and employment opportunities were a result of the Sri Lankan government associating criminality with Tamil ethnicity.

Women joined later than men, at a time when Tamils were being physically targeted and attacked by the SLDF and Sri Lankan police. Women were participants in other more socialist Tamil militant groups, but did not ask to join the LTTE until after the 1983 riots left hundreds, or perhaps thousands (the numbers are still unconfirmed), of Tamil civilians dead. While women in other militant groups may have conceptualized security differently, this thesis indicates that female LTTE members joined because of heightened risks to bodily integrity, the experience of being displaced due to war, and because they witnessed the effects of violence on their communities. Unlike men, women were less likely to speak of their own encounters with the SLDF and/or at checkpoints and instead cited the experiences of their families and friends. The majority of female LTTE fighters had experienced the loss of a friend or family member and had

experienced, to cite Miranda Alison, “communal suffering” even if they personally had not been victims of violence. The majority of LTTE female members also came predominantly from the north and east, the areas most affected by war. Consequently, they were witnesses to the SLDF’s aerial bombing campaigns and the ramifications of ethnic profiling. Even though female LTTE members did not mention personal encounters with the SLDF to interviewers, they mentioned that a climate of fear caused by indiscriminate aerial bombing and artillery shelling convinced them to join the LTTE. They linked the possibility of finding peace with the success of their community and families. When women felt the loss of security personally, it was because members of their family or community experienced trauma. Thus, journalistic, academic, and government attempts that frame women (in the LTTE, specifically) as being uncommitted to nationalist causes due to damaged personal psychologies are overstated and demand further investigation when applied to women in other militant organizations.<sup>288</sup>

The LTTE provided females with employment and training opportunities (the LTTE’s policewomen were paid well, for example) and as higher education is an important Tamil cultural concept, many women mentioned that war made studying increasingly difficult. They linked the inability to pursue their educations with the physical insecurity caused by war. Unlike males, however, most women did not mention employment as a reason for joining the organization. In fact, while the LTTE provided women with training advancement, those interviewed understood that they were actively risking their lives and recognized that employment with the LTTE carried the possibility of death. Females connected physical safety with education. If there was no war, the Tamil people could study and pursue their educations without disruption.

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<sup>288</sup> Cunningham, “Cross Regional Trends in Female Terrorism.”



Female recruits liked the LTTE's definition of gender equality, one that construed female emancipation as the right to engage in combat. Many recruits felt stifled by Tamil society, but they also needed an avenue to defend their people once non-violent protest became ineffective. As LTTE members, females inhabited new roles and became extensively involved in Tamil political life. They seized the opportunity to create political and social agendas that affected Tamil civilians. The LTTE not only provided security to female recruits, but allowed them to become enablers of security. As LTTE members they could, for example, fight for a Tamil nation free from threats to education and employment. They could also defend Tamil women from sexual assault—which, according to interviewees, created a climate of fear and highlighted female vulnerability to gendered attacks by the SLDF. Unlike males, females spoke of the threat of sexual assault, though no female member admitted to being a survivor. Instead, they wove the threat of sexual assault into a larger narrative about protecting Tamil women from Sri Lankan aggressors.

Related to the opportunity of providing their families and communities with security, women also spoke of the self-fulfillment coming from being an active community member. Many recruits believed that Tamil culture had hindered females and that the LTTE had allowed women to reach their potential by disproving that women were weak. This belief contrasts with statements made by male recruits, who often spoke of their involvement as a last resort or as something they had to do for survival. Security, as conceptualized by females, meant achieving equality with men, including the Tamil men who were their allies. The war created opportunities to expand female responsibility, partially because the male population was being decimated and the LTTE needed more members. As the male population decreased and as Tamil men left war-affected areas in search of employment, women often became the dominant income-earners of

their families and were required to work outside the home. While some Tamil women must have found this situation difficult, LTTE females spoke of these new roles positively to their interviewers.

However, females joined not only because they were attracted to the LTTE's understanding of gender emancipation. Black July reinforced ethno-cultural oppression against Tamils. Tamil civilians were violently targeted specifically because of their ethnic identity, and women were targeted specifically because they were *Tamil* women. Aerial bombing and artillery shelling were targeted at Tamils. Enemy lines were drawn around ethnic differentiation.

Though males and females joined the LTTE for different reasons, with females believing that gender equality and physical safety were paramount (freedom from fear) and males first joined because they needed access to education and employment to survive (freedom from want), both sexes were led to the LTTE because of Sri Lanka's institutional decay. Linguistic and educational policies were created to benefit the Sinhalese, historically underrepresented in the government sector and certain post-secondary departments. Sri Lanka could not manage its ethnic differences and interpreted democracy to mean majoritarian rule. No protections were guaranteed for its largest minority. Non-violent protests against oppressive linguistic and educational policies were ineffective, and so youth turned to militancy. After the 1983 riots, the Sri Lankan government banned political parties from calling for a separate state, an action which increased ethnic polarization on the island and denied Tamil activists the ability to protest peacefully. In short, the Tamils perceived the Sri Lankan government to be a Sinhalese government.

Often when studying cases involving security issues, academics will determine who benefits from the state's security arrangement. In the case of the Sri Lankan civil conflict,

security was provided for the Sinhalese so that they would be protected from the marginalized and criminalized Tamil population. The Sri Lankan government, working to reconcile historic Sinhalese marginalization, constructed policies that protected the majority from a problematized Tamil minority. Both sexes viewed the Sri Lankan government as oppressive and designed only to protect the Sinhalese. The loss of the government's ability to protect all ethnic groups within its borders served to reinforce the LTTE's claim; the organization was the sole and legitimate representative of the Tamil people.

While males and females had different perspectives on security and identity, there was some overlap. Both sexes sought security and joined the LTTE under the (correct) perception that the organization would provide education and employment, even if these provisions would come in a future ideal Tamil homeland. Where the sexes differed was that men were more likely than women to join the LTTE in search of employment and education, while women spoke of long-term security solutions that would enable Tamil youth to study.

Where male and female motivations were most similar was on the issue of ideology. Lower-ranking males and females were not attracted to the organization's ideological commitments to Marxist-Leninism. Despite the organization's prominent socialist members (including Prabhakaran, Adele Ann and Anton Balasingham), the LTTE rarely use socialist appeals as a recruitment tool. Women were more responsive to nationalist and feminist appeals and men were motivated to join the LTTE due to poor material conditions that prevented them from gaining access to education and employment. Males did not use revolutionary socialism to understand these material conditions. Instead, they understood that their ethnicity was at the root of their marginalized status. Similarly, females understood their reduced rights as resulting from the ethnic conflict and found that the LTTE offered them the opportunity to redress these

grievances through its commitment to gender liberation, which it defined as expanding traditional gender roles to include women as active combatants.

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