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**Exploring the impact of online politics on political
agents and political strategies in the Sri Lankan Tamil
diaspora**

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PhD

The University of Edinburgh

2009

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is based purely on my own original work and it has not been previously submitted to any other institution for any degree, diploma or other qualification.

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Date

Abstract

The thesis explores the role and impact of the internet on Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora political activism, focusing on both the experiences of political activists and on an analysis of web content related to diaspora activism. The central argument of the thesis is based around the relationship between political agents and cyberspace. The thesis argues that the political strategies and tactics adopted in the Tamil diasporan political sphere have changed with an increased dependence on the internet changing with it the politics and lives of individual activists. Cyberspace is presented as a site of power struggle with power as both an *objective* and *source* in micro-political struggles. The thesis also highlights the double sense of space attributed to cyberspace, both as a space facilitating political activism and as a qualitatively new space for politics. It traces the manifestation of violence in cyberspace based on its extensive reach and the collateral damage it can cause in political conflicts. Also the thesis argues that these intense web engagements for domination and resistance within the diaspora communities cause the emergence of new political priorities in Tamil diaspora politics. These do not parallel political developments in the conflict back in Sri Lanka.

The thesis is based on research conducted from 2005 to 2008 during heightened rivalries between supporters of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) and dissident Tamil diaspora political activists which involved the extensive use of cyberspace for political purposes. The empirical research consisted of an integrated framework of online and offline research. The offline research was based on eight months of fieldwork in London including interviews with Tamil diaspora political activists across the spectrum from pro-LTTE to anti-LTTE dissidents. The online research was based on the technique of Web Sphere Analysis, which enables a framing of web content into a coherent unit of analysis.

Key words: Sri Lanka, Tamil diaspora, Internet Politics, cyber terrorism, Web Sphere Analysis, Power, Political Space.

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Acknowledgements

This study and the resulting thesis were completed thanks to the collective support of many individuals and institutions. The Universities of UK Overseas Research Scholarship (ORSAS) in combination with the Principals scholarship awarded by the University of Edinburgh enabled me to undertake my research towards completing my PhD.

I am indebted to Vasuki Walker, Nirmala Rajasingham, Paul Sathianesan and Sree for providing me with the necessary support and linking me with the contacts for my fieldwork in London. These individuals went out of the way to put me in touch with people that really mattered for my research. Gamini, Vasuki, Nirmala, David and Namal were my constant hosts when I was in London and made me feel at home after long tiring days and weeks of fieldwork.

I must also thank the company and support of Dr. Sarah Holt, Alistair Hunter, Dhana Wadugodapitiya, Jagath Pathirage, Dr. Premakumara De Silva, Dr. Sharika Thiranagama, Amanda Wittman, Chris Ogden, Becky Walker, Melissa Titus, Jaya Bose. Special Thanks to Dr. Jeevan Raj Sharma for helping in the formatting of the thesis and providing important critical insight into my theoretical arguments. Arumugam Jeyanithy was a friend I made in Edinburgh and he took time with me in the long and arduous task of translating many websites that I had captured during my research. A special thanks to Sarah Hill my first and closest friend at the department of Politics, University of Edinburgh. She did the painstaking task of proof reading texts from the first year of my studies to the final draft of the PhD thesis despite her busy schedules and was always there for me when I needed a friend. Crispin and Aya's presence in my life in my time in Edinburgh cannot be forgotten.

Prof. Jayadeva Uyangoda was the first to direct me to the University of Edinburgh and he made me the political scientist I am. Prof. Nira Wickramasighe and Dr. Dayan Jayatilleka gave me the inspiration and strength at all critical conjunctures in my academic life. Dinesh Idroos is the unsung hero in my academic journey. Prof. Dorothy Denning provided critical insight into my arguments on cyberspace and cyber security.

Gihan, Tharanga, Asanka, Ashani, Yohan, Vimani, Harinda, Samantha, Anumali and Sumudu made sure I didn't succumb to the pressures of student life and assuring me I had many a home away from home in Edinburgh. Also Yohan Fernando, Subhani, Prasadini, Chandani, Aruna, Niroshini and Menik made sure that I was always thought of and they were with me from Sri Lanka. They made me believe cyberspace was indeed a space of convergence.

My supervisors, Prof. Jonathan Spencer and Dr. Luke March, were a wealth of support and were two of the most patient individuals I had ever met in my life. They kept me going and always challenged me to realise the importance of both the struggle and pride of becoming an academic. Sue Grant and Susan Powrie from the graduate office patiently responded to my queries and made my life in Edinburgh smooth in being supportive in all administrative affairs

Harshi was the love of my life from my high school years; she gave her time and patience to see me become who I am today. I married Harshi in the second year of my PhD research and ever since she has been my strength and the source of energy. For more than a decade she kept me going and made sure I never stopped short in achieving my goals, all at the expense of other things that she would have done in this time. I also thank Harishi's parents for being immensely supportive. My parents Sarojini Abeysuriya and Sarath Vidanage guided my life in their own different but complementing styles. My mother, I believe, shaped the social and political activist in me, making me realise the importance of being a human. My father constantly made me realise there was no limit to human potential. Above all my parents' love and protection made me who I am. I would have not been in Edinburgh without their inspiration making me believe that we make our own destiny.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ARPANET	:	Advanced Research Projects Agency Network
CFA	:	Cease-fire Agreement
EPDP	:	Eelam People's Democratic Party
EPRLF	:	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
GDP	:	Gross domestic product
IPKF	:	Indian Peacekeeping Force
JVP	:	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE	:	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PA	:	People's Alliance
PLOTE	:	People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
RAW	:	Research and Analysis Wing
SLA	:	Sri Lankan Army
SLFP	:	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
TNA	:	Tamil National Alliance
UNP	:	United National Party
USD	:	United States dollars
UNHCR	:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	:	United Nations Children's Fund
UTHR (J)	:	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)
TELO	:	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TULF	:	Tamil United Liberation Front

Map of Sri Lanka



Figure 1 Political Map of Sri Lanka. From <http://geology.com/world/sri-lanka-satellite-image.shtml>

Map of Tamil Eelam



Figure 2 Map of Tamil Eelam on Tamilcanadian.com. URL:
<http://www.Tamilcanadian.com/page.php?cat=192&id=921>

SRI LANKA

*The country has been in a civil war with
Tamil Tigers since 1983*

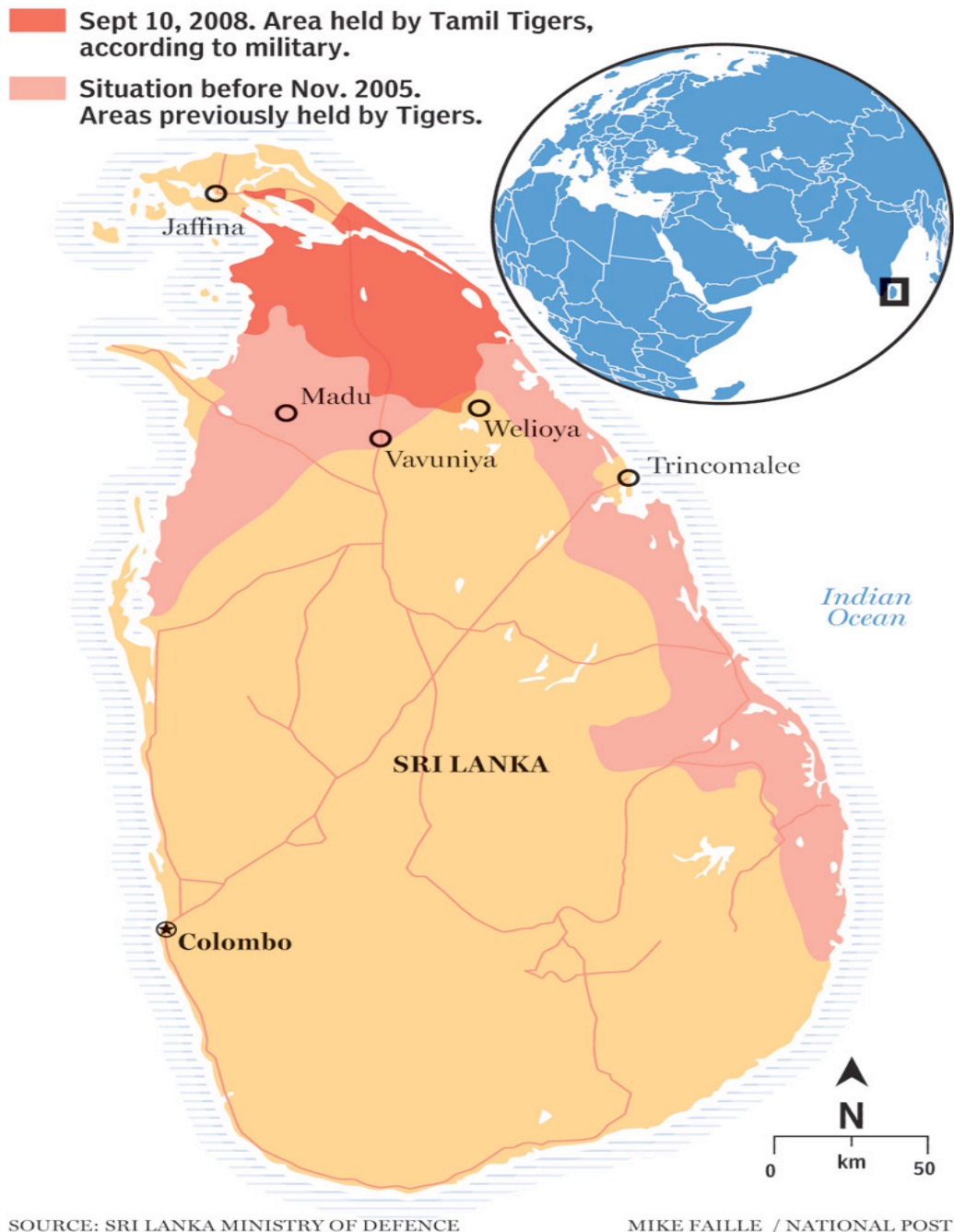


Figure 3 Map of Sri Lanka which presents the shift in the conflict zones from 2005 – 2008.

This is significant as it shows the rapid changes within the conflict zones during the time period of my research. The map is from nationalpost.com. Available on <http://network.nationalpost.com/np/blogs/posted/archive/2008/09/20/graphic-sri-lanka-conflict-area.aspx>

Introduction

The Sri Lankan Tamils are widely dispersed across the Western world and have been a key life line for the Tamil secessionist movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE/Tamil Tigers) in Sri Lanka. The Tamil Tigers claim they are fighting for a separate state for the ethnic Tamil people in the North and East of Sri Lanka. This is a case study of diaspora politics linked to an ongoing ethno-nationalist conflict in a state, making the analysis of Tamil diaspora, politically important in transnational nationalistic activities. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict has triggered two physical flows of Tamils out of their traditional homes. Firstly, an internal displacement leading to inward migration and secondly an outward migration to many international locations. These flows, especially in the early 1980's and 1990's, have created significant Tamil diaspora communities and diaspora centres across the globe. My research takes place nearly two decades after the major influx of Tamils reaching London, the colonial hub where Tamil diaspora politics is a well entrenched phenomenon. Diaspora centres such as London and its extensive diaspora communities have become sites of extensive political activity. For the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in particular, the diaspora centres have become important bases for international presence. They have become the virtual nodes of LTTE international operations attracting multiple researchers to study dynamics spanning from diaspora formations to political engagements.

Tensions between the Sri Lankan state and Tamil militants were mounting in the late 1970s and this time was marked with occasional confrontations. By the 1980s the civil war was a reality and the conflict was marked by four stages of military warfare that commenced between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. These phases are periods of intense confrontations which are identified as Eelam Wars I, II, III and IV. The anti-Tamil riots which marked the early 1980s created a massive exodus of Tamils out of Sri Lanka. The exiled Tamils settled in various locations in the Western world and in some regions of Asia. This exodus created significant Tamil diaspora centres.

The Tamil diasporans, especially in areas of high concentration of Tamil communities such as London and Toronto, were able to establish and run various organizations, ranging from businesses to charities. The LTTE managed to manipulate and gain a

strong grip of these diaspora communities making them a part of the LTTE's struggle against the Sri Lankan state. The LTTE transformed the diaspora landscapes converting them to international strongholds and made LTTE's presence felt in these centres as a powerful force.

In 1986, the LTTE was able to set up its funding network that has up to now kept on churning the millions of dollars needed to keep the war machinery operational (Smith 2003: 8). It enabled the LTTE to procure weapons that were capable of challenging the military might of the Sri Lankan armed forces. The money also enabled them to run local military and munitions production facilities with explosives and expertise bought from the international black market. The LTTE's military and political operations are sustained by economic support within the diaspora. To maintain the brand of Tamil nationalism and the Tamil nation the LTTE was representing, it organized diasporic activities including many cultural and fundraising events. The cultural and religious practices were key factors that maintained the geographical imagination of Tamil Eelam alive in the minds of every Tamil diasporan.

The mid 1990s to early 2000 was the peak of the military advantages of the LTTE and its rise to power. The 1996 attack on the military camp at Mullaitivu was the first success of the LTTE as a conventional military force. The success of the Mullaitivu battles led the LTTE to transform into a more conventional force (Smith 2007). With the battle successes the LTTE also managed to set up web operation through pro-LTTE elements in the Tamil diaspora and sympathisers of the organization. The most successful was the Tamilnet.com launched in 1997. The web operations began to spread with the proliferation of hundreds of web sites and web forums dedicated to the Eelam War. The mid 1990s saw the LTTE making massive amounts of money pumped from diaspora centres and through their own businesses and investments made within these locations (Gunaratne 1999; Fuglerud 2009.)

The Tamil diaspora communities have become centres of influence and an important audience of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Academics looking at diaspora formations, and specifically into diasporan politics in cyberspace, have constantly mentioned the importance of studying the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora (Braziel and Manur 2003; Karim 2003). They have stressed its importance in theorising future trajectories of diaspora

studies. It will be crucial to analyse schematically the role of cyber technology and the World Wide Web within such ideological and political formations. As Braziel and Mannur ask, ‘for example, do supporters of specific organizations such as the PLO and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka), who are committed to posing a different version of the homeland, use cyberspace to promote alternative visions of the home and homeland, while also moving capital across such divides?’ (2003:11).

The web was extensively used by the LTTE to reinforce the common identity of the Tamils in the diaspora. It was also used continuously to keep the discourse of the two key claims of the LTTE alive within the Tamil diaspora. These two key claims were that, firstly, all activities of the LTTE within the diaspora were to ensure the future life of the Tamils in a liberated state. Secondly, that the LTTE was the only organization that has the legitimate right and authority to uphold the right to create the Tamil homeland or Eelam state (Fuglerud 2001: 198).

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of the internet in diaspora and its political implications. My thesis temporally sits in a significant conjuncture of changing political landscape in the Tamil diaspora with the rise of the Tamil dissidents’ challenging the key claims of the LTTE. This intense political activity has generated extensive political engagement between the pro-LTTE and the dissident groups. In this thesis I explore the political use of the internet by both camps and the political implications of the internet in the context of intense inter-group rivalry within the Tamil diaspora.

Diaspora discourse has proved attractive to scholars because it is one of the best fields for studying political transnationalism. For Vertovec (1998) and Cohen (1997), the modern gurus of transnationalism, diaspora have formed the locus of their research. With diasporas marked frequently by the flows that are transnational, ideological, financial and political, such flows demand a rethinking of diasporic spaces in relation to ideologies of nationalism and transnationalism. My thesis is based on research into actual diasporan politics in cyberspace and the perceptions of diaspora political activists on what cyberspace means for their political actions and when and why they actually occupy this space. These newly emerging areas of political engagement in cyberspace

will contribute to the current literature on cyber politics especially politics of nationalism and the mobilization for such projects using the internet.

My thesis investigates the dimension of cyberspace and its use in Tamil diaspora politics. I engage with Tamil political activists in a quest to understand the actual impact of online political processes in their lives to decisions determining political strategies and action. The research is an attempt to piece together personal experiences of political activists in using cyberspace for political participation and political mobilization, and assess such impacts from the view point of these activists.

The time line in my research is 2005 – 2008, which was a period of constant and significant transformations in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict in both ‘internal’ dimensions and ‘external’ dimensions. The key internal dimension was the split within the LTTE organization in Sri Lanka, where the Eastern military leadership defected to the side of the Sri Lankan government in 2004. This split sent ripples throughout the LTTE and the conflict at large contributing to changes of the external dimension, which is mainly the Tamil diaspora community and the political field within the Tamil diaspora community. The significance of researching this time period from 2005 – 2008 was that the flux and rapid changes in the political and conflict landscapes in Sri Lanka had a profound effect on diaspora politics. By engaging in an online research project I was able to observe and grasp these changes rapidly as each event unfolded. From the perspective of diaspora political activism, the importance of the split within the LTTE symbolised the shattering of LTTE’s image as an indestructible organization. The 2004 split created opportunities for the Tamil democratic activists and reinforced within them the belief that the LTTE could be critiqued, challenged and even changed.

Cyberspace, Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and the emergence of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) have been studied and interpreted by social theorists such as Castells (2000, 2001, 2004), Fortier (2001), Haraway (1985, 1995) and Grey (1997) from various disciplines. These issues have been analysed and critiqued from marxist, post marxist, post modernist, post-structuralist and feminist viewpoints. As a political scientist I am venturing into a study which is multi-disciplinary in form but it

inherently possesses political significance as the focus is on political engagement with newly constructed spaces that are social and technological in nature. Currently there are many theoretical discussions of the importance of space and place in shaping cultural, social, economic and political life. There is a significant interest in many disciplines in understanding spatiality of all the above macro categories in human life. The belief of theorists such as Lefebvre (2000), Massey (2005) and Soja (1989) is that such critical discussions will undoubtedly help shape debates about space and place and their political significance in the immediate future.

A key dynamic running throughout this thesis is the political tension and contestation between pro-LTTE activists and dissident political activists as they attempt to dominate and resist each other. This leads to a classic scenario of a hegemonic and counter-hegemonic duel in a political field dominated for nearly two decades by a single hegemonic project. These rivalries, which date back since the inception of the conflict, saw a surge during the period of the research because of the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ dynamics of the conflict explained earlier, which led to the focus of my research on the dissident dimension in Tamil diaspora politics. The decision to focus on the Tamil dissident diaspora activists in my research was itself a break from the existing literature of research on Tamil diaspora and Tamil diaspora politics, which is dominated by accounts and analysis of LTTE led configuration of diaspora politics (McDowell 1996; Gunaratne 1998; Fuglerud 1999; Sriskandarajah 2004; Guha 2003). This thesis captures intense rivalries and tensions between these two groups through interviews and online research on web operations. These contestations generate opposing approaches to the politics of cyberspace among these two groups, with the LTTE analysing it as a single space that needed to be dominated under a homogenous political strategy, while dissidents approached it as a space of multiple opportunities. The dissidents’ take on web sites on Tamil political affairs and the political potentials of web operations, focuses on cyberspace as a space for political action, meaning both the expansion of opportunities for political activism and a claim that this is a qualitatively new site for politics. These opportunities, according to dissident activists, are created through the mediated spaces in cyberspace where dissidents can place themselves strategically at different levels from political communication to political strategies challenging the LTTE.

The structure of the thesis is constructed around three key sections effectively engaging in three main strands of enquiry into the use of cyberspace for political engagement among Tamil diaspora and its effect on the lives and strategies of activists. The three main sections of the thesis look broadly at three larger questions which the thesis overall attempts to respond to.

The first section is an introduction to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the formation of the Tamil diaspora and the use of internet, but the key question generated in this section is: ‘how can I research the impact of cyberspace on the politics of the Tamil diaspora?’ Section One is made out of three chapters, with Chapter One devoted to outlining the history and events leading to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and focusing on drivers of the ethnic conflict. I argue that the increased use of information technology in the conflict is an important factor in shaping diaspora activism. The technologies of computer mediated communication (CMC), as pointed out above, have become a centre piece in politics and political mobilization of diasporas. In my research I focus on the micro politics and political agents rather than larger flows of diaspora mobilization and through this micro political analysis explore the use of cyberspace for political purposes.

In Chapter Two, I engage with my research field, and introduce the challenges in making contacts and finding respondents, and the themes I used to guide my interviews. I also bring out the importance of London as a diaspora centre and explain why I selected it for my fieldwork. I trace the stories of two diaspora activists, their line of flight from Sri Lanka, and their current political activities. Through their stories and political actions I aim to introduce the importance of dissident political activism and the relevance it has in altering the diaspora political space that was dominated by one political ideology championed by the LTTE. Some of the respondents in my research are identified by pseudo names. These respondents wanted to be identified in my thesis through pseudo names. The respondents that are identified using pseudo names are Raj, Nallu, Sutha and Kumar. The rest of the respondents are identified by their real names. I carried out several interviews with each one of my respondents during my fieldwork in London in 2007.

Chapter Three is devoted to engaging with existing forms and methods of researching social phenomena online, and the weaknesses and strengths of these methods. In this chapter I introduce my preferred method of web research, the model of 'Web Sphere Analysis'. It is contrasted with some popular online research methods currently in use while I argue that Web Sphere Analysis is important for researching scenarios of political activism.

I adopted Web Sphere Analysis to research the web operations of the Tamil diaspora to overcome problems with other popular methods such as network analysis and virtual ethnography. One of the key limitations in online research is scope, as a researcher can only focus on a limited number of web sites or extensively research one web site. Political engagements online cannot be captured in such limited analysis, but when a series of web sites are analysed under one single framework this framework becomes a distinct unit of analysis and this is one of the key advantages of using Web Sphere Analysis. Web Sphere Analysis was originally used to understand and analyse web developments like electoral processes and significant events like the political response to the 9/11 attacks. In my methodological chapter, I analyse further the analytical tools included in the framework of Web Sphere Analysis that aid the researcher to look at an array of web sites irrespective of their form and format. But the most important aspect is the facility it has to investigate the inter-linkages of the sites as well as their producers. In the case of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora there are two significant pools of web sites in the web sphere, one is the pro-LTTE web sites, and the other the dissidents which the web sphere enables to capture as one single unit of analysis.

Thus Section One situates both political actors and web sites, or both the online and the offline, and looks at the challenges of developing a research framework to include and integrate both these dimensions. Chapters Two and Three introduce these two dimensions of offline and online as an integrated research framework that enables the capture of actual involvement of political activists in cyber political activities. This framework illuminates the manner in which cyberspace or the internet technologies have affected political activists, altering their political practices, strategic planning and practices of day to day life.

I adopted a two tiered research framework that can capture data from both ‘offline’ (the political activists) and ‘online’ (the web operations) simultaneously with the capability to fuse the two dimensions in an analysis process. As my respondents were not web masters, but were mostly political activists, some of whom had been in politics for nearly three decades thus very much preceding the internet. The offline research was based on interviews with these activists and these interviews brought out the key thematic arguments that I develop in the next two sections of my thesis.

The analysis made on web sites captured through Web Sphere Analysis forms the second key question and Section Two in my thesis: ‘what is the significance of the internet in the political strategies of Tamil diaspora activists and the LTTE as an organization and to what extent does it define their political actions?’ Chapter Four is one of the two chapters which make up the analysis of my online research. It is presented in Section Two to illuminate the intense online political rivalries between the two Tamil diasporic groups. These rivalries are important in displaying the working of cyberspace and its use for struggles played out in a new battlefield and as a strategic determinant of power.

Chapter Five brings together certain dynamics of online politics, analyzing the content of web sites captured during my research period. The importance of this chapter is to illuminate the new dimensions for political action that have opened up with the use of the internet. I argue these findings are politically important as they form an integral component of greater political strategies adopted by the LTTE during the period of 2004 to 2008, to deal with challenges it has faced. The chapter deals with the use of ‘deception’ as a cyber political tactic as opposed to accurate information based mobilization tactics adopted by the Zapatista movement used in its web campaigns. The chapter encapsulates the discursive production of the LTTE, projecting the constant advancement of its military machinery by incorporating military jargon into the texts produced for websites that inform the diaspora on achievements of the LTTE. These new political tactics are observed during 2004 - 2008 and I argue that the LTTE is depending far more on the internet for strategic political positioning of the organization. Such dependence on web-based technologies has made customised political strategies using

websites uniquely distinct from those adopted in the 1990s. I further argue that these differences alter the purpose the internet was used previous to these rivalries and political engagements.

The responses generated in my interviews form the third key question and Section Three of my thesis: ‘what are the political consequences of using the internet in diaspora activism and why is it politically different?’ These interviews exposed an array of dynamics that cyberspace has effectively influenced and imposed on the political activists. These included cyberspace being used and perceived as a site for politics rather than a mere information passage. Some activists called it a ‘democratic space’ in the context of the hegemonic struggle within the Tamil diaspora. ‘Space’ is understood both as a space for political opportunities and as a place for enabling the constitution of political agency. Such responses came from both spectrums of opposing nodes representing pro-LTTE and dissident activists. I was driven to explore the workings of power within cyber political engagements based on information from my respondents on their perception of cyberspace functioning as a political sphere. These observations included terms such as ‘domination’ and ‘resistance’ along with texts and images used in virtual struggles. These concepts set up the Section Three, comprised of Chapters Six to Eight, that investigates the working of a discourse of power.

By forming a research problem into the notion of power and its relationship with spatial properties in cyberspace, this thesis provides new insight as to why political activists take their operation to cyberspace. Jordan (1999) attempts to theorise a notion called ‘cyberpower’. His understanding grows from virtual reality and the emergence of cyber societies. There is no well planned offline fieldwork evidence in his work to back up his assumptions as it is limited to analysis of certain behaviours of individuals. Jordan also fails to look at a particular political sphere thus his research is scattered across multiple areas from cultural aspects to economics of cyberspace which fails to provide robust and clear findings. In my field research one of the key issues I was exposed to was the actual perception of diaspora political activists of cyberspace and their experiences in the context of politics and power.

The cleavage in studies on politics in cyberspace can be traced to the use of communication as the key element in online political mobilization. From Castells (2000), Fortier (2001) to Jordan (1999) the core argument for politics shifting to cyberspace is attributed to its superior use as a communicative medium and recurring cost effectiveness. In my research I tend to understand the notion of cyberspace as a site more than a medium as explained in Chapter Six where I discuss the key questions driving my thesis. This is the key reason why I intend to introduce theories on politics of power, space and internal contestations within the Tamil diaspora political project. I perceive this as a new dimension in exploring online political activity, which needs more attention in the discourse of politics and political mobilization in cyberspace.

Chapter Seven traces change of political strategies in the wake of online political engagements gaining momentum and attracting a higher online interaction among activists and diaspora communities. Online interactions have significantly increased in the new millennium and with the political rivalries between pro-LTTE and dissidents coming out in the open after 2004. Cyberspace has become a key battle ground with both parties reiterating the need to maintain a 'higher level of presence' online and improve 'effectiveness' of online strategies. The chapter investigates the forms of Tamil diaspora politics online, mainly looking at my respondents' claims that it opened political opportunities in cyberspace for diasporan political activists. I also look at the claims made by respondents about shifts in political strategies in dealing with cyberspace, which is qualitatively different and requires different expertise.

Chapter Eight focuses on the changing nature of cyber conflict mainly based on the experiences of political activists. In cyber politics, cyber attacks and cyber conflict is focused on attempts to disrupt web services and hacking into web sites or defacing them. These political tactics of conflict in cyberspace were also utilized by the LTTE. According to Vatis (2001) they are the first terror outfit to launch a cyber terror attack. In this chapter I focus on changing strategies of the LTTE, from adopting new strategies of cyber attacks which focuses not only on attacking rival web sites but deploying personalised attacks on political activists. The chapter also focuses on the intense web attacks and battles waged between the LTTE and dissidents. I highlight that the dissident response to LTTE attacks are becoming more similar to that of the attacks used by the

LTTE on dissidents. This chapter along with Chapter Seven argues that a change of political strategies have effected a shift in political priorities among diaspora activists from being totally focused on developments in Sri Lanka to more immediate issues created in the process of intense cyber rivalries.

Both in sections Two and Three I discuss an issue the activists raised in the interviews and that was evident in web sites captured through Web Sphere Analysis. The crux of their argument was based on their experiences and observations on the extent to which violence or dynamics of actual conflicts can be transplanted in mediated environments such as the internet and its real life effects as they unfold in cyberspace. The respondents spoke of ‘cyber conflict’ and accused the LTTE operatives of carrying out ‘cyber terror campaigns’, by which they meant the targeting of dissident activists in web campaigns that have expanded into personal spaces such as ‘family and ‘home’. My respondents claimed such internet generated violence made them adopt added measures to evade being targeted and develop counter measures such as identifying LTTE operatives and attack them online. These online engagements have triggered issues based on personal rivalries to dominate political priorities among political activists. In Section Two, I explore this issue in Chapter Four in the sense of its importance as being part of a power struggle within cyberspace and in Chapter Eight I discuss the role of such individualized cyber attacks, as an effective ‘dirty tactic’ in diaspora politics, which has far reaching effects in comparison to pre the internet dirty political strategies. These political tactics have complicated the political priorities among Tamil diasporans as the internet with its reach and speed has the effect of creating new issues based on personal scandals. These personal scandals dominate the political battles rather than issues pertaining to the ethnic conflict. This was captured in ‘web storms’ which are introduced in Chapter Four over issues such as the European Union Ban on the LTTE and LTTE air attacks. I show that these political issues generated using web space was not related to the EU ban or the air attack, but were muddled with political action in the context of the ban. I explore these issues in an attempt to respond to the larger question this thesis raises, such as how internet politics has affected the lives of Tamil diasporan politics and what difference has it brought to the adoption of politics and political strategies within the Tamil diaspora.

My research was specifically looking at online web developments between 2006 to middle of 2008. From late 2008 to early 2009 there was a sharp rise of web activity among all parties involved in the Sri Lanka ethnic conflict, especially through the blogosphere or blog based web interactivity. These included, blogs exclusively setup for discussing the developments in the ethnic conflict such as www.defencewire.blogspot.com, www.ellalanforce.blogspot.com and www.puligal.blogspot.com. Citizen journalistic blogs such as www.groundviews.org/ saw an increased participation of bloggers later towards 2008. There was a rise of bloggers and blog activity at the height of the Eelam War Four or the ongoing phase and as many speculated, to be the final phase of the military engagement in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. In my research this aspect of web activity is not discussed, as my field work and online research was carried out prior to this period of increased blog based web engagements. There were blogs during the time of my research. Some web sites such as Tamilaffairs.com that I discuss in this thesis are based on blog formats, but the rapid increase of bloggers and blog visitors is seen later in 2008 and 2009.

This thesis seeks to respond to the three key questions I have raised in this introduction while bringing out the complicated nature of web politics drawing from the experiences and observations of my respondents backed by online research conducted periodically during my fieldwork research and after.

Chapter 1: Politics of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora

1.1 Introduction

Sri Lankan Tamil diasporan political engagements in cyberspace are the key focus of this thesis. The thesis explores the impact of cyberspace and online technologies on the lives of Tamil diaspora political activists in the process of political engagements, exploring the possible dimensions of cyberspace, from being a mere communication medium to becoming a point of struggle with a possibility of it being a resource for political mobilization. This chapter, along with chapters Two and Three forms the key launching pad of the thesis situating the history of the ethnic conflict and introduce Tamil diaspora politics and research methodologies used in the research design of my thesis. These chapters explore developments of online politics of Tamil diaspora from information gained from my fieldwork in London and based on online research into Tamil diaspora politics. This chapter introduces three key things: the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka; the formation of the Tamil diaspora parallel to the conflict; and finally a short literature analysis of theories on diaspora studies mainly of diasporan politics, to understand which theory is best suited to analyse Tamil diasporan political activism. It also introduces current research into online politics and diaspora politics online, while situating my own research and underscoring distinct features embedded in its form and process

1.2 Ethnic conflict

Literature on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict from the rise of Tamil nationalism and its transformation into militant nationalism covers a wide spectrum of academic writing from anthropology to political science. In a general synthesis these analyses of the conflict tend to be focused either on the rise of Tamil nationalism and its systematic radicalization as a symptom of crisis within Tamil society or as a reaction to an oppressive Sinhala dominated state (Wickramasinghe 2006: 253).

Bose (1994) claims that the state making process was flawed in Sri Lanka as the state did not create the necessary capacities to accommodate Tamil aspirations. The national

identity forged in this process of being a Sri Lankan was not satisfying the Tamil people. He also identifies the Sri Lankan conflict as a modern problem where ethnic identity was mobilized by political agents representing modern political institutions. These included political forces such as political parties that emerged with the introduction of liberal political institutions. Bose points out:

Sinhala – Tamil polarisation far from being the continuation of an ancient conflict rooted in ‘primordial’ ties, is in actuality a development peculiar to the second half of the Twentieth century (1994: 47)

Bush (2003) argues that the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict cannot be understood using a primordial lens, as such analysis would disregard changes that take place over time on culture and identity of ethnic groups. The ethnic group identities that are in contestation are modern categories of social and cultural expression of identities. The analysis of Tamil nationalism and ethnic conflict has several dimensions which range from issues of problems of democratic institutions, lack of political will to post colonial state making in Sri Lanka.

Neil DeVotta (2004) locates the conflict roots in the context of Sri Lanka’s transition in early 1950’s from a traditional to a modern society. He claims that the Sinhala language was used as a political tool and a policy to empower and unite the Sinhala communities polarizing Sinhala and Tamil relationships. DeVotta claims: the ‘Sinhala only’ movement led to the formation of an ethnocracy and ‘ethnic outbidding’, which led to the marginalization of the Tamil minority and undermined Tamils’ confidence in state institutions (2004: 4). DeVotta’s (2004) argument of linguistic nationalism and its manifestation in culture and in modern institutions illuminates that the Tamils were deprived of the ability to adapt to the changing social and economic structures in Sri Lanka where community empowerment was critical in the transition to an industrial society.

Following on from these analyses of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka I approach it as a conflict for space. I use the term space both in the sense of space as a political location and space as the power and ability for human agency to function with the ability for political expression, political mobilization to developing social relationships. I argue that Tamils in Sri Lanka lost a space for politics when the majoritarian Sinhala politics took

over the realm of the control of social, political and cultural spaces since independence in 1948. The current arguments for the rise of Tamil and Sinhala nationalism are based on the polarization of political power, social control, control of the economy and the modern institutions that empowerment of individuals and the community. The importance of the arguments from Bose (1994), Krishna (1999), DeVotta (2004) and Rotberg (1999) is the focus on the rise of tensions between the Sinhala and Tamils as a production of modern forces. They locate their arguments in the processes of social polarization between Tamils and Sinhala through modern politics and political institutions of representation and its failures to accommodate the plurality of the Sri Lankan society.

Thus I claim these polarizations have occurred as a result of intense contestation and desire to dominate spaces of political power and space for empowerment in the Sri Lankan polity. The Sinhala mobilization, the ability for the Sinhala political forces to dominate spaces of power and institutions of power, has given the Sinhala dominated state the ability to restrict and control the lives of Tamils. Restrictions were imposed on Tamils' access to means and tools for their upward mobility in the society, creating a control mechanism to filter them from gaining higher positions in the new post-colonial society.

1.2.1 Ethnic categories

I would like to introduce the ethnic categories in Sri Lanka as this identification deals with where my respondents came from originally. The main distinction in Sri Lanka between the ethnic identities is constructed through a linguistic divide. This is between the Sinhala and Tamil speakers. Tamil is also spoken by the majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka forming the second minority group apart from the Tamils. Minorities such as Malays, and Burghers¹ speak Sinhala and Tamil as well. The population in Sri Lanka is divided mainly according to ethnicities. According to this ethnic division the Sinhala community makes 74% of the population constituting the main ethnic group. The Sri Lankan Tamils are mainly located in the North and East of the country and make out 11.7% of the population and Indian Tamils represent (19th century migrants for work on

¹ A minority community in Sri Lanka mainly consisting of a lineage originating from the intermarriage of colonials with local women during all colonial periods which include Portuguese, Dutch and English

plantations) 5.6% of the population. The Muslims constitute the third largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka at 7%.² The ethnic differences and tensions have now evolved into a full blown ethnic conflict where ethnic Tamils are fighting for a separate state in Sri Lanka.

1.2.2 Colonial technologies of governance

The pre colonial Sri Lanka, until around 17th century, had three political centres and these three political spaces were autonomous regional powers. One of these kingdoms was under Tamil rulers and was located around Jaffna in the North of Sri Lanka. Bose argues: ‘These medieval states often had diffused boundaries, marked by zones of intermittent influence. All that had become history by the nineteenth century’ (1994: 43). He is trying to bring out the significant difference in governance and political identities of the Sri Lankans in pre-colonial and colonial times. These methods of governance were instrumental in pitting newly created political identities against each other in competitive political spaces such as representative political institutions.

Many of the tensions that arose between the ethnic categories are attributed to the colonial technologies of governance, especially during the British rule (1815 – 1947). Though the colonial policies of political representation paved the way for the polarization and solidifying of ethnic identities, it is widely accepted that the British did not have a plan to divide the communities in the initial setup of institutions of political representation in Sri Lanka. But such technologies of governance eventually became a solid division among communities and political elites based on ethnic identity, which the colonial rulers exploited. The ethnic identity division between the Sinhalese and the Tamils based on a political power struggle was harnessed by the colonial rulers based on a policy of divide and rule for the ease of governance.

This process was initiated in 1833 by the introduction of a legislative council composed of British and Sri Lankan representatives. The key aspect of the form of representation for these councils was that it was based on ‘communal representation’ and it was the first

² Sri Lankan ethnic groups <http://countrystudies.us/sri-lanka/38.htm>; more information on statistics on Sri Lankan population division according to ethnicities on <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/population/index.htm>

time the term was used in the political jargon related to Sri Lankan politics. This form of representation had long term impact in the community which later on led to political polarizations of ethnic identities. A salient feature of colonial rule was its constant expansion of administration and also attempts to get these administrative areas under one central mechanism. Bose observes that the British used coercive power in this process of expansion and unification of areas in Sri Lanka and it also led to the local sovereignties being replaced by what he called: 'a single monolithic, impersonal, indivisible and alien sovereignty' (1994: 43).

This system of distribution of political power and the importance of ethnic category as a necessary qualification to become a politician created the platform for the emergence of a breed of politicians who were hardcore representatives of ethnicities and ethnic interests. This resulted in the polarized representation of the legislative body introduced through the reforms of 1930, which will be discussed later in the text. Local representatives for the legislative council introduced in 1833 were made up different races. These nominations were attributed to the colonial view of Sri Lanka as a multi ethnic and a pluralist society. The 1833 reforms which fundamentally remained unchanged for nearly a century facilitated a significant political division among the ethnicities and political elites. Colonial rulers strategically started playing ethnic identities against each other by the early 20th century. The rift between the Sinhalese and the Tamil leadership surfaced in the aftermath to the elections for the reformed Legislative Council in early 1921, which returned thirteen Sinhalese from territorial constituencies as against three Tamils. In 1923, then Governor Manning made certain reforms to the representation of the Legislative Council which brought in 8 Tamils and 16 Sinhalese, an obvious stark misrepresentation of the communities, where Tamils represented 11% of the population with the Sinhalese 67%. In this case Manning was responding to the emerging nationalist movements namely the Sinhala Buddhist movement.

In 1931 a major constitutional reform came as a result of the Donoughmore Commission; it was responsible for the creation of the Donoughmore Constitution which came into effect from 1931-47. This reform paved the way for abolishing communal representation which earlier was introduced and sustained through reforms of 1833. The

1931 constitution introduced representation from a realm of equal citizen to a numerically proportionate representative of all ethnic groups, in other words devising a system of political and economic power matching the numeric proportion of ethnicities. Krishna (1999: 51) criticizes the liberal ideal of representation and the postcolonial manifestation of it in Sri Lanka. These reforms of 1931 were met with suspicion and disappointment by the minority ethnic groups who believed the constitution would ensure the dominance of the Sinhala majority; they argued, at the least, for constitutional safeguards for the rights of minority ethnic groups. However, the constitution was enacted in the face of minority protests and their fears turned into fact when the first board of ministers under the new constitutional system was made solely out of the Sinhalese representatives.

As 'being Sinhalese' became an important political identity and a battle cry for political activists, this was powered on by the emerging and powerful religious revivalist movement. The Temperance movement in 1903 – 1905 was a key driver in mobilizing the Sinhala Buddhist identity. One of the key leaders of this movement was Anagarika Dharmapala. DeVotta (2004) claims Dharmapala played a key role in fusing Buddhism with Sinhala ethnic identity and popularizing this hybrid identity as the most superior in the country. DeVotta also notes that by creating this superior identity Dharmapala was able to equate Buddhism and patriotism (2004: 31). Buddhism also became a strong counter-measure to Tamil nationalism and deterred policy decisions to rectify the grievances of Tamil people. The rapid popularization of Buddhism came in the form of collective practices such as the Vesak³ celebration and it generated the 'othering' for the Sinhala psyche, the 'others' included the British and minorities such as Christians and Tamil Hindus (Wickramasinghe 2006: 87). Spencer points out, Buddhism and its ability to bring out the revival of the Sinhala as a race was an ideal symbolic tool for politicians since 1931, used to address a Sri Lankan society riddled with caste, class, regional matrix (1990: 20). This is the key reason why even now the arguments of Sinhala majoritarianism still center on the necessity to protect Buddhism and the Sinhala people.

³ This is the most important date in the Buddhist calendar in Sri Lanka and many other Buddhist countries; it commemorates the Lord Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death (attainment of nirvana). It is celebrated in the month of May and the day of full moon.

The tensions between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils grew in the post independence governance of Sri Lanka, as each government since 1948 engineered policy changes affecting the Tamils in Sri Lanka (Wilson 2000). The earliest were the colonization movements, massive irrigation projects, where Sinhala families were resettled in traditionally Tamil and Muslim communities disturbing communal relationships brought through sudden changes of people movement and settlement.

1956 was a critical year in the history of Sinhala Tamil tensions as an ultra nationalist government was brought to power through a majority Sinhalese vote. This government in June 1956 introduced the Official Language Act, declaring Sinhala to be the sole linguistic medium of administration and education to be implemented over a five year period. DeVotta (2004: 69) suggests that as soon as the state moved away from a traditional society with the establishment of development structures and state policy exercised through multiple layers of bureaucratic structures, language became an important medium. It gave the Sinhala the priority and dismissed the Tamils' capability to negotiate these structures. Devotta (2004) also observes that sidelining of the Tamils from new political and social institutions facilitated by linguistic nationalism mobilized the Tamils for the ethnic conflict. The Sinhala language act made the Sri Lankan state be the sole guardian of the Sinhala language, Bush points out that with the Bandaranaike rule 'the protection and maintenance of sinhala cultural identity shifted from the realm of non state cultural institutions (*Sangha*-order of the Buddhist monks, schools) to the realm of state.' (2003:186).

Though this Act was later reviewed to accommodate Tamil in 1958, the politico-ideological change that occurred in tandem with this language shift was perceived by Tamil political leadership as a pre-calculated and well planned political act of isolating and alienating Tamils from all political and administration functions of Sri Lanka. The Sinhala language movement influenced policy reforms seriously affected the day-to-day social life of Tamil people. It curtailed the spaces available for negotiating their lives and triggered a continuous shrinking of opportunities towards upward mobility in social status and access to higher echelons of public life. The Sinhala only policy not only was symbolic in creating hegemonic spaces for the Sinhala nation it also enforced the insecurities that were being garnered by political leaders of the Sinhala nation. Bush

(2003) identifies this as a siege mentality which has effected the Sinhala nationalists. Bose (1994) points out contradicting views on ethnicity and identity between the Sinhalese and the Tamils manifested into competing chauvinisms that drove the two main political parties in Sri Lanka. Both parties did tried to out gun each other inorder to represent their abilities to champion the requirements and playing into the fears of the of the Sinhala community.

Thus the quest for nation building in Sri Lanka, or securing the nation, is premised on practices that generate multiple insecurities (Krishna 1999: 209). This has driven the state to a problematic situation where inconsistencies between nation building and social integration were never resolved. Tambiah (1986) locates this as a product of modernization, and a result of mature colonization based on Victorian racial theory of world divided into distinct races or kinds of people (Spencer 1990: 8). Representation in colonial institutions, the system of representation and elite formation all contributed to the creation of a divide.

The fissure widened between the two ethnic groups, with a widening gap between the Sinhala state and the Tamil leadership, and further constitutional changes saw the aggravation of the tensions and the polarization of the two communities. The Sri Lankan state itself became increasingly politically authoritarian throughout the 1970s. This was reflected in the republican constitution of 1972 introduced by the SLFP⁴ government, as it removed all safe guards entrenched in the previous constitution protecting minority rights, while making Buddhism the official state religion. To add more injury to the already insulted Tamil psyche, a policy of education standardization was carried out which adversely affected young people from areas such as Jaffna. State policies began shrinking spaces available for the Tamil community for emancipation, state initiated disempowerment strategies of Tamils reached its peak with the 1973 University admission based on population of the province. Northern Tamils suffered tremendously

⁴ The two main political parties that have dominated and still dominate Sri Lanka are the UNP, the United National Party and the SLFP, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party. These two parties have swapped power between them in government. In the recent past these two parties have lost significant voter bases to lesser parties but still have managed to be in power through alliances stuck with minority or lesser parties. There are some significant differences in policies between the two but that is not explored in this thesis as its not based on the objective of the research.

with highly educated Tamils missing out on University entrance, as only a lesser number could get in because of this provincial quota system.

In the early 1970s, several Tamil political groups, including the Tamil Congress and the Federal Party, formed the Tamil United Front (TUF). This conglomerate adopted a demand for an independent state in 1976, calling for a 'secular, socialist state of Tamil Eelam,' and renamed itself as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The general election of July 1977 saw TULF winning eighteen seats in the legislature, including all fourteen seats contested in the Jaffna Peninsula in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The electoral platform for their victory was the pledge to support an autonomous Tamil state.

In 1977 the United National Party (UNP) came into power with the leadership of J.R. Jayawardene. Though this new leadership positioned itself as the epitome of democracy and liberalism, the positioning of the nation building process became more exclusive. J.R. Jayawardene introduced a constitution consolidating power around the executive presidency. The enactment of the Prevention of Terrorist Act 1979 introduced draconian and inhumane treatment of both Sinhalese and Tamils. J.R. Jayawardene's vision of a Sri Lankan society was to be the ultimate guardian of Buddhism and the Sinhalese heritage which transformed the state's outlook shifting it to become a garrison state in the Laswellian⁵ sense. Thus post 1977 violence unleashed on Tamils was not regarded as a crime against the citizens of Sri Lanka. These policies and actions led the tensions between the Sinhala state and the Tamil political activists to spill out in the form of an ethnic conflict by early 1980s.

In response to the fortification of a Sinhala state in the name of nation building in Sri Lanka and the failures of the mainstream Tamil political parties to persuade the government to look into the grievances of Tamil people, militancy automatically became the next best alternative to fill this vacuum. As Wilson argues, these new militant

⁵ Harold Laswell, an American political scientist, introduced the concept of a garrison state in the Sixties to explain the structural mechanics of the Soviet Union and its client states in east Europe during the Cold War. The garrison state hypothesis was used in different contexts to identify from explaining militarized dictatorships to powerful regimes in East Asia. I use this in the context of the Sinhalization of the state apparatus during early 20 century Sri Lankan polity

formations were expressions of preserving Tamil nationalism. He claims, 'the nationalism of Tamils is defensive and reactive against Sinhala exclusivism, they essentially wanted to preserve what they had. Their territory, their culture what they always wanted was to maintain their status quo, as it existed in British times, the qualitative differences in nationalism' (2000:12). Thus by the late 1970s there were an assortment of Tamil militant organizations some in nascent form, all bearing abbreviated names: LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), EPRLF (Eelam Peoples Revolutionary Liberation Front), PLOTE (Peoples Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam), TELO (Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization) and ENDLF (Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front). They could be distinguished by their geographic support bases and certain significant political ideological differences. For example the Uma Maheshwaran-led PLOTE was an overtly Marxist organization. The LTTE, a key organization, had its support base in Jaffna in the Northern Province, while Eastern province support was mainly expressed to the EPRLF.

In 1976 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) was formed by Velupillai Prabhakaran, the LTTE's precursor was the organization named as Tamil New Tigers formed in 1972. State relations with minorities worsened throughout the 1980s and the Northern Province became a virtually militarized zone. In a short span of time during the 80's, the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) gained the upper hand among the militant organizations, after a series of bloody turf wars and internal feuds in which they successfully eliminated rivals and emerged as the powerhouse of the Tamil militancy movement. The LTTE ascendancy materialised as an attempt to break free from the Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan nation state which was stifling the Tamil community. The Tamils were losing the political space in Sri Lanka to locate themselves and be accepted as equal citizens and they were being deprived of spaces of political, social and economic engagement. Thus Bose argues that the rise of the LTTE amidst this was a sign of the 'changing in social relationship and power relationships within the Tamil society' (1994: 34). The LTTE put forward the most potent way of breaking free from the hegemony of the Sinhala dominated Sri Lankan state by introducing the need to fight for a separate state for the Tamils. It enabled the LTTE to register their authority over the state of affairs of the Tamil community by introducing a social program which Bose claimed was

‘subordinate and secondary to the central and overarching goal of national liberation’.(1994: 35).

In July 1983, the LTTE demonstrated that they could challenge the Sri Lankan state by successfully ambushing and killing thirteen Sri Lankan government soldiers in the North of the country. This was the first large scale ambush on the Sri Lankan armed forces. This ambush triggered a violent social backlash in the South of Sri Lanka Sinhala dominated communities, the coercion Sinhalese community could exert to subjugate the ethnic Tamils were demonstrated when organized mobs under the direction of certain ministers in the government began descending on the capital city and other main cities in the country and left behind a spate of killings. Their victims, Tamil civilians, were ruthlessly murdered, their belongings looted and their assets burned. Tambiah (1986) describes this as an orgy of violence, unleashed against the ordinary Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka. The aftermath of 1983 riots intensified and internationalized the ethnic conflict and created a massive Tamil exodus out of Sri Lanka. The most important fall out for the Tamils from this event was that it clearly confirmed what the Sri Lankan nation state’s sovereign space could not guarantee safety for its Tamil citizens.

Thiruchelvam (1999) points out that since the 1950s with the state becoming more monolithic and representing more and more of Sinhala nationalist agenda there were periods of what he called ‘collective violence’ unleashed against the Tamils in 1958, 1977 and 1981. Thiruchelvam categorises the 1983 violence as the most distinct of them by claiming: ‘neither time nor space has helped to ease pain, the trauma and the bitter memories’ (1999: 191). The riots signified the final phase in the de-linking of ethnic Tamil people from the political place of the Sri Lankan state, or severing of the umbilical cord of citizenship and the liberal rights of a citizen from the state. The riots demonstrated that there was no safe space for the Tamils and as Bush (2003) observes created the conditions for an unprecedented shift into a rapid militarization of the conflict.

The final political uprooting of the Tamil claims came in the form of the Sixth Amendment to the Constitution (introduced in the aftermath of the 1983 riots), which basically demanded an oath of allegiance to a unitary state from all Members of

Parliament if they were to continue with their elected post as MPs. The amendment which sailed through the Sinhala dominated legislature was certified on 8 August 1983 inflicting a mortal political wound on the Tamil community who had suffered violently at the hands of Sinhala mobs earlier. The Sixth Amendment successfully ejected the largest Tamil composition of MPs in the history of Sri Lankan democracy from the legislature. This eviction dislocated the Sri Lankan Tamils' political ambitions of self-determination, self-rule and Tamil voice from the pivotal political power structure of the Sri Lankan state.

The riots and the Sixth Amendment took away from the Tamil people their right to inherit a political space, through social violence and the sheer brute force upheld through a constitutional sanction. This led to the radical departure from democratic politics by certain Tamil organizations which wanted to claim their own state within Sri Lanka. Although the notions of self-rule and homeland were accepted by Tamil politicians in early 1970s, military struggle was not on the cards. These two incidents sealed the need for a military struggle and establishment of a Tamil nation state independent from Sri Lanka, which was termed as 'Tamil Eelam' or 'Tamil homeland.' The LTTE attacks on military personnel and installations gathered pace during 1985 – 1986.

The Indian factor is extremely important in the analysis of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. At the early stages of the Tamil militancy the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu was the haven for most militants. Though not overtly but covertly the Indian state was nurturing these militant movements. After J.R. Jayawardene came to power in 1977 the Indian government was wary of his pro-Western outlook especially at a time of the cold war. DeVotta (2004) argues that the Jayawardene regime, by taking a pro-Western stance in acts such as supporting in principle the British government's involvement in the Falklands war, opposing the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, trying to enter into defence pact with Britain and trying to lease the strategically important Trincomalee oil farm to a US interest and agreement with the US to host transmission station for Voice of America made Indians deeply concerned about its neighbour (2004: 156). He highlights the government's security network linking with the Israeli secret service Mossad and using ex-British special forces to train Sri Lankan military which may have affected Indian uneasiness over the strategic presence of too many western security organizations. Bose

(1994) points out that Indian backing to the militants was channeled through its external intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). The principle beneficiary was TELO. He claims this was because the Indian government was cautious about the strength and the threat the LTTE could pose and thus it nurtured an organization which could be deployed to counter the LTTE. In the same time it is clear that the Indian government used the LTTE as a tactical ploy to destabilize the Sri Lankan government and its repercussions expanded beyond this tactic. DeVotta (2004) argues that Indian support gave the Tamil militancy the ability to be a lethal and formidable force.

In August 1985 India managed to broker peace talks between key Tamil militant organizations and the Sri Lankan government. These talks were held in the capital of Buthan, Thimpu. The LTTE used the time of the talks to purge many other opposition militant groups. The peace talks did not yield a substantial outcome. By 1986 the Sri Lankan armed forces started actively engaging the LTTE and the culmination of this was a massive military operation codenamed 'Operation liberation'. The big push by the Sri Lankan armed forces commenced on 26 May 1987 with the objective of pushing out the LTTE from their key strongholds. The technologies of military hardware were greatly improved as it was the first time the Sri Lankan army was deployed to quell an armed uprising of this magnitude, which was far higher than the Marxist JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramun /Peoples Liberation Front) uprising in 1971. This assault and the impact it had on the civilian population in Jaffna the key Northern city, made India get involved in Sri Lankan internal affairs by attempting to airdrop food supplies to the population of Jaffna. Failing such attempts to end the Sri Lankan military offensive India exercised an aggressive diplomatic manoeuvre by intervening actively in the conflict. Smith points out 'Delhi sent clear signals that it would not stand by to see Jaffna fall to the security forces' (Smith 1999: 19). Through this intervention, India declared itself a facilitator of a political settlement to end the conflict. The facilitation brought in the package of a peace process and devolution proposal. In July 1987 Indian Premier Rajiv Gandhi and the Sri Lankan President J.R Jayewardene signed the Indo-Lankan Accord. The Accord was designed to provide an end to all hostilities and the surrender of arms. Under this Accord the conflict affected North and the East would be made into a single province with regional autonomy.

The Accord was met with significant mistrust and opposition from the Sinhalese public. As a direct result of the pact the Indian government sent the IPKF (Indian Peace Keeping Force) to institute the Indo-Lankan Accord in the North and East of Sri Lanka. The IPKF was soon seeing battle by the end of 1987 with the LTTE. The IPKF governed in the North and East through alliances with militant organizations which were against the LTTE, mainly EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO. The IPKF failed to dislodge the LTTE and also sustained heavy casualties in the process. The military intervention was counter productive in the context of the conflict as it enabled the LTTE to garner the support of the Tamil population (Smith 1999). Bose, in a detailed criticism of the manner in which India handled this situation, claims the Indian state failed miserably to take the political forces and mass appeal of Tamil nationalism seriously (1994: 171). He goes on to identify the high handed tactics of the IPKF which instead of winning over the people lost both the support for India of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and strengthened the LTTE. He brands it as a totally 'counter productive intervention' (1994: 172).

Ranasinghe Premadasa⁶ who succeeded J.R.Jayawardene as the president struck a strange alliance with the LTTE in 1988 and successfully forced the Indian peace keeping force to withdraw in 1990 with the assurance of peace talks directly between him and the LTTE. This withdrawal created a power vacuum in the North and the East enabling the LTTE to systematically wipe out its enemies, especially the collaborators of the IPKF, the Tamil National Army which was made up of TELO and ENDLF members. This purging of dissent by the LTTE was done simultaneously while engaging in peace talks with the Sri Lankan government.

The 1990s saw the LTTE growing beyond a terrorist outfit, by becoming more of a conventional military force, introducing a military hierarchy and different regiments in its ranks. At the same time it actively established institutional networks in the areas it controlled by gradually building up the infrastructure required to be declared as a separate state. The peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in

⁶ President Ranasinghe Premadasa was the second executive President of Sri Lanka and he came to power through the Presidential election of 1989 succeeding J. R. Jayawardene. He was the long standing Prime Minister to Jayawardene. President Premadasa had his early roots in politics embedded with the Labour movement but gained strong nationalist political stance when he openly opposed the Indo Lanka deal struck in 1987. He was quite vociferous in attacking the Indian regime and had the IPKF removed as soon as he came to power and brokered a cease fire with the LTTE. He was involved in a controversial arms supplying scheme to the LTTE to battle the IPKF.

1990 broke down in 1991, with the LTTE attacking a Muslim village, massacring civilians and killing over 700 policemen who surrendered to them under a false assurance of safety. The 1990s were the most successful time for the LTTE in the history of the 30 year old conflict. In this time line they became famous for ruthlessness with the assassination of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 using a suicide female bomber. In 1993 the LTTE assassinated President Premadasa deploying another suicide bomber. The assassination of Premadasa led to the formation of a caretaker government in the country until the 1994 general election. The 1994 elections heralded the end of UNP power in government after 17 years and brought in a SLFP led 'Peoples Alliance' (PA) into power under the leadership of Chandrika Kumaratunga.

President Kumaratunga introduced a peace package which was aimed at solving the ethnic problem and putting an end to the conflict. The LTTE came back into negotiations but broke off talks in 1995. The devolution package proposed by the PA government was shot down by ultra nationalists and the UNP. This type of political sniping at each other between the two major political parties has been a key factor since the inception of the conflict, as such political discontent could not respond to the needs of the Tamil people. Such signs of political inability of governments in the South have made the LTTE thrive, gaining trust among the Tamil people and at the same time justifying its struggle against the Sri Lankan state.

LTTE used suicide attacks on two naval vessels in 1995 and withdrew from talks with the government. The government responded with a massive military operation once the LTTE pulled out of the talks. After this military operation, the LTTE lost control of Jaffna, but they responded with counter military operations with equal force which saw the government losing control of strategic locations in the North and the East. With these military gains, the LTTE assumed virtual control of the regions. They started establishing the contours of a nation state while setting up a nascent administrative apparatus which steadily grew over time.

The LTTE international network grew out of nascent arms smuggling operations using South India as a logistical back bone. Soon the LTTE developed a self-sustained

international network funded by illegal maritime operations, diaspora funding and investment in assets such as real estate in Western countries. Smith argues that the initial reason for the LTTE to go global was to establish an arms procurement network (1999: 32). This network, Smith (1999) points out, expanded from Singapore to Cambodia and Burma and, with the fall of the Soviet Union, to Ukraine, Bulgaria and Slovakia. The LTTE international network also tapped the diaspora communities in the West. The LTTE established front offices and proxy organizations which were at their disposal for channeling funds, arms procurement and lobbying western governments. Bush (2003) claims, that the LTTE international networks had a large amount of influence in the Western world with a well organized diplomatic lobby. He brings out two classic examples to back this argument. The first is the LTTE hiring a top US law firm run by Ramsay Clarke, a former attorney general in the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, to challenge Washington's 1997 decision to label the group as a terrorist organization (2003: 63). Secondly, in May 2000 an LTTE fund raising event succeeded in having the Canadian Minister of Finance and Minister for International Cooperation attend a fundraising dinner in Toronto (2003: 64).

The mid 1990s to the early 2000's saw the LTTE performing the role of a state as they began regulating and controlling the resources and population of the land under their control. They viewed these methods as tools for effective governance. These included establishing a central information collection agency thus enabling them to implement a successful tax regime. Wilson argues that these methods were the concrete manifestation of a Tamil state (2000: 159). These included the establishment of Eelam police service, courts, a Tamil Eelam bank in 2003 and job centres. These establishments and the ability to link them not only with the Tamil population under the LTTE control but with the diaspora brought them recognition as a de facto regime along with diaspora generated funding. Gunaratne claims in the 1990s LTTE revenue peaked at \$100 million, of which \$60 million was generated from overseas (Gunaratna 2003:210).

The LTTE strategically displayed its ability to resist the Sri Lankan state militarily while building the physical architecture of the Eelam state that they were fighting for. In these aspects the 1990s were the most successful period of the LTTE from its rise from a rag a tag militant outfit to an organized state machinery. They achieved this with a blend of

strong military victories and international campaigns to entrench themselves strongly in the Tamil diaspora. The LTTE was successful in tactically extracting resources from the Sri Lankan state and augmenting with its own international funding. This mode of capture and securing of state and international image was a very successfully sustained strategy for the LTTE both in combat and governance.

The dawn of the millennium saw the LTTE exploiting its successes in the 1990s and expanding its range of military attacks as a ploy to apply pressure on the government. In May 2000 the LTTE launched an attack on one of the largest Sri Lankan bases the Elephant Pass camp complex and took control. In June 24, 2000 they deployed a suicide squad to storm the only international airport and cause of heavy damage to the Sri Lankan airlines fleet.

The UNP led coalition UNF came into power in the 2001 general election with a mandate for peace and negotiations with the LTTE. The government led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe headed for negotiations with the LTTE and with Norwegian mediation signed a Cease Fire Agreement with the LTTE. The result of the 2001 December election created a unique situation in the balance of power in Sri Lanka it brought in a legislature from the UNP whilst the executive remained SLFP led People's Alliance (PA) as the two institutions had separate election processes. This in theory was possible in the constitution of 1978.

The political rivalry between the UNP and the SLFP and the periphery parties, especially Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front) JVP/PLF and Jathika Hela Urumaya (National Heritage Party) JHU, led by nationalist agendas scuttled such cohabitation, once again leaving the LTTE to thrive on political instability in the Sinhala dominated south. President Kumaratunga by 2004 took over many portfolios in the cabinet and went for a snap election in April 2004 as the rift widened between the UNP and PA.

Unlike the 1990s the LTTE was facing internal turmoil in its organization just prior to the 2004 general election in Sri Lanka. The Eastern commander of the LTTE ,

Vinayagamoorthis Muralitharan, alias Colonel Karuna, announced a split with the Northern command and acted independently. This was met violently by Prabhakaran as the LTTE supremo sent in troops to attack his one time most trusted battlefield commander. The split caused wide ranging and lasting repercussions in the LTTE continuing to the present with significant losses in later battles with the Sri Lankan armed forces as well as loss of territory. This split in the LTTE will be examined closely at various instances of my thesis later on.

The Sri Lankan conflict which was driven by the continuous failure of the state to organize itself to respond to the needs of the Tamils was further exposed when it failed to deliver on the Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (PTOMS), a mechanism which was proposed to facilitate a fair distribution of Tsunami aid in aftermath of the Boxing Day Tsunami in 2004. Though six months after the tsunami the government and the LTTE agreed on a mechanism it did not come into practice.

These consistent failures by the state to deliver on what some saw as the most recent opportunity of reconciliation between the LTTE and the government was a sign of the intrinsic problem of the Sri Lankan state. These failures provided the necessary impetus for the conflict to continue. The LTTE claimed that the Tamil people had to gain status of independence in the form of Eelam for their rights to be realized. In August 2005 the LTTE assassinated the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and in December 2005 a new president was elected. The new President Mahinda Rajapaksa vowed to crush the LTTE militarily and fresh offensives indicate the state turning to a purely military solution to disarm the LTTE while accepting a political solution for the grievances of the Tamil people.

1.2.3 Conflict drivers

The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is driven and fueled by the competing conceptions of nationalism (Rotberg 1999: 7) that have plagued the Sri Lankan polity. Its central characteristic is that the assertion of one ethnic identity is always foreseen as the denial of the other and the relationship between them is antagonistic, uncompromising and

incompatible. The force that is driving this conflict has been shaped by colonial encounters and colonial legacies in the post-independence era. The contestations have become galvanized in the perceptions and beliefs of both ethnic identities in Sri Lanka through the uncompromising historical and territorial imaginations that have become attached to it.

The last three decades solidified ethnic tensions and crystallized the polarization. The root of the conflict may be attributed to modernization and colonialism but it should not be the excuse. Tamil militancy rose in the 1980s nearly four decades after Sri Lanka gained independence. The lack of political will on the part of political authorities in the country, and the entrenched Sinhala biased political institutions and leadership successfully became a midwife for the militant Tamil nationalist movement. As Spencer (1990) points out, these antagonisms were not the divisions that were represented in the pre colonial Sri Lanka, which reinforces belief in divisions among communities in Sri Lanka engineered by colonial rulers. From the early 1980's, a political system was created which thrived on these divisions; even Tamil politicians made their political programme a nationalist project. Politics in Sri Lanka from independence onwards began significantly drifting towards issues of identity and nation. This resulted in extreme polarization while creating a space for ultra nationalists. Thus the dialectic between nation and its various ethno nationalist fragments was critical for the production and reproduction of both entities (Krishna 1999: 209) the vicious cycle continued as the nation building project failed.

Krishna (1999) provides a powerful account of the transformation of the ethnic tension into a conflict. His take on the whole conflict is as a 'production' rather than a natural process or ethnic antagonism that evolved into a conflict. He brings out the use of Sinhala and Tamil narratives of history by respective political structures to create extreme polarized views in the Sri Lankan civil society. In practice the 'Sinhala' State formulated a narrative to create a powerful nation which developed this asymmetry in ethnic relationships. The fragmentation of ethnic 'others' is inevitable as parameters of a nation are not applicable. It came to a point when the Tamils in the North East, especially the youth, who were deprived of the right to education and others deprived the opportunity of employment, simultaneously rose up.

The conflict has also seen internal divisions within the two main ethnic identities as a factor that has contributed to violence. Bush (2003) identifies this as a critical hurdle which has caused many peace efforts to fail. He argues that the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is not just dominated by intra-group or intra-ethnic relations and contestations between these groups. These 'inter group' or 'inter – ethnic arenas' contributes to complicating the conflict. He claims:

The pattern of communal conflict is not simply determined by the interaction of communal groups like the action reaction dynamic of billiard balls, it is also affected by the constellation of shifting factors within each communal group. (2003: 6)

The importance of Bush's analysis is that he locates the complicated nature of the conflict and the number of groups that are involved in it. He talks about the Tamil paramilitary organizations which are allied to the Sri Lankan government: some of them had been fighting the LTTE since the beginning of the conflict. The paramilitary organizations such as the EPDP and PLOTE have substantial following and the latest addition is the breakaway LTTE faction led by Karuna named as the TMVP (Tamil Makal Viduthali Pulikal). One key reason for the breakup in the LTTE was the geographic division affiliated with status in the Tamil community. LTTE cadres from Eastern province in Sri Lanka led by Karuna had little or no voice within the LTTE at decision making levels. Bush identifies them as 'primary and secondary social boundaries according to which individuals define themselves, and distinguish themselves from others' (2003: 14). Bose (1994) mentions this in his analysis of the conflict where he claims that the main two ethnic identities which are in contestation are not homogenous collectivities and possess entrenched internal differentiation.

The conflict in Sri Lanka is further driven by the fact that the country's constitutional framework is continuously failing to accommodate the key guarantees to the Tamil minority. Contesting forms of nationalisms could not be addressed in any constitutional reform in the post colonial Sri Lankan state. Edirisinha (1999) points out that even the current constitution, which came into force in 1978 and saw the enforcement of

fundamental rights, concentrates too much power in the executive. He claims that the notion of the supremacy of the constitution is not an acceptable factor to the lawmakers of the country (1999: 171). He nevertheless argues that supremacy of the constitution is important for the preservation of pluralist values in Sri Lankan society if different communities are to coexist peacefully.

The weaknesses of the constitution and its ability to accommodate all communities are evident from the events seen from 1980 to present. They demonstrate the failure of the state to take solid policy decisions towards ending the conflict. Thus the weak governments that came into power thanks to the Proportional Representation (PR) electoral system (introduced with the 1978 constitution) have failed to forge ahead and the periphery nationalist and extremist political parties have had the power to influence national decisions. The workings of this representation system have given much power to Sinhala nationalism and the extreme agents of it, to influence national policy decisions. These influences have seeped into policy decisions concerning land and education, services which are central to every community is prioritized through ethnicity and religion. Thiruchelvam argues that this is a sign of a fundamental flaw in all Sri Lankan constitutions because of the problem in the definition of the Sri Lankan state as it is embedded in the discourse of majoritarianism (1999: 191). He claims that such constitutional flaws need to be radically overhauled and the relationship between the regions and the central government needs to be redesigned through constitutional amendment in order to find a long lasting solution to the conflict

Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake (1999) exposes another dimension to the ethnic conflict, especially in the post 1983 scenario, that is contributing to driving and sustaining the conflict. She claims: 'Lanka's post 1983 armed conflict has generated a hidden economy and new identities which provide the war with its internal momentum' (1999: 58). Her analysis is based on the reconfiguration of economic relationships within the conflict zones and the war remittance for different political and paramilitary groups. She argues that the massive displacement of people as a result of the conflict leads to the destruction of former modes of coexistence and this leads to the emergence of new patterns of social and political organization (1999: 59). The Tamil paramilitary organizations which are funded by the military, the assignment of conflict zones to

paramilitary organizations with the power to charge taxes at points of entry to these zones and the LTTE's own system of taxation are all evidence of this new style of economic relationship in the conflict theatre. Her argument can be analysed in the context of the expansion of the Sri Lankan armed forces and its transformation into a massive job creator. A classic example is the new layers of the armed forces such as the 'Civil defence force', raised in April 2006 out of home guards, or village protection schemes introduced in the late 1980's to protect border villages from LTTE attacks by arming village youth. These economic relations and shaping of social and political modes of life based on them may prove hard to remove and may be another factor that is fuelling the conflict.

The conflict has entered a new phase with heightened confrontation between the Sri Lanka forces and the LTTE since 2006. Uyangoda (2007) views this as an endemic feature of the conflict where it has become self sustained and reproductive. He focuses on the view of power between the state and the LTTE where the LTTE is war-making in essence as a state making process. He makes this argument focusing on the approach to the conflict by the new president of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapaksa who came to power in 2005. Rajapaksa has given total backing for an all out military push to dislodge the LTTE from power. Uyangoda argues, this is a process of viewing the war as, 'a space in which the two sides actually negotiate their competing state formation goals' (2007: 10).

The technologies of warfare and investment in the military machinery by both parties is an area which have been less prominent in academic research. From the mid 1990s the Sri Lankan military has spent billions of rupees to upgrade its arsenal and training and expand military divisions. The LTTE has resorted to similar tactics and strategies by working on developing its ability to wage both conventional and guerrilla battle tactics. These technologies of warfare and the dependencies on constant military advancement have widened the conflict. The LTTE engineered suicide bombings, naval raids and air raids, making the Sri Lankan state resort to military tactics as the best option to counter the LTTE. Thus the technological advances are no more mutual deterrents. On the contrary they are the mutual accelerators of conflict, as demonstrated by the increasing faith in military responses from both the Sri Lankan state as well as the LTTE. The diaspora funding mentioned above adds up to this as the LTTE finds an abundance of

cash to fund its war. Similarly, the government through its allies such as Pakistan, China and Iran are constantly being supplied with arms and new military technology. The state is also buoyed by the ease of shopping around for military hardware in the Czech Republic, Ukraine and Slovakia thus driving the conflict forward. This has seen the recent spending on military continuously increase. Kelegama claims the expenditure was between 4.2 – 4.5 percent of the GDP and from 1995 it rose to 5.4 percent of the GDP (73: 1999). Military spending stands at \$1.7 billion for the fiscal year of 2009⁷; this is around 5% of GDP or 20% of the government's total budget.

Finally the various drivers which are fuelling the conflict and have become dynamics in themselves are reproducing the changes that the Sri Lankan political space has undergone. The spaces of life of individuals who are living through the ongoing struggle are shaped by their responses to the conflict. Some of these individuals form the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Though not experiencing the conflict directly their lives are again shaped by the activities the LTTE has been able to carry out in many diaspora communities. The LTTE were able to fortify and control spaces for politics of the diasporans with remarkable efficiency. I am investigating the impact cyberspace in this context and its role in shaping politics in the Tamil diaspora. As always, people who are in conflict zones or in zones of control by a dominant power, transform such dominated spaces to suit their own needs. Especially at the time of research for this thesis, as Smith points out, the LTTE 'is emerging as an enemy of populism and plurality no less than the forces that began the conflict in the first place' (Smith 2007: 85).

Diaspora politics is a critical sphere for the LTTE to dominate; and it required a spatial architecture which linked Eelam to the diasporans while integrating the diaspora communities into one coherent unit. They achieved this through cyberspace and it was not just a connection between homeland and diaspora communities. It was a larger space with which diaspora communities could be converged, transcending the barriers of the host state they were confined to.

⁷ http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123203734190685985.html?mod=loomia&loomia_si=t0:a16:g12:r1:c0.60737:b0

1.3 The Tamil diaspora

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was the result of the historical and spatially uprooting of Tamil citizens from legitimate spaces of occupation. As the same conditions of the conflict created the Tamil diaspora, it has become an integral stake holder in the conflict itself. Out of the nearly two million Tamils of Sri Lankan origin, nearly one third forms the diaspora. The statistics and figures are mostly estimates, as no host country possesses exact number of Sri Lankan Tamils living within them.

Recent, diaspora politics was dominated and shaped by the LTTE. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is strategically important for the LTTE. Their presence in the diaspora is important for the internationalization of the conflict. The international presence of the LTTE is felt through the diaspora activities, as the spatial stationing of the diaspora community is an important access point for the Tigers to maintain their global presence. The diaspora is also a field for the LTTE to dominate and as the diaspora community forms an integral part of the Eelam the LTTE is claiming it is fighting to create. For the LTTE, the concept and structure of Eelam served a dual purpose, one as a mobilization point and secondly as the authority to exert power and domination over the diaspora. The LTTE while fighting for a separate homeland also had in place a nascent state.

The key focus in this section will be the political potential of the Tamil diaspora and the nationalistic political agenda and action which the Tamil diaspora constantly reverted to. The actual distribution of Tamils is a contested issue. In recent research sponsored by the Berghof Foundation (2004) the numbers which Tamil diaspora are as follows, Canada (approx. 800,000), Great Britain (approx. 110,000), Switzerland (approx. 40,000), France (approx. 40,000) and Norway (approx. 10,000). However according to UNHCR statistical figures (Ganguly 2001), there are more than 800,000 Sri Lankan Tamils living overseas, in Canada (400,000), Europe (200,000), India (67,000), the United States (40,000), and Australia (30,000), with the rest (80,000) spread mostly in a dozen other countries. This is a similar figure provided by Venugopal (2003) where he claims the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora spread out in Canada, United Kingdom, Norway and Australia numbers between 600,000 and 800,000.

The origins of the Tamil migratory movement are to be found in the emigration of Tamil professionals, workers and students in mid 1950s ,1970s and early 1980s, not only to Europe and North America, but also to the Middle East and South-East Asia (McDowell: 1996; Daniel & Thangarajah 1999). Daniel and Thangarajah see the Tamil migrant arrivals in London falling into three phases. Phase I arrivals were drawn from elite families who enjoyed a cultural ease with western values. The second phase was made up of Tamils who were looking for educational and employment opportunities not available in Sri Lanka as a result of the government policies mentioned within the history of conflict. The third phase was made up of asylum seekers who were escaping the violence unleashed against Tamils in the aftermath of the 1983 riots and also during the different stages of the separatist war. Fuglerud (1999) points out that in the early 1990's when the Sri Lankan state was waging war on the LTTE, many Tamils who fled the war were taken care of by members of early Tamil emigrants as these new diasporans had to cope with the tightening asylum controls of the western states.

Tamil diasporans who came in from the early phases of migration provided the social infrastructure required to arrange the departure of asylum seekers following the outbreak of the civil war. As the number of Tamils making their way to Western Europe and North America increased, that infrastructure grew stronger, thereby facilitating further asylum migration. This sequence of events provides a neat demonstration of the demographic principle identified by Douglas Massey, 'once the number of network connections in an origin area reaches a critical level, migration becomes self-perpetuating, because migration itself creates the social structure to sustain' (1998).

1983 is a significant point in the evolution of the conflict to a larger scale high intensity war and the beginning of dispersion of Tamils out of Sri Lanka on a massive scale (the incident behind 1983 was presented in the above paragraphs). If 1956 was the conjuncture of polarizing tensions, 1983 was the rupture. Post 1983 Sri Lanka saw a massive exodus of Tamils out of the country with a huge migratory movement to the West. The Tamils fleeing Sri Lanka landed in UK, Canada, and Australia and in all Scandinavian countries. This post 1983 exodus created the modern Sri Lankan Tamil

diaspora. The West at that time accepted these Tamils as asylum seekers creating a Tamil Asylum diaspora (McDowell 1996).

Almost all of the Tamils coming out from Sri Lanka had experienced some form of discrimination from the state, with the post 1983 Tamils being subjected to persecution and violence. A significant parallel to this exodus was the development of the LTTE international presence and its operational strength overseas. The LTTE through its own international cells and other front organizations launched campaigns internationally after 1983 on Tamil issues, while positioning their movement as a Tamil liberation struggle. The initial international campaign by the LTTE maps these dispersed Tamils located them as 'Victim Diasporas', even before this term was given scholarly currency through Cohen's (1997: 31) work more than a decade later. More than one third of the Tamil pre-war population settled outside Sri Lanka.

Fuglerud (2001) argues that the cultural survival of the Sri Lanka-Tamil society to a larger extent relies on exile dynamics. Many diaspora association bodies have been formed in order to publicize the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka and lobby host governments. Most of these organizations spreading from United States, United Kingdom, France, Norway and Australia were formed in the aftermath of the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka. These include the Ilankai Tamil Sangam, the most active political group representing Sri Lankan Tamils in the United States; the Standing Committee of Tamil Speaking Peoples (SCOT), a London-based group concerned with providing relief to Tamil areas; and the Ceylon Tamil Association (Australasia) (renamed the Eelam Tamil Association [ETA] in 1982), a prominent Tamil community organization in Australia.

The newly set up lobby and advocacy groups managed to mobilize within their host countries as well as in transnational spheres. The classic example is a London-based Tamil activist addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 1978 pretending to be the Sri Lankan foreign minister (Rajasingham 2002). The impersonator managed to highlight the violence unleashed on Sri Lankan Tamils before the real foreign minister could take his position. Sriskandarajah points out, 'Two decades on, perhaps the best

demonstration of the diaspora's influence on Sri Lankan politics was the presence of two diaspora Tamils among the four official LTTE delegates to the first session of direct negotiations with the Sri Lankan government in September 2002' (2004:498).

There is no doubt that the activities of the LTTE are important in upholding a sense of common identity in exile. The LTTE seeks to suppress all internal controversy among the exile population and claim to be the sole representative of the Tamil people (Fuglerud 2001). A.C Shanthan, head of the British Tamil Association (BTA) in July 2006 addressing a crowd in Hyde Park commemorating July 1983 events in Sri Lanka, said 'We are gathered here today to send a message to the international community: you cannot split the Tigers and the Tamil people. They are united in their cause of liberation.'⁸ The unique feature here is that the LTTE did manage to set up a comprehensive international network, even before the diaspora began to take shape especially in the post 1983 situation (Gunaratne 1999). This is why Johnson (2003) notes that the Tamil diaspora is a creation of the LTTE, which I perceive as a far fetched analysis but signifies the organic link between the LTTE and the Tamil diaspora and the level of control the LTTE had on the diaspora till very recently.

Thus by establishing a certain sense of working relationship with the diaspora, LTTE developed a huge diaspora support network among the new diasporans. It found many allies, while people come to accept LTTE as the main representative of the Tamil people. LTTE positioned itself among the diasporans as the key organization fighting for the establishment of a separate Tamil homeland. The network involves a huge fundraising arm for the acquisition of sophisticated military hardware (their arsenal includes 152mm and 130 mm howitzers, and suicide speed boats) and fund raising for charity work in Sri Lanka for Tamils affected by the conflict. The LTTE drive to establish itself as the sole representative of Sri Lankan Tamils was enforced most of the time through violence and threats to rival organizations. The internal war in Sri Lanka was extensively used by the LTTE to suppress the controversies of the situation, as it was the only Tamil rebel force fighting the Sri Lankan government. *Jane's Intelligence Review* revealed in its August 2007 edition, that the LTTE has managed to raise \$ 200 to 300 million through

⁸ _____ 'Thousands gather in Hyde Park remembrance'
<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=18920> July 25 2006

international fund raising. These funds were made out of its international operations spanning from investments in businesses in the West to voluntary donations from Tamil diasporans and money acquired by coercion from rich Tamil businessmen and professionals in the diaspora.

The Tamil nationalistic project among the diasporas were dominated by political activities organized by the LTTE; these drew in large crowds all over Europe, North America, Australia and South Africa. There are significant days in the diaspora calendar on which cultural and political activities take place every year. The July 1983 events are remembered and the uprising of the Tamils is celebrated; these are called the Black July campaigns. These range from awareness campaigns to large LTTE front office organized cultural events and fund raisers. November 27 is named as Heroes Day, *Maveerar Nal* where global events are held to remember the LTTE fighters who sacrificed their lives for rights of the Tamil people. These celebrations throughout the globe are an ideological attempt to link all Sri Lankan Tamils irrespective of their differences to demonstrate their support for the struggle. In this light LTTE until recently was the success story of how a movement which fights for a separate state in this tiny island country has developed into a major transnational player. Krishna highlights the magnitude of this widespread well organized network for scholars researching on the LTTE: 'An ethnographer studying the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a militant group at the fore front of the Sri Lankan Tamil movement for self determination, would have a hard time demarcating and entering the field of her proposed ethnography: the guerrillas' walkabouts now span Jaffna and Geneva, Sudumalai and Sydney' (Krishna 1991: xxi). The evolution of the conflict and LTTE strategies coupled with growing dissent among members of the diaspora community pushed the LTTE to expand its role as dominator and the representative of Tamils simultaneously.

Apart from these set events, the Tamil diaspora engages in other forms of nationalistic social and political activities, from sports festivals organized solely for Tamils to educational establishments in Europe which specialise in teaching Tamil culture and building aspirations towards a homeland (Guha 2003). These diaspora driven activities lead to the assertion of a strong national identity and the yearning towards a homeland. The researchers on Tamil diaspora formation and politics point out that the LTTE was

not interested in just framing the image of the victim diaspora, as they later began to position the Tamil diasporans as part of a larger heroic identity. As Cheran points out, ‘in the current incarnation of the nationalist discourse, the Tamil is no longer a “paraiyah” Tamil. S/he is a Pulithamil (tiger Tamil)’(Cheran 2001 : 4). I analyse this as not just a change in nationalist discourse of Tamil militancy, but it is a shift of LTTE policy from being representational to domination of the diaspora. The conditions which created the diaspora enabled the LTTE to develop an organic relationship with the diasporans as their representatives. The LTTE has succeeded in its objective of radicalizing the Sri Lankan Tamils overseas (Wickramasinghe 2006 : 266). This remained the case until the dissident phenomenon became a force and effectively challenged the LTTE hegemony. The next section will locate the Tamil diaspora in the context of existing theories on diaspora formation and also locate its political features in an appropriate diaspora theoretical analysis.

1.4 The notion of ‘Diaspora’

The term ‘diaspora’ according to Cohen, is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over): ‘When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization’(1997: 2). What Cohen implies is that all diasporic communities settled outside their native habitats, perceive their ‘homeland’ as represented in their language, culture, religion, irrespective of their current territory of occupation. Dufoix (2008) claims that the term ‘diaspora’ used signify any form of dispersion from a place to any non territorial space where exchanges do take place. He claims:

“Diaspora” has become a global word that fits the global world. It has been a proper noun, in the Septuagint Bible, and a quasi proper noun—that is, a closed category – for Armenians, Greeks, Africans and others. Today it is a common noun it “speaks” for itself. (2003: 108)

What Dufoix (2008) is trying to bring out by engaging with modern usage of the term ‘diaspora’ is to expose its multiple meanings and multiple usages. The term diaspora now possess the meaning of referring to a national, ethnic or religious community living far from its native land, or place of origin, or being dispersed in several foreign

locations. Dufoix claims the static term diaspora originally used to identify population movements, presents a more inclusive meaning making itself increasingly dispersed (2008: 54).

A premier driver behind the revival of diasporic studies seems to be the changing nature and explanation of contemporary migration flows. According to Vertovec, the emergence of 'transnationalism' as a central concept in understanding how global identities are constructed 'from below' and 'on the above' has been a key feature of the contemporary efforts in theorizing diaspora (Vertovec 1998). Braziel and Mannur state that 'Theorizing diaspora is a process of unveiling the "critical spaces", which modernity has created in forms of creating new spaces of being and exploration, the transformation of identity and belonging' (Braziel and Mannur 2003 : 3). But again due to the diverse nature of these interpretations there is discontent as well, as highlighted by the works of Sheffer. There is no agreement among politicians and academics regarding the precise point at which migrants cross the rubicon of immigrant and form new diasporas or join existing ones. Clarification of this issue may not only have major theoretical implications but also practical effects (Sheffer: 2003). James Clifford (1994), a pioneer in the notion of diaspora formation in the modern context, talks of formation of diasporic consciousness in the sense of being oriented towards and organized around an eventual return to a place of real or mythic origin. This is a point where later studies on diasporas see the widening of the sphere of diasporic politics.

Clifford, Safran and Scheffer identify the concept of diaspora as a framework to describe any population which is considered de-territorialized or 'transitional'. The rebirth of the notion of diaspora has stemmed from academics using it to characterize transnational ethnic groups who have found in the expression a positive way of constituting a 'hybrid' cultural and political identity (Vertovec 1998; Cohen 1997). Diasporic engagement cannot be understood in most of current theorizations of diaspora from Clifford (1994) to Scheffer (1996) as their theorization is concentrated on the forms and shaping of diasporas. Even analysts such as Vertovec (1998) and Scheffer (2003) who are focused on diaspora politics, locate diaspora as a totality or a well defined entity. In research focused on transnational diaspora they examine various nodes connecting diaspora networks. This is an extremely structural approach to the study of diaspora politics.

Current theorization of diasporas as networks has reached a level of saturation. The positive thing emerging from positioning diaspora as a transnational political entity is the study of their politics on new media spheres (Karim 2003; Mitra 1997).

Brubaker (2005) in a recent article introduces these theoretical positions while engaging them critically; this leads to a more pragmatic interpretation of a diaspora activity as a category of practice rather than normative definition of diaspora as a category of migration. From Clifford, Safran, Scheffer (1994; 1991; 1996) Brubaker draws three core features of any diaspora; they are dispersion, homeland orientation and boundary maintenance. Brubaker's fundamental problematising of this framework lies in the actual political action of a diaspora. In a significant critique of Scheffer's (2003) recent work, Brubaker notes the impossibility in quantifying a diaspora, as in a temporal framework. He argues that not everybody in a diaspora wants to maintain a boundary, nor a homeland orientation. Brubaker uses a classic diachronic deconstruction on the theorization and categorization of diaspora. He raises the question: is 'multi generational staying power' being taken into consideration in forming these frameworks?

To overcome these problems Brubaker introduces a working understanding of the diaspora phenomenon. He states, 'I want to argue that we should think of diaspora not in substantialist terms as a bounded entity, but rather as an idiom, a stance, a claim. We should think of diaspora in the first instance as a category of practice, and only then ask whether, and how, it can fruitfully be used as a category of analysis' (2005:12). His understanding is that rather than speak of 'a diaspora' or 'the diaspora' as an entity, a bounded group, an ethnodemographic or ethnocultural fact, it may be more fruitful, and certainly more precise, to speak of diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices, and so on.

Brubaker's framework provides a pragmatic method of analysis for diaspora studies. Brubaker looks at diaspora as a process oriented dynamic rather than a more static political entity. In this thesis I similarly analyse Tamil diaspora in times of its political practices, online political engagement of the Tamil diaspora as well as impact of cyberspace on their politics. The thesis also explores the shaping of the Tamil diaspora

political field through the practices of diaspora political activists. This focusing is informed and enhanced through Brubaker's analysis of diaspora politics, although there is a significant contribution to diaspora theories from theorists in the lights of Scheffer (1996), Safran (1994), Cohen (1997) and Vertovec (1998), and their focus on the notion of transnational diaspora which I will also refer. In the next section I will discuss the literature around cyber politics and its implications for the analysis of global diaspora politics.

1.5 Politics of the internet

This is a brief introduction to the literature on cyber politics and research on online diaspora political engagements. While engaging with them I draw out the distinctions my research and analysis generates in the context of this existing knowledge, especially concerning the diaspora use of cyberspace for political engagement. Chadwick points out that since its inception from the early stages with the rise of the ARPANET⁹ in the 1960s, the internet has had a significant impact on politics and he claims that the importance of internet politics is based on the fact that political actors of all sorts have become more closely involved in the production, consumption, and regulation of information communication technologies than they were when the internet first emerged (2006:2).

The first generation of publications which emerged in the mid to late 1990s concerning the politics of cyberspace mainly focused on the role of politicians such as Wayne Rash's *Politics on the net* (1997), Richard Davis's *The web of politics* (1999), Elaine Kamarck and Joseph Nye's *democracy.com?* (1999) and Anthony Wilhelms *Democracy in Digital age*. (2000). Later publications showed a sign of shift in focus and research. The publication, *Politics as usual* by Michael Margolis and David Resnick brought out the dimensions, or key areas, of politics that the internet can be and is being used for. This provided an expanded horizon for research and analysis on net politics. Jordan's (2004)

⁹ ARPA stands for Advanced Research Projects Agency, a major research agency of the U.S. Department of Defense established mainly as a knee jerk reaction of the USA to the launch of the Sputnik orbiter by Soviet Union in 1957. This later developed a research project looking at networking of computers especially focusing on the development of interactive computing for resource sharing. These initiatives triggered primary research and funding and collaboration with Universities such as Stanford which brought out ARPANET, 'Advanced Research Projects Agency Network', the immediate precursor of the internet.

Hactivism and Cyberactivism provides a multitude of perspectives on online activism, and looks at macro and micro aspects of political mobilization and the use of cyberspace.

There is a massive growth in literature exploring the evolving nature of politics online, which is widely expanding from research on national politics, political organization, political institutions, social movements, democratization, and governance to conflict politics. Chadwick (2006), referring to Argre's (2002) research, broadly identifies eight key areas where the internet has had a significant political impact. These political topics include decentralization, participation, community, globalization, post industrialization, rationalization, governance and libertarianism. My thesis focuses overtly on a micro political facet as it is concentrated on the impact the internet has on diaspora politics, and especially its impact on political agents.

The Media of diaspora (2003) edited by Karim, brings out the media dimension to diasporic politics, and mainly the use of different medias, including the internet, while the more recent publication by Landzelius (2006), *Native on the net* focuses on minority politics online in the transnational context. Such literature as Karim's and Landzelius's work on online technologies and the link with politics of protests is quite relevant to my research as well. I argue that there is still a lack of in-depth research studying the impacts of cyberspace on the lives of political activists, and *vice versa*, and on the spatial dimension of transnationalism, and the notion of 'place' and 'location' for political activism in cyberspace. Thus I look into the impact cyberspace has on the lives of political activists with my research engaging directly with the views and personal experiences of Tamil diaspora activists.

The literature on online diaspora politics arose from studies on transnationalism where the concept of diaspora is increasingly used as a point of analysis, especially the manner in which diasporas develop connections and the political possibilities arising from these connections. Diaspora, is positioned as a historical condition of displacement but in which people can be uprooted yet keep in touch. As Landzelius (2006) points out, it looks at people who have homes in a 'host country' and yet simultaneously consider themselves homeless. These new possibilities mainly mediated through communication

technologies make the displaced of today 'stay connected' in ways that were inconceivable for their forebears.

In the context of diasporas online and diaspora politics online, Laguerre points to an external tension between the virtual world and the real world/visible world, which he identifies as a 'dialectical tension'. According to Laguerre, 'Virtual diasporas are not identical to real diasporas because they inhabit distinct, although connected conceptual universes and because their identities display different characteristics '(2005:131). As Calhoun (1992), Laguerre (2005), Hannerz (1996) and Karim (2003) point out, Information Communication Technologies (ICT) have enabled diasporas to make regular physical or symbolic connections. In their view, ICT has given an unprecedented technological edge to quests to 'maintain, revive, invent' connections to an actual homeland. Landzelius sums up the importance of cyberspace in the modern context of diaspora dynamics when she notes that: 'Cyberspace not only assists but it maintains the diaspora ideology alive' (2006: 21).

The current research on online diaspora spread across themes such as indigenous cyber presence, virtual diaspora and cyber relationships that keep the diaspora alive, but there is less focus on diaspora politics online. Helen Lee's (2006) analysis of the Tongana diaspora mainly focuses on discussion forums and thus the research looks at diaspora connections and re-imagining diaspora identities, similar to Gibb's (2006) analysis of Harari youth who are displaced from Ethiopia. Karim in his edited volume the *Media of Diaspora* looks at cyberspace and online technologies as overcoming hierarchical structures of traditional media for the diasporas to stay connected and use online services such as Internet relay chat, email, Usenet, Listserv (2003:15).

The literature explored above has two key drawbacks. The first is that the analysis of the internet as a kind of new technology of connection and the importance for diasporans to stay connected remains the key focus. This lacks analysis to the importance of politics amongst diasporan agents. The second weakness in the research and literature on cyberspace and diaspora politics has been its focus on certain websites and forums. The

analysis is mainly limited to the observation of limited political participation or focusing on few websites randomly selected.

Existing literature on Tamil diaspora politics such as Wayland (2004), Ranganathan (2002) and Whitaker (2006, 2007) is heavily focused on the dominance of the LTTE in cyberspace and the cyber operations and networks it has fostered. Political developments in cyberspace are analysed through the LTTE's effort to create the notion of a 'virtual Eelam' (homeland)' and the support diaspora mobilization from LTTE fronts. Tamil diasporic web sites run by LTTE fronts identify the notion of nation as the primary focus for their activity¹⁰. The website www.Eelamnation.com carries this mission statement:

Our mission is to focus on political, social, cultural, and economic events that affect our vision of an "Eelam Nation" while encouraging cultural exchange and information among the Tamil Diaspora, a service we hope to support by providing Tamils all over the world with an opportunity for manifesting their talents, knowledge, and experience in our pages.

These web efforts reconfigured the idea of Tamil nation or according to Pradeep Jeganathan 'Imagi nation', which has emerged within the context of cyber space (Jeganathan: 1997).

Cheran brings this observation in an argument tracing the origin of Tamilnes through analyzing the classical literary texts of the Sangam period. He claims the concept of *Thinai (landscape)* as defined in Sangam literature are cultural sites which form the basis of Tamilness. There are five landscapes introduced in the Sangam age literary text *tholkaapiyam*. Cheran claims the two above mentioned *thinais* are his addition to the existing five landscapes which form the core pillars of Tamilness, or Tamil identity. Cheran points out: 'with the growing of the Tamil diaspora and the emergence of thousands of Tamil cultural web pages, I argue that two more things can be added to this classical Sangam age classification. *Aaramthinai*, sixth genre (exile and diaspora) and *Earlaam thinnai* the seventh genre (cyberspace)' (2001: 9).

¹⁰ It is not just Eelamnation.com that presents this notion of nation but all the premier Tamil Diaspora sites carry this message like Eelam.com, TamilEelam.com, www.Eelamthugz.cjb.net/ other than these all Tamil and Tamil Diapsoric sites mostly use the phrase 'our land' and 'our people'. The recreation is supported by maps depicting the Eelam. The Tamil Diaspora is attempting to achieve a cyber nation be created within the simulated virtual reality of the cyberspace.

Tekwani sums up the online LTTE presence and its implications for online politics:

It is apparent that the online network is primarily used for propaganda purposes serving up a dynamic and vibrant Tamil presence, offering emotional and cultural sustenance to Diaspora Tamils and an outlet for political discourse they may have otherwise been denied, the online network is also a symbol of a parallel network that runs on more subterranean lines, channeling funds, recruits and arms to the LTTE (2006:21).

Thus the thesis looks specifically at the politics of diaspora, exploring the phenomenon of web politics beyond the focus of a single web site or a forum. I focus more empirically on the actual impact of cyberspace on political engagements of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The case study looks at the impact of cyber politics on the lives of political activists and decision makers and the perception of these activists on cyberspace. This thesis focuses not only on LTTE web operations but it also represents the Tamil diaspora political activists who are opposed to LTTE operations and are actively opposed to the LTTE domination of diaspora spaces. This provides an alternative insight into the cyber politics of Tamil diasporans with new dimensions that open up when research is conducted across the Tamil diasporan political spectrum instead of purely concentrating on the LTTE.

1.6 Conclusion

The LTTE virtually nurtured the politicizing of Tamil life. They successfully fused the identity of being Tamil diasporan with allegiance to the struggle for national liberation to carve out a separate state for Tamils. This was backed up until very recently with a promise of possibility of return to a Tamil homeland. The split in the LTTE has had significant impact among the diaspora Tamils with dissident groups gaining power to challenge the international operations of the LTTE. The Tamil dissidents and the political struggle between the pro-LTTE elements and the dissidents will be introduced at length in Chapter Two; the struggle has a major influence on this research.

This chapter mainly introduced key background issues that affected my research and themes of knowledge that it bases on. Earlier research on diasporan politics and

particularly on Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora politics, has primarily concentrated on cyberspace as a medium of communication. In this research the thesis explore the own views of political activists of it. Chapter Two will look closely at who my respondents are and where I carried out my research. It will also introduce the theoretical framework for the research and its design; based on the responses of Tamil diasporan political activists, setting the key theoretical arguments of this thesis concerning issues of political engagements of Tamil diasporan activists in cyberspace.

Chapter 2: Research methods

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One reviewed the literature on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, the formation of Tamil diaspora and diasporic politics in cyberspace. This chapter relates my research to current knowledge into online diaspora politics, while investigating new dimensions of Tamil diaspora politics which have informed the design of my fieldwork strategy. Thus this chapter introduces the research design, in-depth analysis of my field and the respondents. As a social science researcher, it is inevitable that one has to make a lot of choices in defining one's own research area. I selected the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora as Sri Lankan Tamils can be identified as one of the most dispersed diasporic communities in the globe. The fact that these diasporans are engaged in politics on cyberspace provides a researcher with a diverse but rich set of data.

2.2 Research Framework

My research design is basically made out of two components. The first component is the fieldwork aspect of my research (the offline phase) where I made contact with respondents who make up the political leadership in Tamil diaspora politics in London. I had already identified key Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora organizations based in London, especially in central London and south London. These were later used as locations where I conducted in depth interviews with political activists who are chief organizers of Diaspora activities in London. I will be introducing my field, the respondents and the reason why I selected them later on in this chapter.

The second component of the research framework, my online research and analysis will be presented in Chapters Four and Five. This second component is purely a web based research on Tamil diasporic websites (the online phase). The online analysis is based on the methodology known as Web Sphere Analysis (Foot 2004); this approach is discussed in Chapter Three where I introduce the methodologies of web analysis.

2.3 Methodological Practice

There is existing research on various dynamics of the Tamil diaspora from various researchers. Gunaratne (1998) and Fuglerud (1999) have completed extensive research on the politics of Tamil diasporans. Both these researchers have focused on LTTE influence and domination of the political realms of diaspora mobilization. Fuglerud has concentrated on diaspora politics in Norway, while Gunaratne has done some extensive interviews with some key LTTE operatives in London. There is no existing research involving political activists focusing on the emergence of cyberspace and their reaction to such new developments. This vacuum itself was a challenge in organizing my research and devising themes to be discussed in interviews.

The respondents in my fieldwork are all members of the Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora and most importantly they make up the leadership or decision-making units in diaspora politics as individuals or as groups. There are pro-LTTE activists and leaders also in my pool of respondents but the majority are dissidents. A broader introduction to dissident Tamil political activists is provided later in the chapter prior to introducing my respondents. In simple terms the dissidents are opposed to the Tamil nationalist project of the LTTE. The key reason for focusing on the dissidents is the increase in political activity carried out by dissident groups. There has been a significant surge in dissident politics and a lack of research done on this emergent phenomenon on Tamil diaspora politics.

As a method of data gathering, interviews ensure coherence between the research question and the methods, using ‘conversations’ with a purpose (Lewis 2003). I hoped to unearth a number of critical issues pertaining to diasporic mobilization from these individuals. In this context good in-depth interviews have the potential to combine the structure with flexibility as emphasized by Legard et al (2003). The in-depth interviews will try to look at the Diasporan politics in cyberspace through the experiences of Tamil diasporan political leadership and its impact on political decision making.

By scheduling a significant number of preliminary interviews, and spending some considerable time with Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora political activists in London from

2006 to the end of 2007, I was able to develop confidence with my respondents and to engage with them on discussions generally about politics. This investment of my time with potential respondents contributed to organize proper interviews and also use the snowballing technique to gain access to more potential respondents pertaining to my research.

My fieldwork, and the questions I posed to my respondents, were mainly based on my experiences gained from the pilot fieldwork I carried out in London from April – June 2006. In this fieldwork I was mainly looking at the dynamics of online diaspora politics, the impact of such online politics on diaspora politics and the attitude of diaspora political activists towards cyber politics as a serious mode of political engagement. In my main fieldwork, which started in May 2007, the process of interviewing was made simple and clear to avoid any unnecessary complications for the respondents. The interview questions were based on some key themes that I outlined and presented to the respondents, this helped my inquiry while making it easier for the respondents as it was loosely structured rather than maintaining a rigid set of questions. The key themes within my interviews were:

- The impact of cyberspace on Tamil diaspora politics
- The role of cyberspace and online technologies in political mobilization
- The communication and information dimension of cyberspace.
- The advantages of online politics
- The types of political action that were preferred to be carried out online
- The political processes cyberspace generated
- Possible new dimensions that cyberspace opened up for politics among diasporan politicians

The interviews flowed more like discussions, but they were guided by the themes of my research agenda. There were instances in interviews with pro-LTTE activists where they subtly tried to position themselves as moderate political activists. They did sometimes talk of involvement with the LTTE but they used cryptic language to indicate where their loyalties were rather than stating them outright.

The field research which I had to undertake posed several key challenges. The primary challenge was how I could position myself as a researcher. This was mainly due to the sensitive nature of the issues that I was investigating and also it was a time of heightened political activity within the Tamil Diaspora. I was aware that my role as a researcher among the Tamil Diasporas had certain inherent challenges. These included being from a Sinhalese background and having had a previous affiliation to the regime in Sri Lanka which was waging a military campaign with the LTTE. The Tamil community in London, irrespective of which side they were on politically, tended not to trust anyone affiliated with the regime of President Rajapaksa. These were the challenges I had to negotiate using a series of strategies. However, the position and political views I held on the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict placed me in a favourable position when approaching the Tamil political activists. I was one of the key individuals in the Rajapaksa regime who always advocated a political solution to the ethnic conflict and openly worked towards its implementation. These included the efforts I took to enlighten President Rajapaksa when he was Prime Minister during the Northern Ireland peace process, coordinating visits to Northern Ireland and meeting delegations of all political parties in Belfast and Londonderry. I also developed links with democratic Tamil activists and journalists, listening to their democratic voices despite my strong disagreement with the idea of a separate homeland for Tamils in Sri Lanka. This reputation aided me when I started my PhD.

I laid the ground work for the interviews early at the beginning of my PhD programme; I was able to make contacts with pro-LTTE activists through two key sources. The first was through a web master from the most viewed pro-LTTE website www.Tamilnet.com. I had affiliations with Tamilnet.com even as a researcher in Sri Lanka as I closely associated with the late Dharmeratnam Sivaram, popularly known as Taraki who was the chief editor of Tamilnet.com until his death in April 2005. The webmaster of Tamilnet introduced me to some key pro-LTTE Tamil political activists in London. However, these introductions were not smooth affairs and I had to build up trust with these respondents by attending casual meetings from early 2006 onwards prior to being granted full interviews in 2007.

The second opportunity came in January 2006 when I attended a workshop organized by the Centre on Migration Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford. The workshop brought together researchers on Sri Lankan Tamils in London. I was able to establish links with some academics and researchers who were involved in Tamil diaspora studies. One of the participants, Councillor Paul Sathianesan introduced me to Tamil political activists in London who represented the pro-LTTE lobby. Sathianesan is a politician with aspirations to establish himself in UK politics and political institutions, but his political activities caused him to interact with pro-LTTE activists and to develop a good rapport with them over the years of his political career.

I spent the first year of my PhD preparing for my field work and this primarily involved making contacts and visiting them in London. The routine visits and meetings with potential respondents paved the way for prolonged associations with them and helped break down barriers and inhibitions, particularly amongst Tamil dissidents who might otherwise have been wary of talking to me. This meant that discussions could eventually be steered toward political matters which allowed me to introduce fundamental aspects of my research. Such long term associations with the respondents at an early stage of my PhD research proved fruitful in the long run. I was able to develop confidence over time and this confidence building exercise matured into a collection of good empirical data and set the momentum for reaching out to new respondents.

One might feel that access to the Tamil dissidents compared to the pro-LTTE activists was much easier. This was not the case. The dissidents, though categorized in the common identity of being anti LTTE, do not form a unified group, nor are they centrally linked compared to their rivals. The only thing they shared in common was animosity towards the LTTE, based on diverse reasons, from antagonisms which went a long way back to the inception of Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka and the LTTE's ruthless execution of its rivals, to very recent rifts within the LTTE. Thus the dissidents included members of other Tamil political parties, militant groups which the LTTE violently put down, and ex-LTTE members who harboured personal grudges with its leadership. This matrix of differences complicated my attempts to make contacts with these dissident political activists. I had some relatively easy access to some activists based on personal affiliations, and the others I had to formally contact through email addresses and phone

numbers which the other dissidents passed on, where the best they could do was provide me contact details of other dissident activists.

Making contact and making appointments for initial meetings were difficult and challenging as I had to provide explanations of my research in very short periods of time to secure even initial meetings. I also used very short one page bullet formed texts as an email attachment which I forwarded to these potential respondents as further reference for them concerning my research prior to conducting the interview. These meetings were challenging as they needed to be confident in revealing their ideas and becoming part of my research. Unlike the LTTE, some of them were politically not very visible when compared with LTTE members in London, as they tended to operate more underground. They were also afraid of Sri Lankan government intelligence agents operating in London.

I carried out nearly fifteen interviews during the period of eight months and these were lengthy interviews with diaspora political activists. I was able to interview almost all the decision makers in the dissident Tamil diaspora sphere based in London. These dissidents included Tamil activists, who were in London since the early 1970s to second generation Tamil diasporans. Such a cross section does help to identify significant changes of politics, types of preferred spaces for politics and political strategies for the inception of online politics. There were lengthy interviews with the few pro-LTTE activists and leading lobbyists that I was able to contact and remain in contact with them throughout my fieldwork research period.

The respondents I selected were not web masters but most of them were actively engaged in offline and online politics in London. The online politics ranged from content contribution to websites to email campaigns. Thus the importance of these fifteen individuals was that they were exposed to online politics and also played a major role in the Tamil Diaspora political activities in real world scenarios. The empirical data that were featured from these interviews was analysed along with the online research, from this the clear impact and consequences of online politics on actual political agents could then be judged.

Though there is a significant diaspora presence in London, the political leadership and decision making is in the hands of a limited number of people. These political activists have the ability to easily influence the diaspora as Sriskandrajah points out:

While only a small part of the diaspora may be actively involved in overtly political activities, .. almost all Tamils are aware of and interested in political developments at home. The ongoing conflict and the plight of family and friends still in Sri Lanka mean that many members of the diaspora have a real and direct connection to events in their former home. As a result, the spaces, events, and initiatives produced through Tamil nationalist political discourse are some of the most important factors in the life of the Tamil diaspora (2004:497).

This is why I argue that the social and political positions of my respondents are critical to understand the actual impact of online politics. These key respondents have the agency to dictate and shape the political flows of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The reason that the number may seem quite small compared to the estimated diaspora figures in London is that the political organization and leadership in the diaspora community is through a small number of political activists who are the key figures of Tamil diaspora mobilization.

2.4 The respondents

This section will do three things. First, it will expand on the concept of a dissident Tamil diasporan political activist because, as I mentioned above, the majority of my respondents are representatives of the dissident Tamil identity. Also as mentioned, there is no significant research on this new turn in diaspora politics, although dissidents did exist from the early formations of the Tamil diaspora. Secondly, this section will include the life stories of two respondents, exploring the phenomenon of becoming diasporan and of becoming a Tamil diasporan political activist. Finally, it will introduce my field or the location of the study and its importance as a research site in the context of my thesis.

2.4.1 Dissident factor

The University Teachers for Human Rights Jaffna (UTHR[J]) group pioneered human rights based activism starting in the early days of the conflict. The group was made out of academics mainly from Jaffna University, Sri Lanka and was formed in mid 1988. They came out both against state suppression of Tamils and the violence unleashed against Tamils by Tamil militant organizations. The key objective of the organization in its own words

To challenge the external and internal terror engulfing the Tamil community as a whole through making the perpetrators accountable, and to create space for humanising the social & political spheres relating to the life of our community.¹¹

The group's first achievement was to publish *The Broken Palmyrah* a book which resulted from extensive reports and research conducted by the UTHR(J) on various issues surrounding developments in the conflict. These included the immediate events that took place after the entrance of the Indian Peace Keeping force (IPKF) in 1987 to Sri Lanka. *The Broken Palmyrah* also included the Sri Lankan government's war strategies and its effect on the Tamil civilian population in the North and East of Sri Lanka and the alarming dictatorship of the LTTE which was evolving into a powerful military force.

The LTTE assassinated one of the core authors of *The Broken Palmyrah* and one of the founding members of the UTHR(J) Dr. Rajani Thiranagama the head of the Department of Anatomy in the University of Jaffna and a human rights activist. In the early 1990s more UTHR(J) members were abducted and were reported killed by the LTTE which made the remaining members flee Sri Lanka. The UTHR(J) still manages to report on human rights violations in the context of the ongoing conflict committed by all parties through their website [www.UTHR\(J\).org](http://www.uthr.org). The UTHR(J) remains one of the oldest efforts of dissent challenging the domination of both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state.

¹¹ [Http://www.uthr.org/history.htm](http://www.uthr.org/history.htm)

I will also look briefly at the dissidents in London who were active against the LTTE. This early dissident activity revolved around two different sections of Tamils living in the diaspora community. One of them represented the various Tamil militant organizations in Sri Lanka which were subjected to a violent purge by the LTTE. These militant operatives who fled the LTTE, and also the Sri Lankan government's anti militant operations, established their organizations in London. These included the EPRLF, PLOTE and TELO, all had opened party offices in London. The other segment included individuals who were unaffiliated with the Tamil militancy but were concerned of the suffering of Tamil people within the situations created with the rise of Tamil militancy. The *Tamil Times*, the English weekly started publication in 1981 is an example of the work by such individuals.

Rajanayagam pioneered the use of print media in the early 1980s when he started the English journal *Tamil Times* in 1981 from London. Rajanayagam told me that the rise of Tamil militancy, the violence unleashed against Tamils in mid 1980's and killing of political activists in Sri Lanka led to launch of the *Tamil Times*. The *Tamil Times* ceased its publication in 2005. *Tamil Times* took an independent view point on the Tamil national question thus it was not favoured by the LTTE and pro-LTTE operations. The LTTE operations tried to take over this journal and when it failed started publishing alternative English publications to counter the *Tamil Times*. *Tamil Voice International* (TVI) is one such example. Thus *Tamil Times* represents long term defiance against the LTTE within the Tamil diaspora. Rajanayagam said that the current web politics has been able to expand the reach of the dissidents and that the LTTE is feeling the pressure brought upon it by dissident web publications.

My thesis traces the development of the dissident political actions among the Tamil diaspora in the last five years, especially in the context of cyber politics. I asked a dissident political activist what makes her a 'dissident Tamil' and she told me, 'I mean as dissenting from Tamil nationalism, that means I am no longer analysing the ethnic conflict from the view of a Tamil nationalist point of view. Earlier I could not escape from Tamil nationalist movement, now I am opposed to the movement. This means now I am consciously dissenting from or opposed to secession and find no real meaning in

Tamil nationhood.’ And she further said, ‘At the beginning we were of a minority “lonely voices of the wilderness” in the Tamil community.’

Though this was an interesting definition, some of the other dissidents I interviewed had different views on it. Some still identified themselves as Tamil nationalist and representing the rights of Tamil people. The common factor which bound them together was the fact that they were fiercely opposing the LTTE along with its rigid political ideology.

The best analysis of a Tamil dissident comes from the website operated by UTHR(J), In one of their reports, paying tribute to one of their slain members, they defined what makes a Tamil dissident,

In fact all Tamil dissidents are products of the same rotten society that gave birth to the LTTE and its bloodstained politics.... Dissidents were often persons who had flirted with the mainstream of a decadent Tamil nationalism, and had their hands dirtied in its cause. Others, whose political convictions gave them far greater clarity about the malign trends in Tamil nationalism, dirtied their hands protecting themselves from the LTTE’s murderous wrath. Through experience and crises in their lives, many of them came to a point where they were horrified with what they had been associated with. Where they had opportunity and time for reflection, they put themselves on the line and took the position that the Tamil people could regain their freedom and dignity only through a commitment to the higher values of democracy and human rights (UTHR 2006).

The role of dissidents and their diasporic politics do have a significant impact on this thesis as they provide a kind of spark that generates an alternative view of politics within the Tamil diaspora in general, and of diaspora engagements online. They have also become a catalyst in putting the politics of diasporans into flux, changing and removing established fields of practices.

2.5 Stories of flight: becoming diasporan

This section traces the political life of two political activists and their journey from Sri Lanka, to Tamil Nadu, to London, and the ideological transformations they underwent in this journey of becoming the diaspora political activists that they are now. This piece

provides a snapshot into the lives of two Tamil diaspora political activists who are interviewed in my fieldwork. It brings out the turbulent but politically charged lives of Raj and Keeran, the former a founding member of the LTTE, and in his time in the LTTE a close associate of Prabhakaran, but currently a leading member of the dissident Tamil activists based in London, the latter a former member of the PLOTE and currently a member of the dissident Tamil group in London.

2.5.1 Raj: From predator to prey

Raj is a leading political activist. He is a former member of the LTTE and was part of the first thirteen members which formed the LTTE. Explaining his political history Raj said he got involved in politics when he was in the 9th standard (grade) in school. The 1970s like the 1950s were a turbulent time in the history of Sri Lanka. It was the decade prior to the full blown conflict, but the political developments in the 1970s led to the rapid change of political engagements of the Sri Lankan Tamils. In 1970 a new government came into power, led by the SLFP founded by S.W.R.D Bandaranaike, the architect of politically institutionalized Sinhala nationalism. The alliance which came to power in 1970 sought a mandate for constitutionally establishing a republic, as Sri Lanka was still under the dominion rule of Britain. In the aftermath of the victory, the new constitution was drafted and enacted in 1972. The constitution demonstrated the hegemonic project of the Sinhala government over whole of Sri Lanka, as it declared ‘the the republic of Sri Lanka shall give to Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism’. The constitution further endorsed Sinhala as the official language of Sri Lanka. This was met with protests in Tamil dominated Jaffna in the North of Sri Lanka. Thus developments in the North and East saw more and more Tamil agitations and the drift towards the notion of a separate Tamil nation settling in among many Tamil citizens. These were reiterated by constant changes in policy from education standardization to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) backed by periodic violence unleashed by Sinhala politicians as mentioned in the previous chapter.

By 1976, the leading Tamil parties including the Federal Party, the Tamil Congress of G.G. Ponnampalam, and Thondaman's Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) representing Plantation Tamils, and Prof. C. Sunthalingam, a prominent Tamil nationalist, had combined to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF). The TULF adopted the Vaddukoddai resolution which put forward an independent state of Tamil Eelam as being the solution to the problems of the Tamils in 1976. This state was to be won by non-violent means. The Vaddukoddai resolution made a deep emotional impact on Tamils, both locally and abroad. But it took the 1977 anti-Tamil violence to give it life.

This was the background from which Raj entered into politics, especially inspired by the student movement in Jaffna, which started organizing in parallel with various nationalist movements of the time, and by Tamil students movement, including the Tamil Students League (TSL) and Tamil Youth League (TYL), which organized street protests against education standardization and the 1972 constitution. Later he was drawn into Prabhakaran's LTTE and became a senior cadre. Raj joined the LTTE in 1974 (he rarely mentions the term LTTE or Tigers, instead he always uses the term 'organization'), and he went to India as an LTTE cadre against the backdrop of certain disagreements with the LTTE leadership and later left the organization. Raj was involved in the famous Pondi Bazaar¹² shooting incident in May 1982 where Prabhakaran and Raj were involved in a shoot out with Uma Mashewaran, ex theoretician of the LTTE who split with the leadership and formed his own party in 1980.

Raj left the LTTE in April 1984, and joined a group of militants from various organizations, including TELO, PLOTE, EROS. The post LTTE world for Raj was interesting. As he said, 'I was in the organization for ten years and suddenly it was so strange.' He said that he could not explain the feeling which he had experienced. 'I joined the organization in 1974 and was in it till 1984, and it was like my life, and when I was out of it I felt life was suddenly meaningless and it took a time to come to terms with my life outside the organization.' In the aftermath of leaving the LTTE Raj made

¹² Pondi Bazaar is a main shopping area, stretches for around a kilometer on in the large commercial locality of T Nagar, in Chennai/Madras India.

contacts with people he knew from other organizations who were also living in Tamil Nadu and who were also disillusioned with their own militant groups.

The LTTE has a reputation for violently putting down deserters, branding them as traitors. They tried to track and harm deserters outside of Sri Lanka as well but they did not go to extremes at this particular time period, especially in India as they did not want to make India their enemy. The LTTE was not just after dissidents from its organization but members of rival Tamil political, militant groups. Raj said, 'The LTTE did not have resources to pursue us at that time and they did not risk much in India', but they killed one of their friends, 'comrade Ruban went to Vedaranyam, a border village, which was an operational and logistics hubs used by the LTTE.' Raj told me, 'Ruban was abducted and taken on a boat in this village and murdered. We heard that his body was dumped in the sea and he was never found.'

Life in Tamil Nadu for Raj was not that difficult. As a member of the LTTE for 10 years, and with extensive travel between Jaffna and Tamil Nadu for various reasons within this period, from training to taking LTTE cadres to India, Raj had established a wide network of contacts, especially among the fisher folk in certain coastal villages. These coastal villages were of strategic importance for the LTTE in its first decade of activities. From Vedaranyam to Coimbatore the LTTE has established support networks among Tamil sympathizers and local politicians and these were used as points of logistical importance from sending cadres from training, to hiding caches of arms and ammunition. Raj stressed that he had a significant support network, 'but I and my other comrades were mostly living semi underground in the village of Thiruvoppiyur, again a coastal village where the fisher folk lived and we were helped by locals.'

Raj spoke extensively about his efforts to form a political group which represented a larger voice of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Explaining his relationship with members of other political organizations, in his post LTTE life as a Tamil political activist Raj said 'Initially people who came out of the various organizations wanted to form a democratic group, but this did not work out practically as they had different objectives while some wanted to form independent groups and did not want to be under one

organization.’ The problem had a significant effect on Raj’s decisions about his own life and its future, and also he pointed out apart from significant disagreement, India always intervened in such political set ups and sponsored groups in which it had vested interests. Raj pointed out, ‘India supported nurturing of such organizations TELO was one such organization.’

This period still contained Cold War tensions as the geopolitics of the region dominated by both American influence on Pakistan and Soviet influence on India and the Pro American foreign policy of the Sri Lankan government under the presidency of J. R. Jayawardene made India and Sri Lanka uneasy neighbours. India was actively using militant groups to intervene in Sri Lankan affairs. There was significant diplomatic tension until the end of the Cold War between the two countries. The height of this was the infamous, ‘Operation Poonalai’ (operation garland) on 4 June 1987, where four Mirage 2000 fighter jets of the Indian Air Force escorted 5 AN 32 military transport planes with supplies and rations, violating Sri Lankan air space to drop their payloads of relief items to people in Jaffna. This was in the wake of a large military operation against the LTTE by the Sri Lankan government forces.

Raj suggests that the failure to establish a democratic organization was a blow to his political operations and a depressing factor to deal with, ‘I was a marginalized voice in this type of political setup and did not know what to do.’ Raj said he kept on talking to the Indian officials who were directly involved in setting up these organizations. He said he was desperate to be part of it but it was a serious let down. ‘Thus when I wanted to be part of this democratic organization and the Indian sponsoring of new organization I pleaded with officials in the central government and even had discussion with local government members, and it did not work out as I kept on complaining but no one took it seriously.’

Raj’s journey had still not ended, as his next major leap was to enter the UK. Raj was not clear about his intentions on choosing to come to the UK but he indicated, among many reasons, his disappointment with the political failures in India was a key reason why he fled to London. Ever since Raj left the LTTE, he seemed to be trying to open up political

spaces and establish relationships with people of similar interests. But his efforts to spatially liberate people from the shackles of petty political ideologies failing, he sought to locate himself somewhere else and joined the diasporic flows, westbound from the region of South Asia.

When Raj entered the UK, there was no need for a visa as political asylum in the UK was not discouraged. Raj pointed out ‘as there was no need for a visa at that time for citizens of Commonwealth countries to enter the UK, I was able to get an Indian passport and fly to London.’ Raj was able to get advice from other political activists who earlier made it to London how to handle British immigration officials. Raj said, ‘In September 1986 I landed in London and I was able to convince the immigration officer the reasons why I came to London and was granted entry to the UK.’

Raj found the situation in London politically discouraging, so he chose to stay away from politics and focused his energies on adapting to life in London. However the political animal in Raj could not be contained for long as he found his kind of political needs being catered within certain Tamil circles. Raj revealed, ‘Since I came to London I wanted to be involved in politics but it was very difficult. Even in London a minority of people discussed matters of human rights, they were mostly from the Tamil literary groups, consisting of writers, poets and journalists.’ Raj went on, ‘This difficulty for democratic voice was a result of the LTTE’s ban on all other organizations in Jaffna from 1986. The LTTE cut the democratic space in the North and East, people had to flee the LTTE rule, as those remaining were killed by them.’ The LTTE launched a bloody campaign to wipe out other rival organizations in April 1986, with the virtual extermination of TELO, the Indian-backed militant organization. This caused the Tamil political activists and militants opposed to the LTTE to flee the North (flee the country) or be absorbed into government forces to operate as pro-government paramilitaries for their own safety.

The dissident political spaces in London and in other diaspora centres, were very insignificant; according to Raj these circles formed pockets of activity for a long time. He emphasized, ‘There was no major political force till early 2000 for dissident politics,

and we were involved in little activities which were insignificant at that time.’ While describing the minor political activities which were opposed to the LTTE Raj pointed out, ‘These origins of the dissidence, at least the earliest dissident political activities, should be credited to Tamil literates who fled to Germany and France.’

These Tamil literates¹³ were also under significant LTTE threat, especially in Paris, in the so called ‘little Jaffna’ located close to the Gare du Nord train station in Paris and the cultural centres which revolve around the two Hindu temples located near la Chapelle, where there was significant LTTE dominance. The LTTE has proved to be more ruthless in its violent operations in Paris. Raj revealed that the rise of the dissidents in Paris was mainly done to the unprecedented levels of violence unleashed by the LTTE against any Tamil opposing the organization. He said,

There were few a significant events which spurred the dissident movement, in 1994 LTTE assassins shot and killed Sabalingam in Paris, he was a founding member of the Tamil militancy and was famous for his escape from the Sri Lankan authorities, he literally jumped from the fourth floor (the notorious interrogation section of the Criminal Investigation Department [CID] or the secret police in Sri Lanka .The CID complex is located in the ultra high security zone in Colombo). Sabalingam was living in France and was critical of the LTTE

Raj also referred to an incident where a LTTE hit squad killed another Tamil literate and historian in France, ‘He was shot at his house where the French authorities failed to respond.’ These incidents had triggered a chain reaction among the Tamil literates, journalists, political activists in the diaspora community, setting the scene for the dissident movement to gain much needed momentum. According to Raj and many other dissident activists, the watershed of the dissident movement came in the back drop to the signing of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) in 2002 between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. The LTTE launched a systematic tactic of executing dissidents in Sri Lanka, using the CFA as a cover. Raj explained ‘This led to us becoming more and more concerned and we saw that we needed to organize to counter this and people began to care less about consequences when they started opposing the LTTE.’

¹³ Raj uses the word Tamil literates to identify Tamil academics, poets, journalists and any educated Tamil who is actively engaged in politics among the diaspora.

The dissidents gained significant strength following the split in the LTTE in 2004, which significantly depleted its military strength in the East of Sri Lanka. The split reflected the social tensions within the Tamil society between the communities of Tamils of Eastern and Northern origin. There was suppressed friction between the Northern command of the LTTE and the Eastern command which goes back to the class, caste and social divides entrenched in Sri Lanka Tamil society. This depletion of the LTTE military strength and the shrinking space of control of the LTTE in Sri Lanka, shattered its appearance of 'invincibility'.

Raj told me these internal problems within the LTTE have weakened some of its organizational abilities in diaspora communities. He saw it as a restriction of the LTTE and also its capabilities to suppress dissenting diasporans. But he also acknowledged that it still was not safe as the LTTE used to kill opposing Tamil politicians and activists in the diaspora communities. Raj said, and 'It was alarming as LTTE was given recognition by other states and the Norwegian government's recognition was the most serious.'

2.5.2 Keeran: The prophet unarmed

Keeran belongs to the dissenting Tamil diaspora political community based in London. He was born in Nelliady in Vedamarachchi a hotbed of Tamil militancy and an area which has seen some of the bloodiest battles between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces. Nelliady was the site of the first suicide bombing mission by an LTTE suicide bomber. This area belongs to the electoral division of Udupitty in Jaffna, a stronghold of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) in the late 1970s and the 1980s, which campaigned for Tamil self determination. Keeran said, 'I got involved in politics after the Jaffna library was burned and I was in the first year of my A'L class. At that time I was politically supporting TULF. My electorate was represented by Rajalingam. He was from a low caste background and we wanted to ensure he won'. He went on to say that 'I was also disturbed by the violence unleashed in 1977 and the riots.'

These were the points of departure of his chosen path from education to politics. Like many youths of his age and their families, he dreamt of doing well in his studies and getting into University, as education was seen, as Keeran said, to be the key or the only way of emancipation for Tamils living in Jaffna.

Keeran's dream was shattered with the events in 1981 and especially the burning of the Jaffna library, a symbolic centre of education in the Jaffna society. Post-1977 Jaffna was a hotbed of violence and state aggression which culminated in 1981 and this pushed Keeran to join a political organization. He said he developed a sudden yearning to join the youth movement that was making headway in the Tamil political realm and the organization he joined was TELO. I asked him why he joined TELO. With a big smile Keeran said, 'Well they were the ones who contacted me first, and I did not have any idea of what I should join but just wanted to join some organization which was agitating for Tamil rights.'

Keeran's political journey started against this backdrop when he joined TELO, the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization. TELO was named as the political wing to the militant organization Tamil Eelam Liberation Army (TELA) founded by Nadarajah Thangavelu alias Thangadurai in September 1977. Thangadurai set up his organization inspired by the IRA and he made the TELO function similar to that of the Sinn Fein (Swamy 1994: 36). TELO was a leading militant organization formed in the mid 1970s by pioneers of early Tamil militancy which started in the 1960s, where Thangadurai was a member of underground militant groups of the Democratic Tamil United front, the key Tamil party which had Tamil representation in the legislature. Keeran joined TELO in 1982 and was sent for military training in India. TELO was widely known to be the darling of India out of all the militant organizations then, and drew strong support whilst being heavily funded by the Indian military.

Keeran talked about his life in the organization and the Indian link with the Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka. He told me, 'In 1982 I went for military training to India, we were trained in a location in Anna Nagar. At that time the Indian government did not support us openly, there were 24 of us, this was the first batch, our leader Thangadurai

was in prison at this time and we were led by Sri Sabaratnam who joined us in the training.’ The Indian military operations were quite covert at that time; the Indian involvement became more open after the 1983 riots. Keeran told me, ‘We were trained by a retired Major of the Indian army, he was an Indian Tamil, and the camp had 82 trainees including LTTE cadres.’

1983 saw the largest diaspora flow out of Sri Lanka and it also created a more politically active Tamil militancy which received generous support from India, and TELO benefited significantly until it was decimated by the LTTE. Keeran described the strong relationship TELO had with India: ‘I came to Jaffna in 1983 was working for the TELO and I was mainly involved in recruitment. In the aftermath of the riots, our leader Sri Sabaratnam went to India and held talks with Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He negotiated with India to train our members and three to four batches were recruited by the Indian army and were trained in India.’

This phenomenon is explained by Hoole et al, ‘The July 1983 riots and the adoption by India of the militant groups changed all this. With material help from India, the militant groups became purely military organizations, accountable to the RAW and not the Tamil public. The latter became everyone’s plaything’ (1992:31). Keeran returned to Sri Lanka in 1983 and was arrested in a crack down on Tamil militants by the Sri Lankan military. Badly tortured in army interrogations Keeran still carries these scars of militancy. The imprisonment saved Keeran’s life as he escaped the purging of TELO by the LTTE in 1986, while Keeran spent four years in prison. Keeran’s anger at the LTTE was heightened when he heard about the first suicide bombing LTTE carried out in 1987.

Keeran recalled his capture and the events which unfolded in his four years in imprisonment, ‘In October 1983 I was arrested by the Sri Lankan army and was kept in the Elephant Pass army camp, I was interrogated by Major Denzil Kobbekaduwa.’ Keeran recalled how this Major who later became a mastermind in military strategy and a respected general, who died in a landmine explosion, treated them during their confinement in Elephant Pass military base,

We were all treated as Tigers, the soldiers called us Tigers. From Elephant Pass I was transferred to Colombo and was taken to the 4th floor four for questioning, and the questioning went on for months. I was held in detention at the Harbour police station in Colombo, then I was transferred to Welikade, where I was housed in a new wing which was earlier used for women prisoners.

Describing the prison facility Keeran said, 'This was used specially for detainees under the PTA, I was held there for 2 years and then was produced in a court, I pleaded guilty and was given 5 and half years imprisonment. The magistrate ordered me to be released in December 1987 as I had already served two and half years in prison by 1985.' Apart from this, prison life helped Keeran to become a changed man, he decided that violence could never achieve what he believed in earlier. Prison enabled Keeran to make new friends, as there were militants from all organizations in his prison cell; and they still remain useful contacts in his current political activities. 'In prison I met and made friends with lots of leaders of other militant groups, especially Roberts of EPRLF, and in 1988 after I was freed, I decided to head to the UK.'

When Keeran was finally released he said he was a changed man and he had totally given up violence or militarism for the sake of Tamil nationalism. On 5 July 1987, Vallipuram Vasathan known in LTTE ranks as Capt. Miller became the first suicide martyr for the LTTE when he rammed a truck filled with explosives into a heavily fortified army garrison in Jaffna. His target was a well-respected high school in Jaffna (the Nelliady high school) that had been garrisoned by the army with the heightening of the conflict. The impact and subsequent attack killed 18 soldiers but structurally destroyed the whole school. Nelliady high school was where Keeran studied till he joined the TELO and this has had a drastic effect on Keeran's psyche.

Though Keeran wanted to go to the UK, he did not have an idea of what his life would be like there. The diasporic flow, plus threats from LTTE, made his decision easier as the LTTE pursued remaining TELO members. 'I acquired a Sri Lankan passport and with some money I went through the immigration officials. After I arrived in UK I did not have any idea or money and was not involved in any political activity', Keeran said recalling his entry into the UK. After he moved, Keeran had to face severe hardships in life, 'Life was hard. I worked in various supermarkets in London for two to three years

and also did work in a garage as a mechanical hand.’ In London Keeran started to publish a Tamil magazine, titled ‘Thaham’ (Thirst) for the Tamil community. The LTTE vigorously opposed this and Keeran’s Tamil publication was forcibly shut down. ‘I started publishing a Tamil magazine called “Thaham” in 1994. It was completely criticizing the LTTE and even I condemned the attack on the Mullativu army base. The LTTE threatened me and also threatened all shops that sold my magazine and I had simply to shut the operation under fear, threats and intimidation.’

With the failure of his first attempt to be a diaspora political activist, Keeran turned to the private sector to make a living. ‘Then I sought employment at a Korean computer company and worked on the hardware component of the business, this was the time when 286¹⁴ was hitting the market. I specialised in assembling computers and then started my own computer assembling business in 1999.’ Keeran re-entered the political field when he finally made contacts with other Tamil activists, who were mainly anti LTTE and with whom Keeran developed a close association. ‘By this time I was associating with Tamil activists who were associated with forums such as Tamil performance arts, this involved people who were politically criticizing the Tigers. This is where I met some of my friends who have formed the vanguard of the Tamil dissident movement in London.’

This section has traced the political life stories of two individuals who currently form the vanguard of Tamil dissident diaspora politics. It is not merely a story-telling exercise but an introduction to two unique individuals who are part of the diasporic flow that has realigned political identities to spearhead a reform diasporic political movement free from the grip of the LTTE. The story traces the incidents that made them militants and the spatial context of the unmaking of these affinities to become a total opposite to what they represented in the beginning. Their stories display individual struggles to break through spatial limitations and hegemonic ideologies which are spatially enforced. This is not a story of fleeing but it is a story of flows, mobility and new territory as the diaspora activist always looks for new spaces to be heard in. In short, these are stories of

¹⁴ The 286 was launched in 1986 in the USA by IBM the leader in PC manufacturers then and was seen as a powerful machine capable of multi tasking with a hard drive of 20 Mb and a RAM of 640 Kb.

minoritarian struggles in the face of majoritarian oppression. These stories lead to introduction of other respondents involved in my thesis and set the tone as to why these individuals are important in my research. They demonstrate that these are individuals who have committed their lives to politics and are key political agents in the Tamil diaspora political realm.

2.6 The location

There are two locations in the Western world where the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has concentrated and established operations: Toronto in Canada and London in the United Kingdom. Tamil diasporans are spread throughout the rest of Europe, but significant numbers and political decision making are done in these two locations. London has a history of Tamil migration even before the exodus in 1983 (Daniel and Thangaraj 1995). The LTTE established its international head office in London and directs international political operations from London. The borough of Brent (North-west London) is home to the largest number of Sri Lankan Tamils, calculated to be in the region of 12,000. The Tamil population in London and Greater London is the largest in the UK and, although is predominately Sri Lankan in origin, it is a community that additionally supports Tamils from India, Mauritius, Malaysia, Singapore and South Africa. Other main settlements of Tamils in the United Kingdom are in East Ham, Merton, Surbiton, Tooting and Croydon.¹⁵

According to Gunaratne (1998), the UK has always been the heart of LTTE overseas political activity. Since the riots of July 1983, the LTTE has expanded into Europe from London. To make its position secure, the LTTE has either established, absorbed, or

¹⁵ There is no single statistic of exact number Sri Lankan Tamils in United Kingdom, as there are undetermined number of illegal migrants as well. The figures have been given at various occasions by the UNHCR, research findings by Daniel and Thangarajah and the research done by Rohan Gunaratne reveal some figures. The most recent work by Nick Van Hear and revealed that there are 39,000 Tamil asylum his team from Centre on Migration policy and society (COMPAS) University of Oxford reveal the problem to have an accurate figure of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in UK, according to them a reasonable estimate of the UK resident Tamil population is between 70,000 and 100,000. (<http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/publications/papers/DFID%20diaspora%20report.pdf>). According to a labour party councilor I interviewed in my pilot study working with the home office seekers, 39,000 asylum seekers cases are still pending at the Home office.

infiltrated a number of Tamil organizations and Tamil community structures. They are mainly controlled through LTTE or LTTE-front organizations in the UK. Most prominent of these are the Tamil Information Centre (TIC) at Bridge End close, Kingston in London, The Tamil Rehabilitation Organization in Walthamstow in London, and the International Federation of Tamils (IFT) in Birchiew Close in Surrey.

Interestingly, although there has been some research into the Tamil Diaspora in London comparatively with Tamil diasporas in Canada, Norway and Switzerland (Cheran 2001, Fuglerud 1999 and McDowell 1996), little research has been done into actual diaspora political engagements of Sri Lankan Tamils in London. Secondly, the active dissident group of Tamils propagating anti LTTE political operations is predominantly based in London. Interestingly, London has thus been site of most of my key research on Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, especially on the growth of the diaspora and LTTE nexus. I was further interested in my research about the importance of London as a diaspora location. This question seem to be avoided by many researchers, who may have taken for granted explanations ranging from the colonial legacy, to easier access for asylum seekers in the 1980s and early 1990s. I endeavoured trying to understand its impact as a major city on the lives of diasporans and its importance and implications for political engagement.

The city is a spatial formation according to Pile (1999), who brings out three broader categories of spatial markers which he uses to distinguish cities as spaces. The first attribute is density, the concentration of people, things, institutions and architectural forms. Second is the heterogeneity of life they juxtapose in close proximity, and third is on city as a hub of various networks of communication that flow across and beyond the cities.

Diaspora politics can be located in the context of identifying a city as a spatial entity and the spaces of political action that it provides. The spaces in modern cities facilitate different networks to operate, and these operations can be channeled in many directions with an inherent force which can create political effects. Massey identifies this as a kind of 'spatial configuration generative' as intense social effects resulting from 'dense networks of interaction' within them (1999: 160)

Sutha, a key pro-LTTE Tamil activist told me, 'London is a diaspora centre and political engagement is much richer in London as it is the central hub of Sri Lankan politics. London is the thickest diaspora centre on Sri Lanka, and the information flow from London is critical as it is the international capital, politically important (unlike Toronto) for all Sri Lankan parties, even like the UNP, SLFP and the JVP.' He further pointed out that 'London is an international operational centre and it is key for academic and studies and Britain is a major player in the Sri Lankan context and all these factors can't be separated from each other in the importance of London for us.' This observation can be presented as an example to theoretical analysis of Massey on the generative aspect of city spaces, especially in the context of the LTTE network and its front offices which use London as a kind of space for generating significant political links to multiple locations globally.

Nallu, a dissident political leader, responding to a question on the importance of London as a location for political activism told me 'It is important because of several reasons, mainly London has a sizable diaspora population which is second only to Canada. The Canadian Tamil diaspora is more of a refugee diaspora while the London Tamils represents more of a social fabric made out of professionals, students, and even with organizations such as EROS and EPRLF which are founding members of the Eelam movement.' Nallu also pointed out 'London is an inspiring place, where activists from Nicaragua, El Salvador, can be found and have some offices. It is a breeding ground, and a fertilizer, and a cross fertilizer, as representatives of every bloody movement and office on earth are in London. It includes a variety of homo sapiens from the modern to the remotest tribe in the world.'

The views of Nallu are interesting, if one looks at Amin and Thrift's viewed London in which they point out:

The place called London, for example, has been fashioned and refashioned through commentaries, recollections, memories and erasures, and in a variety of media – monumental, official and vernacular newspapers and magazines, guides and maps, photographs, films, news reels and novels, street level conversations and tales. The naming, of course is highly selective, giving us London as the

signature of empire, of crowded streets, art galleries, pubs, and people from around the world, of silent trains, well trimmed suburban gardens, terraced houses. But somehow the fragments do come together into an enduring picture of London as a busy gateway to the world, a cosmopolis that is also homely (2002: 2).

Thus London is more of an amalgamation of multitudes of sites. Although it is one city the spatiality of the city has made it a container of a significant multiplicity of people, organizations and political actions.

London was one of the most favoured destinations of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and apart from political reasons, being in London is a prestige thing as well. In my interviews with political activists, Jeyabalan a dissident Tamil activist shared with me some recent experience of his visits to Jaffna. Jeyabalan is a journalist in exile from Sri Lanka and he is a key member of the Tamil dissident activists. He said ‘When I am back home, and visiting people I used to know, everyone has someone in the diaspora, but there are categories of treatment depending on the country you reside. Still the best hospitality and respect is for the people living in the UK.’

Keeran brought out his views on London, especially on its political importance. He told me ‘London is very important politically as there are three generations of Tamils living in London and they are with education levels, unlike total 1983 refugees, like in Canada.’ Jeyabalan brought out an interesting dimension into being a Londoner and its effect on diaspora politics when he said ‘London is important because it is central and the political engagements are through using English which is important in this struggle.’ He told me that ‘even in Sri Lanka and in Jaffna being in London gives you an elevated social status compared to diasporans living in Canada, the USA or any other point in Europe.’ Thus for the Tamil diaspora activist being in London has multiple social and political connotations which echo even in his homeland.

London has become an important location for dissident Tamil political activists compared even to other European sites of dissidents which had a significant dissident presence prior to London. It is mainly because of the spatial attributes of London and the multiple facets of spaces available in London as there are many different kinds of space,

not just one, and the smallest spatiality can have the largest social consequences (Amin and Thrift 2002: 40). This thesis explores the spaces that the dissidents acquired in political engagements through online cyber activities. These have mainly two critical attributes. Firstly, the ability to take over or infiltrate closed spaces in London over which the LTTE had significant control and, secondly, the ability to politicize the dissident voice in spaces which went beyond the spatial limits of London.

Apart from being a geographically central location and having strong links with Sri Lanka from colonial times, there were a few other factors that were considered in my selection of London as the site of my research. There was clearly heightened Diaspora activity in London after 2002 which saw a surge in the developments that led to the LTTE's internal split in 2004. Compared with Toronto, Paris and other diaspora locations, London was the centre for sustained activity by the largest number of Sri Lanka migrants. It was here too that the LTTE organized its online show of defiance in the aftermath of its internal political splits. Many of the political activists whom I interviewed claimed that London was a relatively safe place to live compared to other European and North American destinations, especially if you are a dissident political activist. Many LTTE operations are run by fronts such as Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO), World Tamil Congress (WTC) and White Pigeon because it is easy to register them as charities in London. The UK charity law is comparatively flexible and enabled these political organizations to establish the tax-free institutional bases necessary for their operational, logistical and coordinating work. Finally, the dilemmas of operating across multiple time zones which has become a feature of globalised business enterprises are also applicable in transnational political movements. There is a smaller time difference between Colombo and London than between Colombo and North America or Australia, this making it a highly practical base for globalised political activity.

The importance of London as a political site is brought out through the voices of Tamil diaspora political activists themselves. I have not tried to provide my own interpretations on the importance of London for the diasporans but I have spatially located their arguments linking them with current analysis on cities. These spatial analyses includes the aspects of high mobility, the agglomeration of flows which define city life, and the

city as order, an ordering which is often exacted through the design of flows as a set of serial encounters which construct particular spaces and times (Amin and Thrift 2002: 82). The notion of space which came up in many of my interviews bears a hall mark of how space has become an important aspect in their social and political lives. I will explore this and bring out a theoretical framework to understand the notion of space and its link with the main focus of my study into the diasporan politics of cyberspace.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research framework of the thesis and locates the key theoretical argument based on the different approaches to politicizing cyberspace in the struggle between pro-LTTE Tamil diasporan political activists and the dissident groups. The respondents were introduced at length and it was skewed in representation as more dissident Tamils are featured. I argued that focusing on the dissidents and exploring their political activities adds and broadens the existing analysis of Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora political sphere. Theoretically engaging with two different political groups in the same diaspora provides the chance to develop an interesting theoretical framework where two versions of political ideologies clash and create new dynamics in the understanding of political space, political practices and political conflicts. This chapter is intrinsically linked with Chapter One, as both set out the mechanisms setting the thesis in motion and its basic foundations in respect of existing knowledge and the theoretical framework adopted. This chapter points to where the thesis can be located in terms both the contexts of research on Tamil diaspora politics and politics of cyberspace involving diaspora political projects.

Chapter 3: Key approaches to online research.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the methodological dimensions of conducting research online and the type of framework I have applied for my research on Tamil diaspora web political engagements. The chapter also engages with key methodologies which have been used for understanding the impact of the internet on social relations and political engagements. I introduce Web Sphere Analysis as the preferred framework for analyzing the internet and trends in the internet with Tamil diaspora politics and Tamil politics of nationalism online. I critically engage with some existing research into the online politics of Sri Lankan Tamil political activists while trying to position my own research in contrast to the existing studies. This chapter discusses existing methodologies of online research and the strengths and weaknesses of these methodologies against my research objectives. It introduces Web Sphere Analysis, broadly discussing its role as a multi-dimensional research framework, and the importance of integrating it with a total research framework, which includes the fieldwork research introduced in the next two sections along with the online research.

3.2 Research on Tamil diaspora politics online

There have been previous studies of the online activities of the Tamil diaspora, from web content focused research in the form of Mark Whitaker's (2006; 2007) study of Tamilnet.com to the security analysis of Shyam Tekwani (2006). Tekwani in a recent publication claims 'The LTTE's use of the Internet and other new media and communication technologies as an integral part of its campaign represents an emerging security issue in the region' (2006: 12) and goes on to point out on the basis of huge websites such as Tamilnation.com and Eelamnation.com, that 'The LTTE's formidable online presence is a virtual Tamil Eelam online' (2006: 14). The claims made in these studies and analysis are important for understanding the use of the internet and of web sites such as Tamilnet.com. What makes my research different is that it focuses on a number of web sites, not one or two, and also I analyse their content multi-dimensionally

in both discursive and structural terms. These websites are selected using a methodology adapted to study online political action. This minimizes the random selection of web sites as the sites are analysed in context as one research unit containing multiple websites. This responds to a key drawback in existing research work on the use of the internet for Tamil diaspora politics, which I will introduce briefly before engaging with the methodology I have selected for this research.

Here, I engage with Maya Ranganathan's (2002) study on the internet and Tamil politics and the problems encountered in making assumptions and claims about internet politics without a proper methodological framework for data gathering and data analysis. She investigates the use of the Internet to construct national identity. Using the example of the struggle of the Sri Lankan Tamils for recognition as a nation, her case revolves around a study of selected Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora web sites, and through this she claims one can predict the ability of a recreation of a virtual Tamil nation. She notes, 'For the members of stateless ethnonational diasporas, who have left their homelands due to an uncertain political climate, the Internet provides the most effective way to maintain cultural and emotional ties with the nation' (Ranganathan 2002: 54). She makes this observation in her analysis of the use of the internet, the key drawback in deriving this conclusion concerns the ground of which her claims are made. Her hypothesis is built around the ability of the internet to connect and to communicate across significant distances. Ranganathan adopts a less robust empirical strategy when she randomly goes through certain web sites that support the LTTE. This makes her observations abstract as her analysis suffers from the lack of a solid framework equipped to capture web activity. Web Sphere Analysis makes a huge contribution by enabling the definition of this critical sphere prior to launching any kind of research. This was the key reason for selecting this method to guide my research application as it involves both online and offline research work.

Ranganathan goes on to say, 'The attributes of the Internet allow the Tamils to systematically construct national and cultural identities over time' (2002: 59). The attributes she identifies in the Internet are with communication functions, informational exchanges and its making to cut across boundaries. There is little evidence apart from analysing the substance of few web sites to support the above conclusion. With random

analysis of web content in three web sites she attempts to enforce the notion of the construction of national identities. Ranganathan continues, 'The seeming defiance of the Internet against any form of political control makes the medium a potential threat to the power of nation-states. It is an ideal tool of communication not just in the hands of nation-states, but also in the hands of aspiring nations' (2002: 62). However, this is a statement which underlines most other forces within the context of nation state, global flows and dynamics of ethno-nationalist conflicts that have been internationalized.

Ranganathan makes such assumptions based on an analysis derived from analyzing web content that has not been collected utilizing a proper research framework suitable for online research. Ranganathan's research furthermore does not look at the the offline dimension of political activities of the Tamil diaspora, which she discusses through observations of its online manifestations. It is important to work with a framework that allows both the offline and online to be engaged, to derive conclusions on the actual effect of the internet, like in Ranganathan's case the construction of 'national identity'.

Earlier research has focused on the LTTE factor and its influence on web politics. Thus important factors such as the dissident Tamil political groups and individuals are not captured and analysed. These new dynamics have shifted the outcome of web engagements to different scenarios, unforeseen by agents who began using the web for political purposes. This is what has been revealed in my research on the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora web sphere. I will engage with online research methodologies such as network analysis and virtual ethnography in the next section, prior to introducing the conceptual and operational aspects of Web Sphere Analysis. These methodologies are engaged to explain what added advantage Web Sphere Analysis provides for the development of my research.

3.3 Online research methods

Studies based on the impact of cyberspace were conducted just a few years after its inception. Howard Rheingold's research introduced the concept of 'virtual communities' (1998) opening up research into the social impact of web technologies. Steven Jones' *Doing Internet Research* 1999 was the first comprehensive work that was focused on looking at incorporating research methodologies for internet research. Jones introduced theoretical dimensions of methodological applications and critical issues that arise in researching cyberspace. Christine Hine's *Virtual Ethnography* (2000) added the importance of cultural dimension in researching cyberspace. She emphasised the importance of researching the internet in a cultural context and exploring cyber trends as cultural products. Another important work was *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research* (Mann and Stewart, 2000) which exposed the use of internet as a data gathering tool to be used in qualitative research

I will briefly introduce certain contributions on internet research, prior to focusing on the main methodology that I have selected for drawing my research design. In the context of online research, some researchers have suggested the human experience of simultaneously inhabiting both offline and online environments results in understandings of the self as multiple (Turkle 1995). They claim that online participations create multiple personae and this shows a fluidity and multiplicity in online networks. The key draw back in this idea is that these researchers are unable to come up with a sustainable research framework to manage the fluidity of the virtual environment as it is not as straightforward as conducting research in a geographic setting. Web researchers need to look into a multiple number of web sites, producers of web content and the offline (real world) implication of them. Added to this complicated nature of web space are the forms of presentation of individuals, mainly the web producers and people who can interact online. In many cases such interaction is difficult to grasp for research purposes, with real world identities being substituted by new ones in cyberspace. Research on activists in cyberspace has to gauge the real world impact of such activism. These challenging research situations need to be managed using sophisticated methodological frameworks. This is the reason I use this chapter to engage with current research tools that are available for quality controlling cyberspace research practices, and what added benefits

my preferred methodological framework brings into the online research component of my thesis.

The emergence of network theories in social sciences has had a tremendous effect up on methods of studying the Internet. Network analysis has diverse approaches from spatial analysis to observing nodes of connections of organizations. The fundamental issue is that the Internet is a manifestation of a matrix of networks and this has lead more researchers to carry out spatial network analysis. The premier researcher who has focused on this approach, Barry Wellman, states that analysis must go beyond single users as cyberspace is a networked environment (2003). Social network analysis, which focuses on patterns or relations between and among people, organizations and states, has shifted to cyberspace. This shift has made this approach a very valid one. The key drawback in analyzing the Internet through a network approach is that there is no clear framework for capturing both spatial and temporal dynamics of the network in network analysis as it concentrates mostly on the nodes of connections and the inter-relations between these nodes. Cyberspace is not just about space but the convergence of space and time, thus any political engagement in cyberspace needs to be analyzed temporally along with its spatial displacement.

3.3.1 Virtual ethnography

Apart from the key approaches, the most ground breaking approach in social science research on the Internet came from Christine Hine (2000, 2006) as mentioned above. Hine viewed the Internet as a cultural context best researched with the application of ethnography. Although there were more ethnographic style approaches on the study of life in cyberspace (Jones 1999), a comprehensive contribution came from Hine (2000) in her ground breaking work *Virtual Ethnography*.

Ethnographers such as Reid (1995) and Nancy Baym (1995) have taken an interest in exploring the internet before Christine Hine introduced the notion of ‘Virtual ethnography’. Hine claims that communication technologies, especially the opening up of cyberspace, saw the internet conceptualized as ‘culture’ (2000). The cultural

dimension to cyberspace became the focus of attention, especially for anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. According to Hine, they were interested in studying cyberspace to look at the social, cultural and political formations taking shape in cyberspace. She claims, 'On-line ethnographers join their chosen field sites for sustained periods, interacting with their informants and building up a richly detailed picture of the ways in which the medium is used to create and sustain relationships' (2000: 43).

According to Hine (2000) virtual ethnography involves a challenging expansion of the parameters of ethnographic research where the researchers have to deal with mediated and distributed interactions online rather than the common face to face interactions or observations. The method is a combination of two methodological strategies, firstly a 'duplication' of basic ethnographic standpoints to carry on the functions in the new space of cyberspace Secondly, virtual ethnography needs to tackle the traditional shift from a selected field site to accommodate a site that appears as a matrix of interconnected and mediated spaces. In this, it is related to the ethnography of networks (Newman 1998). While maintaining traditional value parameters in ethnographic work, virtual ethnography needs to adapt to new changes in location. It aims to sustain practices of 'thick description' (Geertz 1983), and to achieve this by paying attention to the perspective of the actors themselves (Ward 1999; Slater 2002). These shifts in methodological practices involved in virtual ethnography are claimed to make it distinct from other online research methods.

According to Hine (2000) in investigating a case through a virtual ethnographic research there are key issues that could be illuminated. They include the ability to understand primarily the linkages between society and the Internet, or in other terms the 'social meaning' of the internet. In virtual ethnographic research there is more freedom for the researcher to be mobile, especially between the offline and online dimensions.

Virtual ethnography is presented as a method to grasp rapid changes to human life styles as they become more entrenched in the cyberspace. A key understanding of Hine (2000) is that virtual ethnography is ultimately an adaptive ethnography, adaptive in the sense

that it can respond to the fluidity of web interactions without losing track of research objectives.

Virtual ethnography has evolved into a strong methodological approach for studying online behavior. It has become a critical tool for understanding minute changes within human interactions in web space. Virtual ethnography provides an ideal input into the social and technological interface that has developed with the interlinking of the physical world to the virtual one. But its weakness comes in its grounding, as 'Virtual ethnography' has a problem in developing robust parameters for its research site and researching across interlinked web sites as a clear archiving strategy is not included in the method.

Hine (2000) pioneered virtual ethnography as a method when she led a project analyzing web content and also reaching out to web producers in an attempt to look at the internet events that developed out of the Louise Woodward trial in Boston in 1997. Louise Woodward was a teenage British nanny who was tried in Boston for the murder of the child Matthew Eppan who was in her care.

Hine's interest in researching the Woodward case came at the end of the trial. Hine claimed that she was drawn in to studying the Woodward case after witnessing the increasing numbers of web sites that emerged in cyberspace parallel to the trial. The trial began on 7 October 1997, then after deliberation on 30 October 1997 the Jury returned a murder verdict on Woodward, but the judge decided to overturn the verdict (under Boston law gives the judge the power to overturn jury decisions). The Judge, Hiller Zobel announced he would release the ruling on internet, mainly on the website lawyersweekly.com. On 10 November 1997 his decision was released in which he found Louise Woodward guilty of involuntary manslaughter and passed a sentence of 279 days in state prison, which by that time Louise had already served and this set her free. The period between 30 October and 10 November saw the internet being deployed as a site competing for justice, mainly arguing for the release of Louis Woodward. Many support sites were created and the topic was hotly debated in bulletin boards and forums. These were subjected to ethnographic research by Hine and her associates (2000: 67).

Virtual ethnographers struggle to establish coherence in their research fields. Unlike in a physical setting, the hyper linked nature of web sites always creates and recreates its configuration. Thus it becomes difficult for the ethnographer to negotiate these sudden changes. In cases of transnational diasporan political engagements, analysis of the network spatially is not sufficient for understanding its functions. A temporal analysis of the network is critical as well. Virtual ethnographies stop short of the ability to integrate both temporal and spatial analysis of networks.

The above approaches to studying online behavior when linked with political action, as I have mentioned in this section, have weaknesses that reduce the ability to research political engagements across time and space. The network approach is sound in its ability to analyze spatially dispersed political movements that are interlinked in cyberspace. But it is incapable of providing an adequate temporal framework to support its arguments on the political engagements of these networks. These deficiencies have made me look for alternative methods that incorporate both spatial and temporal factors. Web Sphere Analysis has the capability to capture these interactions or engagements in cyberspace. This is why I am introducing Web Sphere Analysis as the best alternative research framework. It has the added advantage of being able to integrate traditional methods of social science research with high tech interfaces.

3.4 Web Sphere Analysis

As more and more social interaction is shifted to cyberspace, it has become an interesting site of human behavior, and of the development of new types of social association. The internet, in actuality, is not just a technology. Were it a technology alone, little about it would be of great interest. As Jones point out, 'It is not the technical challenges but, rather, the social ones that seem to require most the most demanding of social balancing acts, between compromise, competition and standardization' (1999: 25). Thus the internet has become a field of social activity, economic exchange and political action. This calls for an innovative research methodology as traditional approaches may not help because of the fluidity and dynamism in cyberspace. Here I introduce a system

which provides a research method to be applied when engaged in research in cyberspace. This system is based on Foot and Schneider's (2004; 2005) recent contribution to the discipline. The key challenge they are trying to manage is the rapid and unpredictable evolution of the web, and they attempt to develop methodological approaches permitting robust examination of web phenomena over time.

Web Sphere Analysis is an important supplementary framework in my fieldwork research design. It leads to primary data and captures them coherently thus providing a comprehensive set of data that can be analysed along with the findings from my fieldwork in London. The stabilization of the field makes it easier to use multiple approaches to analyse web sites, and to analyse them individually while also highlighting the way such sites are grouped or aggregated politically.

Web Sphere Analysis is based on the premise that online action and online political processes can be analysed or 'partially explained' through the identification of web objects. These objects are interpreted as representing the motives of the web producers and as facilitating potential structures for social action. According to the architects of this framework it is a, 'framework for web studies that enables analysis of communicative actions and relations between web producers and users developmentally over time' (Foot and Schneider 2006: 158). The notion of Web Sphere Analysis is quite new and thus I am using a majority of direct references from Foot and Schneider (2006) who introduced this the approach and conducted research using it. There are quite a number of researchers who have now used Web Sphere Analysis extensively though the literature is still very limited.

Foot and Schneider go on to explain what exactly a web sphere is and especially what its parameters is. As they try to bring out the actual values of the system and parameters it covers, they state:

We conceptualize a web sphere as not simply a collection of web sites, but as a set of dynamically defined digital resources spanning multiple web sites deemed relevant or related to a central event, concept or theme, and often connected by

hyperlinks. The boundaries of a web sphere are delimited by a shared topical orientation and a temporal framework (2006: 158).

3.4.1 Importance of Web Sphere Analysis

According to Foot and Schneider (2006), the Web Sphere captured through archiving becomes the central 'aggregate unit of analysis' and this is a stable unit of analysis and becomes a significant utility in creative an integrative research framework for structural, discursive and socio cultural analysis. Thus the researcher can decide on the selection of methods, as the key challenge in online research is devising a framework which can be used to capture the online developments

In simple terms a web sphere provides the researcher with a more robust and well demarcated site to carry on online research especially on online political action. In this light the main understanding should be that Web Sphere Analysis is not just a research method but provides the necessary conditions to embark on the research. It is a more advanced system for establishing parameters in highly dynamic environments such as cyberspace. In the words of Foot and Schneider it is 'The processes of demarcating/establishing web spheres and of identifying constituent elements in a web sphere are foundational to tracking developmental trajectories of online action' (2006: 164).

This system helps overcome serious issues regarding online research. Social science which depends on conventional methods of researching finds it extremely difficult to adapt to the conditions of flux and constant interchange in cyberspace. But when the researcher is able to locate a stable research foundation within an identified space, it reduces the burden and transforms the research challenge from the seemingly impossible to the possible.

As mentioned above the carving out of a web sphere is extremely important in carrying out online social science research. But in this section, the methodology of establishing and securing these parameters will be discussed. Prior to that, certain realities of the

dynamics of the web need to be clarified. These dynamics are the primary challenges when one tries to demarcate a web sphere.

The web is not produced by one single producer, a web site may have two or more co producers. Such joint production by multiple actors makes web sites diverse and bulky content making identification of authorship a problem. Also the often rapid and unpredictable evolution of the web is the greatest challenge any researcher would meet. In this context Foot and Schneider (2006) provide certain guidelines that provide a response to these challenges.

Thus, if someone wants to select a set of websites and their connected sites built through the hyper-links, they have to test their anticipatability, predictability and stability, and explain the implications of various web sphere characteristics for the study of online action within and across them. According to Foot and Schneider (2006) the demarcation of boundaries is both a process of discovery and a process of creation. Below are the three key criteria needed for this dynamic boundary making process:

1. Thematic anticipatability: degree of emergence of web sphere, extent to which it is defined by a specific event. For example the massive internet traffic in response to 9/11 attacks and the various discussions and responses that emerged. In my research I have focused on the LTTE air raids and the process which eventually led to the web sphere activity even prior to the air attacks.
2. Predict types of actors: who are likely to produce material that makes a web sphere possible, that can lead to them being at the centre of internet activity with the potential for the emergence of a web sphere.
3. Stability of constituent web material: level of stability and development of sites, impact on how frequently the boundaries of the web sphere need to be reconsidered. How often they need to be examined. This also helps to look at web sites which have been maintained for a long time, but in Schneider's and Foot approach there is no specific time limit provided.

In my own research, I look at increased web activities in the post 2001 period, including the developments that took place after the peace talks and the signing of the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka in 2002 and the internal split of the LTTE in 2004. These developments did show the potential to create a web sphere. Within this web sphere I focused mainly on political developments in a set of selected websites based on the EU ban imposed on the LTTE in May 2006 and the LTTE air raids on Colombo in March 2007.

3.4.2. Approaches to studying the web sphere

The developers of the system of Web Sphere Analysis introduce three different but mutually exclusive approaches for analyzing the web sphere. The processes of demarcating/establishing web spheres and of identifying constituent elements in a web sphere are foundational to tracking development trajectories of online action (Foot and Schneider 2006: 165). This in other words is the conjuncture where research methods come into play. The three approaches mentioned by Foot and Schneider are,

1. Discursive/rhetorical analysis of web pages sites: content of the websites given priority.
2. Structural feature analysis, individual websites as the unit of analysis, number of pages, hierarchy, ordering of pages, features, presence of search engine, multiple navigation
3. Analysing multi actor cross site action on the web. Based on adaptation of socio cultural methods of inquiry. This analysis looks at the inter-linkages of web sites parallel to the objectives of the site producers. The cross actor analysis also enables the websites to be analysed linking them with offline field research methods such as participant observations and interviews.

This categorization also draws an appropriate research design. The first dimension uses discursive or rhetorical analyses of web pages or sites. The analytical lens is more focused on the content of a web site, including images, texts and graphics, than its actual structuring elements. In an online action or political movement aspect, web texts are

treated as inscriptions of communicative practices on the part of site sponsors and/or users. Employing discursive or rhetorical analysis can help to illuminate social action that any movement or organization will take.

The method also sheds light on relations between web producers within a web sphere, particularly according to Foot and Schneider (2006) when hypertext intertextuality is included through analyses of cross-site linking. This enabled me to look at the dominating political discourse in Tamil diaspora politics, and resistance in the form of counter hegemonic discourses originating from cyber political initiatives. Thus discursive analysis of web content is important to gauge the shape of the political struggle and the working of power within them.

The second set of approaches involves structural/feature analyses. In this approach, the research methodology focuses on individual web sites as the unit of analysis. Especially in this case there is much focus on the structure of the site, such as the number of pages, hierarchical ordering of pages, or on the features found on the pages within the site, for instance the presence of a search engine, privacy policy, or multiple navigation options

This also helps to understand what sort of a network that the website is part of, and it helps research mostly based as a network centric approach. But the meaning or ‘substance’ of those network structures can be difficult to infer from large-scale mapping studies.

The third type of approach for Web Sphere Analysis is focused on analyzing multi-actor, cross-site action on the web. This is based on adaptations from socio-cultural methods of inquiry in social science research. This is the most important approach in this set as it broadens the scope of the research. This provides the ultimate online, offline convergence. Lindlof and Shatzer (1998) make a significant contribution to this in their article on media ethnography calling for new strategies of media ethnography.

Socio-cultural approaches are useful for the analysis of complicated scenarios of online activism, which can include features of collaborative mobilization and extensive co-production of features, pages, and interlinked sites of the social activism projects (Foot and Schneider 2006). The importance of Web Sphere Analysis is its capability to integrate a wide range of methods of analysis and forms of linking online content with offline activism. I use this analytical tool in engaging with political strategies of Tamil diaspora activists and to look at the findings based on concept of cyber terror and its offline implications.

These three approaches are facilitating modes of analysis, and do connect when the research is executed, mainly in combination with research design choices regarding levels and units of analysis. As these analytical tools can be used in combination, my Web Sphere Analysis contains a mix of all these three approaches.

The key factor that generated my interest in Web Sphere Analysis was the fact that it enables the researcher to work with methods not limited to online research. As political action, online activism always has a link to the offline. Web Sphere Analysis provides the space to carry on research online, mainly through the first two approaches mentioned above, while allowing the integration of methods such as interviews, focus group studies and surveys. This provides an integration of research methods and also generates very robust data and findings in any research project focused on online action.

3.5 Applying Web Sphere Analysis

In short the advantages of Web Sphere Analysis can be summed up as,

1. Ability to define a research site, as it provides necessary parameters to form a research field out of multiple websites of various forms working on a common theme.
2. It allows research both on a spatial axis as well as on a time period. Thus spatial and diachronic changes on web based scenarios can be grasped.

3. It prevents the researcher veering off-course, as search engines and hyperlinks can be quite deceiving and may take shoot the research project into a different trajectory.
4. Web Sphere Analysis functions as the perfect conduit between online and offline research fields.

Kirsten Foot and her team of researchers carried out an elaborate Web Sphere Analysis on the types of civic engagement in the post-September 11 web sphere (2006). They mainly focused on understanding which type of site producers responded to the attacks via their sites, what kind of social and political actions web sites facilitated, what type of site producers were most likely to facilitate what kinds of actions, and what forms of civic engagement were reported by internet users in the weeks after September 11 2001.

Foot's research strength was based on effective archiving and analysis of web content. The research team managed by integrating findings based on web archives and interviews conducted with site producers to point the emergence of 'online structures for action' Web Sphere Analysis the enabled Foot's research team to identify forms of content produced in single sites as well analyses web content based on themes of political and social action. They analysed data emerging from Pew internet project's¹⁶ research on its sub project on 'American Life', along with sites produced by individuals as a response to the 9/11 attacks. These responses varied from providing further information about victims, or about, Al Qaeda, to specific web sites coordinating assistance to victims.

3.5.1 Challenges encountered in researching the web sphere

The key challenge in this method is processing the enormous amount of data generated from a Web Sphere Analysis. All these three approaches need periodic studies. As there are both spatial and temporal dimensions of online action, there definitely needs to be a

¹⁶ The Pew internet project is a think tank which is focused on looking at issues, attitudes and trends shaping the American society. URL: <http://www.pewinternet.org/about.asp>

system of data archiving. Data archiving has become quite popular with more digitization of publications. Thus there are demands for systems of information management.

The ephemerality of the web and its content emanates from both its ability to be changed instantaneously and its construction process. Thus from the perspective of the social researcher there is an acute shortage of specialized tools and techniques that ensure that content can be viewed again at a later time (Foot and Schneider 2006). The web has demonstrated its ability to sustain and store information at the same time, which brings about a sense of persistence that clearly distinguishes it from performance media. Thus a key challenge involves making decisions about when and what to archive, what will be the long-term use and how can one make material available for revisiting the data.

In making this decision a technical challenge which I had to deal within my archiving process was effective and precise capturing of web sites and their materials such as images and videos in their original form and appearance. To overcome this challenge, while maintaining the originality of the sites, I selected a web capturing software called Snagit to aid data capturing. This software tool is developed by a company called *TechSmith* which is mainly involved in creating commercial web capturing solutions for the market.¹⁷ This software enabled easier capture of web sites in their full format. It contained the added advantage of an inbuilt editing tool making it easier to capture images and simultaneously customizing images to fit the necessary sections in my thesis. All images presented in this chapter, and the web content that is introduced in the next chapter, were captured and archived using this software.

An important aspect of Web Sphere Analysis is that it enables the researcher to develop a strong archive out of web sites collected at regular intervals during a specific period, enabling retrospective and developmental analysis of many aspects of online relations. The web sphere in my research includes sites from both the pro-LTTE and anti-LTTE factions, following the criteria for a web sphere. These sites are interlinked, not through permanent links to each site, but because they are referring to opposing web sites

¹⁷ <http://www.techsmith.com/screen-capture.asp>

constantly. Thus these inter-linkages have made the web sphere more dynamic and politically interesting and bring out the true dynamic nature of web space. The websites which are brought together in the analysis for the thesis are Nitharsanam.com, Eelamnation.com/net, Tamilnet.com, Tamilcanadian.com, Tamileditors.com, and Tamilnation.com, which are the most important websites of the pro-LTTE outfits as all other pro-LTTE websites are based on developments on the above websites. Websites such as www.vizhippu.com, Tamilaffairs.info, subicham.de, Thenee.com/de , www, Tamilaffairs.com and www.Neruppu.com represent the dissident web operations and these websites spearhead the dissident political discourse. These above websites were used mainly because they were the ones mentioned by many respondents in my pilot research in early 2006. There were also the interlinked websites which made up the pro-LTTE and dissident web networks, each site, with the exception of www.Tamilnet.com and www.Uthr.org has this interlinked feature.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter examined existing research methodologies which look at social and political phenomena in cyberspace, while outlining some key methods such as network analysis and virtual ethnography. The chapter identified the importance of these two methods as well as their weaknesses. I introduced Web Sphere Analysis as the key research framework that I have adopted to analyse my online research. Web Sphere Analysis has been developed as a method to understand online political and social mobilization and it has the capacity to be integrated into larger research frameworks. This is the key feature of this method which is important in my research as well. My research is an integrated analysis of the impact of the internet on Tamil diasporan political activists that was explored through interviews conducted with them. This integration of larger research framework between an offline fieldwork and an online research can be achieved using Web Sphere Analysis as the online component as it creates a strong unit of analysis in the form of an elaborate and solid web archive. I engaged with Ranganathan's research (2002) that attempted to study the web phenomenon in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. She has focused on a limited number of websites and does not clearly outline her research methodology. In my fieldwork I engaged with political activists and gathered data through a mixture of

investigations looking at their own experience of cyberspace with politics and what they have witnessed on the rise of the use of internet technologies for politics. This chapter identifies the method I used to research online politics and the importance of my methodology in analyzing both the web sphere and linking it to the respondents' interviews. I have argued why Web Sphere Analysis is important while outlining its key methodological features. I introduced approaches to Web Sphere Analysis, and which particular websites were selected for this research, which will be presented in the next two chapters, focusing specifically on online research findings.

Chapter 4 Analysing Tamil diaspora web sphere

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on the online research component of my thesis and contains the analysis of the online political engagements as a form of power struggle. The events introduced are used as online evidence of the importance of web sites for politics and hegemony. The methodological framework of Web Sphere Analysis, its features and its importance, were discussed in the previous chapter. This is one of the two chapters devoted to its practical application, focusing on developments in cyberspace parallel to Tamil diaspora politics, and the use of the internet for political processes and objectives. This chapter contains a number of analyses of web sites and online developments, based on their thematic distinctions. I look at two key topics which were of interest to link Tamil diaspora activists during the period of my research. These two topics, are the ban imposed by the European Union (EU) on the LTTE in May 2006, and the air raid launched by the LTTE targeting a key military base of the Sri Lankan government in March 2007. I also introduce a case study of the personalised web attacks on the dissident activist Jeyadevan. This chapter will look at this phenomenon from the view point of extreme web politics in power struggles, while Chapter Five will look at it from the perspective of a political strategy of conflict. Analytical tools prescribed in Web Sphere Analysis from discursive analysis to cross actor participation are utilised for observing and analysing forms of conflict shifting to web space.

Web Sphere Analysis will be based around events from 2006 – 2007. The analysis in the chapter will be guided initially by analysing the two key political developments mentioned above in the form of ‘web storms’. A web storm is an important event in the process of Web Sphere Analysis that has the potential to be transformed into a unit of analysis because of intensive inter-actor and inter-site activity over a relatively brief period of time based on a specific theme or event. Foot and Schneider (2004) note that a political scandal can result in a web storm, and they point out that some web storms develop into web spheres that are durable over the web for longer time.

4.2 'Web storms' in Web Sphere Analysis

Pro-Tamil nationalists who were sympathetic to the LTTE contributed to the shift in the conflict to cyberspace by developing web sites encouraging pro-LTTE fronts and LTTE led diaspora operations to take cyberspace seriously. Tamilnet.com was the first website which began its operations and was started by pro-LTTE activists. My online research took place ten years after the launch of Tamilnet.com. The Web Sphere Analysis in this thesis looks at the dynamics of web based political action while tracing new developments which have occurred during this period. The Tamilnet.com originated under circumstances in which the Sri Lankan government and dissident Tamil activists were gaining propaganda mileage over the LTTE in the eyes of pro-LTTE elements. They soon realized that the military engagements were not limited to troops, weapons, and battlefield advantages – they were also about a battle of perceptions. The LTTE understood the impact real time global feed would have on strategic decisions about the war and thus they wanted to gain the advantage of this. Initially the web operation of the LTTE was based on acquiring of this strategic edge and out-smarting the Sri Lankan state in this information sphere. What the LTTE did not expect was that in about ten years time the internet would not be limited to an information sphere and its spatial features might facilitate political action and mobility, transforming cyberspace into a site and space of politics. I start my research on the conjecture that the internet seems to have surpassed the idea of a mere informational exchange process. As Jones points out, the internet has not only connected computer networks but ideologies and ways of life that have, thus far, seemed disconnected or perhaps were even beyond connection (1999:23).

Prior to engaging with my fieldwork in the next chapter I locate the struggle that has engulfed the Tamil diaspora in the last few years between the pro-LTTE activists and Tamil dissidents. This is captured in the inter web activity and this struggle drives my thesis as it intensifies political engagement among diasporan Tamils. To maintain the flow and to analyse important political events which triggered political engagements in cyberspace chronologically, I will present two web developments to start off the online political analysis of my research. These two are the cyber engagements parallel to the impending EU ban on the LTTE which came into effect on 29 May 2006, and in March

2007 LTTE air raids on Sri Lankan government installations. These two were selected as web storms because both these incidents created more than 200 web articles based around them. These articles not just reported the incidents but were actively responding and engaging with the issues surrounding the two incidents and resulted in creating fresh issues such as the targeting of individuals such as Jeyadevan and Sethupuram Nadarajah. These web engagements dominated the web sphere for more than two weeks at a stretch with massive hit counts. The hit counts were revealed by the web masters of Thenee.com and Tamilnet.com and by analyzing the web usage through the web service Alexa.com which provides data about site access and the number of users and visitors to a web site.

4.2.1 Web storm 1: The EU ban

I researched the online developments between March and May 2006 and this enabled me to capture some intensive web usage by Tamil diasporan political activists based on the European Union's move to name the LTTE a terrorist organization and proscribe it in the European Union region. In the period between March and May 2006, the LTTE was trying to fend off an impending ban of the organization within the European Union. At the same time dissident Tamil political activists were running a political campaign to push through the ban. This lobbying and mobilization of political interests and agents in the Tamil diaspora created significant online activity. This included political strategies based on inter web activism, such as web sites campaigning for and against the ban, to precision email campaigns targeting important EU delegations. My analysis of these websites, and their political symbolism is based on a discursive analysis of the messages embedded in the sites and a structural analysis of the web sites, which includes looking at the wording of texts of the use of images and media technologies. These are two key analytical approaches to web sites archived and captured through Web Sphere Analysis.

The LTTE fronts carried out a campaign to deter the EU members from imposing the sanction and to expose what they called 'state terrorism'. These campaigns which included larger sections of the Tamil diaspora mainly took the form of protest rallies. The Tamilnet.com article featured in Figure 4¹⁸, sets the scene, in a rally protesting against the impending EU ban carrying the graphic image of civilians allegedly murdered

¹⁸ Available on <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=18293> (accessed 26 May 2006)

by Sri Lankan armed forces. The banner reads 'is it our fate to bathe in Blood? Deafening silence doesn't the world has words?'

Is it our fate to bathe in Blood?
Deafening silence, doesn't world has words?


Festive spirit infected the South.
 Electric bulbs enlightened the shrines...
 The symbolic decor hinted to minds.
 Buddhist belief of Buddha's Nirvana
 It was a day of compassion and love...
 A day dedicated to practice the teachings.

A Group of soldiers, Buddha's followers - they
 Rendered compassion distorts its meaning.
 Infants, their parents and also the neighbors
 Massacred Tamil bodies fell in the Tamil North.

Note you nations that render the verdict.
 Note you nobles the bastion of many rights.
 Note you leaders the defenders of civility
 Note our relatives note their plight.


Green-peace, blue-cross and many more...
 Plants and animals have voice and much more.
 Deafening silence is all we hear.
 International powers are ignoring our tear.

Decades have gone and deaths are a routine
 No one came... No body helped
 Will they come oh will they ever?
 Paralyzing panic debilitating fear!



Refuse we do to accept our demise
 'To be or not' isn't for us
 We will! We will! We will forever!
 It is our right! It is our life!

Oh thy powers come for our help
 If not now you shall never!



Puthuvai Rathinadurai

Figure 4 Images of dead civilians and the Sri Lankan President

www.tamilnet.de

Reporting to the world on Tamil Affairs

Diaspora Tamils to hold protests worldwide
 [TamilNet, Friday, 26 May 2006, 11:03 GMT]
Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora organisations in Europe, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in Scandinavian countries, are to hold rallies voicing protest Monday, 29th May, against the expected proscription of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) by the European Union next week, organizers of the protests said. Protesters will conduct peaceful demonstrations in front of the Parliaments in their respective countries, said leaflets calling expatriate Sri Lanka Tamils to join the protests.

The protesting organizations will place the following demands to the Western Governments according to the leaflets :

- Recognise Tamil Nation, Tamil Homeland and Tamils' right to self-determination,
- Lift prohibition of Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.
- Remove restrictions of High Security Zones (HSZ) in NorthEast allowing displaced Tamils to resettle in their homes,
- Remove ban on fishing along coasts of NorthEast,
- Provide opportunities for the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) Members of the Sri Lanka Parliament in world forums to expose the current violations of human rights in Sri Lanka against the Tamils to the international community.

Rallies will take place on Monday 29th May 2006, at the following places said the leaflets.

- Australia - 10.00 a.m in front of Australian Parliament in Canberra.
- Toronto, Canada - 6.00 p.m at the Mellasmam Square, 5100 Yonge st. Toronto.
- Ottawa, Canada - 09.00 a.m in front of Canada Parliament.
- Italy - 09.00 a.m Beginning from Piazza Politeama reaching the Interior Ministry in Cavour.
- France - 15.00 in front of Ministre des Affaires etranger, 37 Quai d'Orsay, 75007 Paris.
- Sweden - 14.00 Starting from 1k Sergels Torg, Stockholm.
- New Zealand, Auckland - 8.00 a.m to 6.00 p.m - a sit in fast at Ayodya Square, Auckland City Centre.
- New Zealand, Wellington, 30.05.2006 Tuesday in front of New Zealand Parliament.
- Switzerland - 13.00 in front of Parliament in Bern.
- Netherlands - 11.00 a.m in front of Parliament in Den Hauge.
- Denmark - 12.00 noon in the København Raadhusplads.
- Germany - 11.00 a.m beginning from Dusseldorf HBF.
- Norway - 14.00, 7 juni-plassen, Victoria Terrasse.

Figure 5 Tamil Diaspora activities

Tamilnet.com used the images and the speeches of demonstrations. These texts included comments made by European politicians in support of the Tamil struggle. The web site's main intention was to show, by referring to such EU officials comments, that the EU ban does not reflect unanimous agreement among EU members in the region. The websites were trying to point that the EU was not totally against the LTTE and that the LTTE also had allies within the EU. It attempted to reinforce belief in the existence of substantial support for the LTTE all over Europe. The site captured in Figure 5¹⁹ announces the various locations of the protest rallies. By indicating these international locations in one page, the strategy is to fold the geographic distance. This also signifies the LTTE attempt to stamp its hegemony and domination throughout the diaspora sphere. Tamilnet.com by listing the diaspora activities throughout the globe highlights LTTE control over all Tamil diaspora mobilization. It is an attempt to point to a structural fact of the LTTE's superiority in controlling the diaspora. This exercise by Tamilnet.com to bring all Tamil diaspora centres into one web page demonstrate this control of the LTTE disguised as an act of uniting the voice of Tamil diasporans.

On 30 May 2006 Tamilnet.com, Nitharsanam.com, Tamilcanadian.com, and Tamilnation.com, the larger and major players in the web-sphere, all came out with a combination of images from Europe, Canada and Australia, summing up the climax to the protests against the EU ban on the LTTE. These global mobilizations were projected in these sites to demonstrate the transnational organizational ability and the power of the LTTE. The significance is that all images published depict Tamils waving LTTE flags and holding placards of the LTTE leader (Figure 6)²⁰. All images contain more flags and placards of the Tigers and the images are more focused on LTTE symbols than on the actual people involved. The notion of LTTE hegemony at work in the form of web operations discussed earlier is reinforced with these images. They depict LTTE's aspirations to be the symbol of power and symbol of authority within the Tamil diaspora. Analysing the content of these web pages shows that they are more concerned with the LTTE show of strength and defiance, engineered in cyberspace, in order to symbolise the seamless control of the diaspora by the LTTE across the globe rather than the actual lobbying for the lifting of the ban.

¹⁹ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=18293> (accessed 26 May 2006)

²⁰ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=18333> (accessed 29 May 2006)



Figure 6 Diaspora rally held on 29 May 2006 in Bern against the EU Ban on the LTTE.

Structurally analysing these websites, one can see that they had undergone certain facelifts, from changes to their home pages and site structures as a response to modifications to their web campaigns against the LTTE ban. Structural changes were made to websites in line with this strategy in which the home pages were redone, with even their normal templates inverted for new images, and images with side bars depicting harrowing pictures of dead women and children claimed to be killed by Sri Lankan armed forces. In analysing the purposes and importance of such face lifts to the web sites one can see that such graphic material goes beyond the discursive positioning of the Tamil Tigers' struggle. It structurally endorses them by trying to bring the conflict emphatically closer to the visitors of the web sites.

In the wake of the ban the websites unleashed a hate campaign, even targeting the EU. The web sites carried graphic visuals as embedded pictures, for example, the 'you too EU' attached to a picture of a mother holding a dead child allegedly killed by the Sri Lankan forces. These were graphic and they sustained a campaign of demonstrations and events denouncing the ban imposed by the EU and claiming that the Tamil people will face genocide in Sri Lanka.

Observing the responses generated from anti-LTTE or dissident websites, parallel with the web activism of pro-LTTE websites, plays an important role in my analysis. Dissidents resorted to targeting the internal problems that were brewing within the

LTTE's organization structure, especially the military hierarchy, during this time period. The anti-LTTE movement was actively campaigning to push through the ban in the EU. They worked relentlessly to get the HRW (Human Rights Watch) March 2006, publication on LTTE extortion of the Tamil diaspora funding. The dissidents used attacks on LTTE operations in Europe, and its main target was the ailing LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham.²¹ The dissident websites concentrated on attacking the LTTE during the build up to the EU ban. On 18 May Vizhippu.net carried the main title 'LTTE panicking about its EU wide ban proscription.'²² The same period also saw the dissident websites such as Vizhippu.com targeting the Nitharsanam.com²³ web site of the LTTE. Interestingly once the ban was finally imposed on the LTTE, rather than celebrating the ban, the dissident websites concentrated on a full scale attack on Nitharsanam.com. This may be due to the impact it had on the lives of dissident political activists.

The LTTE was targeted in this web storm by a website which gained rapid popularity named www.Thenee.com. Figure 7, is an image from the banner of the website, which is one of the most successful websites of the Tamil dissidents. Thenee literally means the 'bee'. The website is run by an ex-militant belonging to the group EROS, by the name of Gemini, based in Stuttgart Germany.



Figure 7 Banner of the dissident website Thenee.com

The site, launched in 1998, had significant threats from the pro-LTTE operations. It started to properly operate from 2003 onwards, and in 2005 the site had to change its service supplier due to the massive hit-count and the servers crumbling under increasing

²¹ Anton Balasingham was the Theoretician of the LTTE and its nationalistic project, a key advisor to the LTTE leader Prabhakaran. He settled in London in the late 1990s and was a pivotal figure among the diaspora Tamils as well as the LTTE. He passed away in London on 14 December 2006 due to kidney failure.

²² <http://vizhippu.net/node/2740>

²³ <http://vizhippu.net/node/2757> (20 June 2006)

demand. By early 2006, the site was getting 80,000 hits a day, according to an activist who did not want to be named in my research. The site did have a huge impact in becoming an information provider to the dissenting community. Moreover, it was able to expose many LTTE activities, which in turn successfully hampered many LTTE propaganda and funding operations, as well as altering its image among international organizations varying from human rights to aid agencies. Keeran revealed that the LTTE attempted to shutdown Thenee.com's operations and even tried to duplicate the website to prevent or reduce the visitors to the site.

Thenee.com on its home page on the day of the EU ban on the LTTE, carried an image of Prabhakaran claiming the LTTE fascism was revealed, and it reminded visitors of the impact of the Canadian ban on the LTTE on April 2006: 'the Tigers will die out soon along with the Canadian ban'. A significant aspect of the discourse around the ban was highlighted in the second story which ran under the heading, 'Democratic space to breathe for the Tamil people', hinting at the weakening LTTE control of diasporic space. The reference to democratic space was important; this was similar to the arguments made by Tamil dissident respondents whom I interviewed. There seems to be a reassertion of the political priorities of the dissidents as well as the confidence that cyberspace contributes in opening up possibilities that were limited to these activists in their earlier efforts to become engaged in politics.

Equally important was the third story featured in Figure 8, an instance where the attack is taken to the LTTE, where an image of children is captured alongside an LTTE cadre and another man in civilian clothes. The site claims the man is the head of recruitment of the 'Tiger baby brigade' (child soldiers), by the name of Thiagaraja. Thenee.com also revisits Thiagaraja's recent statement to UNICEF, claiming the LTTE does not recruit children; they come voluntarily to join the LTTE. Though subtly introduced, this story was another clear attack on the LTTE, displaying Thenee's capacity to maintain pressure on the organization.

வேலியே பயிரைமேயும் சூட்சுமம் இதுதான்



விடுதலைப் புலிகள் சிறுவர் களுக்குப் பயிற்சி கொடுப்பதை அவர்கள் மறுதலித்தே வந்துள்ளனர். இப்படத்தில் கைகாட்டி நிற்பவர் புலிகளின் சிறுவர் பாதுகாப்பு அணிக் கு பொறுப்பான தியாகராஜா. மற்றும் சிறுவர் களுக்கு ஆயுதத்தை கொடுக்கும் புலிப் போராளி. யுனிசெப் அமைப்பிற்கு சிறுவர் களை நாம் படைகளில் சேர்ப்பதில்லை. அவர்களாகவே எம்மிடம் வந்து சேர்கிறார்கள் என கதையளக்கும் புலிகள் ஆயுத ஆசை காட்டி படைகளில் சேர்க்கும் சூட்சுமம் இதுதான்.

The other adult in the photo is Mr Thiagaraja, member of the LTTE Child Protection Unit. He is also the Head of the Liaison Office of the LTTE which is in constant contact with UNICEF and other international agencies concerning child protection.

Figure 8 Image from dissident website Thenee.com on the day of the EU ban on the LTTE

What Thenee.com displayed in this one web page were the possibilities cyberspace has provided for political action. In one article it endorses the dissidents and urges them to break the LTTE authority, to come out against the LTTE. Simultaneously, as Figure 8²⁴ indicates, the dissident web site precisely targets weaknesses of the LTTE, challenging LTTE where and when it's most vulnerable, picking up allegations of child soldiers in their ranks and evidence of its recruitment agencies. Thenee.com exposed an embarrassing problem LTTE is facing with charges of child conscription on the same day it was banned in the EU.

On the other side a structural feature of the pro-LTTE websites were their attempt to shield the LTTE leader, during the period leading up to the ban and immediately after the ban came into force. The pro-LTTE web sites consciously refrained from publishing any images of the leader of the LTTE or any response from him to the ban. All comments on the impending ban in the aftermath of enforcement of it were made by then political head of the LTTE late S.P. Thamilselvan and the LTTE theoretician late Anton Balasingham. The argument made by the LTTE was that it was a political matter, but the interesting aspect of this is, though some of these websites are directly under the LTTE control, most of them are run by individuals and organization which support the LTTE. These web sites functioned as a blanket damage controlling mechanism, shielding its

²⁴ http://www.Thenee.com/html/euban_tamil.html (accessed 30 May 2006)

leadership and diverting attention to other issues such as increasing attacks on Tamil dissidents.

Web Sphere Analysis into Tamil diaspora political activism demonstrates that the politics on the web takes on its own dynamic as it is inhabited by a diverse set of political actors. The political engagements in these web sites have become more interactive as web sites tend to respond to each other; the confrontation between Nitharsanam.com and Thenee.com is an example for this new kind of web activity. Prior to the inception of dissident websites pro-LTTE web activity was more of a communication tool concerning developments within Sri Lanka and the LTTE role in the conflict. Prior to the dissident web activity, Tamilnet.com or Tamilcanadian.com positioned themselves as information gateways for the conflict, mainly targeting the Tamil diaspora. Whitaker (2007) points out that the Tamilnet.com was brought out to challenge the information revealed by the dissident web site belonging to University Teachers of Human Rights (Jaffna) group. But the difference in this kind of web activity was that there was intensified interactivity and Uthr.org was not updated in a daily basis as it served mainly as an information service which created in-depth reports about certain situations arising through the conflict, mainly on human rights issues. The LTTE and pro-LTTE operations had to introduce new web sites or change the manner in which some traditional web operations were run from being mere information gateways as the web space started facilitating multiple web sites which are actively engaging with day to day diaspora political activities.

Increased web interactivity has resulted in the emergence of political issues which range from the wider politics of the conflict to more personalised political confrontations. A classic example would be the pro-LTTE web sites responding to dissident web operations. These efforts, timing, and the resources spent on attacking dissidents and managing dissident counter attacks, have to a certain extent derailed the purpose for which these sites were initially established. In the mid to late 1990s the web sites were almost all pro-LTTE within the diaspora and their sole purpose was to reflect the Tamil Eelam or to reinforce the notion of homeland and virtually keep it alive. This trend started to dissolve from 2001 onwards, as the dissidents started using the web space for political purposes. This change can be further explored in the web engagement which

emerged in the back drop of the LTTE air raids, on a Sri Lankan air base, in March 2007 which led to the second web storm analysed below.

4.2.2 Web Storm 2: LTTE Air attack

The web storm of the year 2007 came in the back drop of the use of air attacks by the LTTE on the largest Sri Lankan military airbase in March. The LTTE air attack on 29 March 2007 on the Katunayake airbase became a large web storm similar to the web traffic generated by the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. The significance of this was the fact that it was the most important military operation captured in the web, surpassing all Tiger military campaigns against the Sri Lankan state.

The web sites of both pro-LTTE and anti-LTTE elements on the Tamil diaspora web sphere had their different takes on the air attacks. The event became a web storm immediately and web sites related to the Tamil web sphere came out with news, articles and photographs. Even a pro-LTTE web site doctored images to show a vast air field in the North of Sri Lanka claiming to be housing many more LTTE aircraft. The discursive construction of the air attack was to demonstrate the LTTE's ability to violate the sovereign space of the Sri Lankan state and remain uncontested in such efforts.

Tamilnet.com broke the story about the attack at 20.00 hours GMT on 29 March 2007, and had four updates on the story, and frequent comments from the LTTE military spokesperson. The first report was confined to revealing that the high security air base was under attack; this has been another feature of managing the flow of information in websites which supported the LTTE cause, a fact which respondents in my own interviews pointed to. The constant updating keeps the diasporans connected to a real time battle. My respondents brought out the importance of this linkage between the battle theatres and the diasporans. The second online update had a comment from the LTTE military spokesman 'two attack aircraft belonging to Liberation Tigers carried out bombing raids at the Sri Lankan Air force base at Katunayake.' The third update, which came 6 minutes after the first, claimed that Sri Lanka's only international airport, which is adjacent to the military base, had been shut down indefinitely.

The politically important revelation came in the fourth news update, about two hours after the first, In this the LTTE military spokesman claimed, ‘Two aircrafts of TamilEelam Air Force (TAF) with air to surface capability participated in the sortie’, this is first instance the term ‘TAF’ was used as shown in Figure 9²⁵, In the context of the Web Sphere Analysis the careful selection of the words by the military spokesman which appeared first on cyberspace was not just limited to commenting on its attack; the LTTE has used the internet extensively to develop branding and mechanising its military organization.

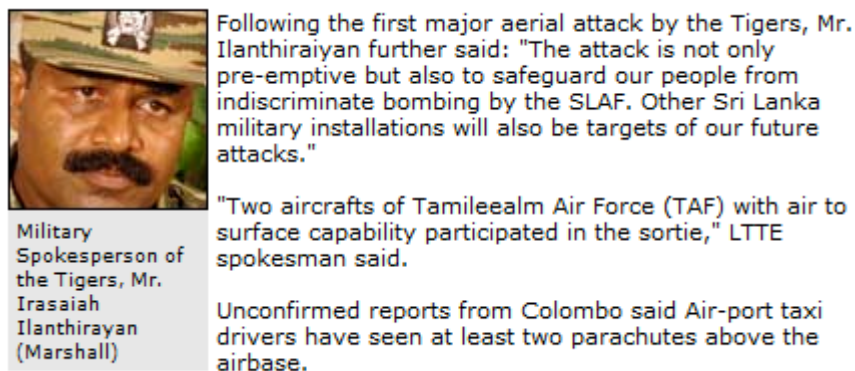


Figure 9 LTTE air attacks on Sri Lankan Air base.

The internet has always been used to project and present technological development of the LTTE. Such military achievements and the technological know how of the LTTE was projected to the diaspora in real-time to reinforce the military development of the organization while encouraging them to believe the LTTE was in a process of evolving into a powerful military machinery which could take on the Sri Lankan government in any military dimension. While the LTTE was using cyberspace in these web storms to keep the diaspora connected with its achievements in Sri Lanka, the dissident response to the attacks was based on the objective of containing LTTE propaganda. This is similar to their strategy in the previous web storm, to stop the LTTE from taking the trajectory of image building and political mobilization efforts based on developments in Sri Lanka.

²⁵ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=21667> (accessed 26 March 2007)

In the backdrop of the LTTE air attacks, the dissidents resorted to pointing out the discrepancies in the information disseminated by the LTTE. In the same web engagement the dissident Tamil web campaign targeted the key LTTE site Nitharsanam.com. It is interesting to see that, with the evolution of the dissidents' approach to web politics, the unitary hold of the web campaigns of the LTTE changed as well. The LTTE's main concern was waging the war with the Sri Lankan state and making that real war felt to the diasporans. The dissident factor which emerges about with the new millennium has a significant effect on the dynamic of online politics.

Exploring the dissident response to Tiger air raids in the light of the above argument is important to grasp the level of web activity and intense rivalry around it. A leading dissident Tamil web site, Tamilaffairs.com carried the article in Figure 10. This is an interesting twist in the web politics of the Tamil web-sphere, the main focus of the article is a direct attack on the key LTTE website operated through a webmaster directly linked to the LTTE.

REPORTING ON CURRENT TAMIL AFFAIRS

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Tamil News

- கடடுநாயக்க விமானப்படைத்தளம்மீது இன்று (26-03-07) அதிகாலை புலிப்பயங்கரவாதிகள் திடீர் தாக்குதல்
- VizhippuFM News 25-03-2007
- மன்னார் முருங்கன் மோதலில் 9 படைவீரர்கள் பலி 90 போர் காயம்
- பாக்காத் போலீஸ் நிலையத்தில் லொரி குண்டு தாக்குதல்: 20 போர் பலி
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Home

Cyber Terrorist confirm Sri Lanka Air force base is flattened

25 March 2007 News



The LTTE's cyber terror man wearing police uniform with a pistol.

The LTTE's infamous website operating from Oslo has confirmed that the Air force base situated next to Colombo international airport has been destroyed in the LTTE attack.

This exclusive news not covered by any other international media agencies based in Colombo is reported by the LTTE's nitharsanam.com run by Nadarajah Sethurupan alias Dirty Sethu.

Whilst publishing this exclusive news, the LTTE website also distance itself from its LTTE link by quoting spelling difference in the nitharsanam and nidarsanam names whilst not giving any explanation to the same spelling in Tamil language.

Nitharsanam.com publishes threats and intimidations and even confirms certainty of deaths of some individuals before they are assassinated by the LTTE.

The impending assassination of the former Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Luxman Kadirgamar was reported well before his death in the nitharsanam.com.

Nitharsanam.com is said to come under LTTE's intelligence wing head Pottu.

Figure 10 Sethupuram on Tamilaffairs.com

The air attack is made secondary in this report appearing on Tamilaffairs.com where the website attacks the webmaster of Nitharsanam.com. Figure10²⁶ also demonstrates the dissidents' web site attacking the web master and questioning the credibility of his site. In the same page Tamilaffairs.com claims 'Nitharsanam.com publishes threats and intimidations and even confirms certainty of deaths of some individuals before they are assassinated by the LTTE'. This reinforces the reputation Nitharsanam.com has developed among the diaspora political activists as new fear generator, which is the key reason it is being targeted by dissidents at all available opportunities such as the air attack scenario.

The dissidents, in spite of the media and information interest in the air attacks, diverted attention to attacking Nitharsanam.com and discrediting it, pointing out its exaggerated

²⁶ <http://Tamilaffairs.com/node/100> (accessed 26 March 2007)

claims in the aftermath of the attacks in Sri Lanka. Importantly, sites such as Tamilaffairs.com, vizzhipu.com and Thenee.com are creating alternative political issues even at the height of LTTE propaganda campaigns with substantial evidence to back the LTTE attacks in Sri Lanka. The efforts to attack the pro-LTTE sites within prominent web storms have created a situation where the pro-LTTE sites have to maintain maximum propaganda while devoting significant resources to counter the dissident sites.

Thus analysing such web storms captures political activities that are now becoming bitterly contested and creating more personalised and immediate political conflicts among diasporan political activists. These can spiral into conflicts not necessarily mirroring the developments or incidents in theatres of conflict in Sri Lanka. Such incidents of personalised diaspora conflicts, and new political priorities among diasporan political activists, are further analysed in the section under cyber terrorism later in this chapter. These shifts herald the shaping of Tamil web politics, transforming them from being web enhanced politics to web based politics. The term 'web based' political activism is discussed by Vegh as 'used for activities that are only possible online' (2003: 72). I argue that such web-based activism has a profound impact on the lives of activists as well, as activists turn to such web based activism to generate effects in real world politics. This exceeds the general perception of internet's political potential being limited to political action based on 'electronic civil disturbance'²⁷ strategies.

In my final analysis of the two web storms, the archives capture the tensions that were discussed earlier between the pro-LTTE Tamil activists and the Tamil dissidents. The dissidents have challenged the political arena previously dominated by the LTTE and its allies. The key objective for the LTTE in this contest is to maintain total hegemony, and for the dissidents, their aim is to carve out spaces of political action and positions to attack and challenge the LTTE and its authority. These tensions in some web sites are brought out through structural alterations to site content, while more discursive constructions of domination and resistance are the key features in this power struggle in other web sites.

²⁷ A strategy using information technologies to target a website as a mark of protest, mainly used by activists to disrupt web services of a site using tactics such as 'virtual sit ins' where activists try to access an identified web site simultaneously and repeating it till the web site crashes unable to manage the traffic directed towards it.

For the LTTE, the state-based discourse or championing the notion of Eelam (homeland) remains the justified route to state building and nation building. This theory guided the shaping of strategies dealing with the Tamil diaspora for the LTTE. These strategies were based on the objective of gaining the total support of the diaspora Tamils and achieving virtual allegiance from them. The dissidents emerging in the web have identified the importance of dethroning the LTTE from this moral high ground and are the strategic focus in organizing their political campaigns to challenge the LTTE. The web is significant for political action and activism and it also creates spatial conditions where geographic fixities are being challenged by spaces of political and social possibility beyond the confinement of statist ideologies. In the next section I introduce one of the key new developments online.

4.3 Analysing online violence through web sphere

The web archiving during the periods of web storms, as well as during the time of my fieldwork, shed insights into the changing patterns of cyber engagement in the sphere of Tamil diaspora politics. I look at the websites archived in the web sphere to look at the use of intimidation, violence and terror strategies embedded in them. These are discussed under the general theme of cyber terrorism. This is not to frame all similar tactics under one label, I am introducing it because it was the most recurrent term used by my respondents.

4.3.1 Cyber conflict in power struggles

The use of cyberspace for political engagement in Tamil diaspora politics seems to have undergone certain changes in its features and objectives with the dawn of the new millennium. For many years diaspora politics and online political action were focused on the ethnic conflict: developments in Jaffna, LTTE activity, the Sri Lankan government's responses to the LTTE, potential hotspots susceptible for violence, ongoing violence and the military campaigns. Web politics and information flow were based on these issues till around 2001. Things gradually started to change following the split within the LTTE in 2004, and the increased dissident activity within diaspora communities, which in turn

generated a change of political priorities in the diaspora sphere and web politics. This in turn has effectively problematised the existing notion of cyber conflict and cyber terrorism, notions integral in security studies (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 1997; Denning 1998, 2007; Weimman 2006). In the interviews with political activists in London, the notion of cyber terrorism was given new meaning and a new type of interpretation.

The term ‘cyber terrorism’ and ‘terrorist’ became an allegation increasingly leveled by dissident activists at certain websites belonging to or run by LTTE factions. Figure 11²⁸ depicts an article on the dissident web site vizhippu.net and it is a direct attack on Nitharsanam.com and its webmaster. This cycle of attacks, and counter -attacks by Nitharsanam.com, has taken the spatial focus of the conflict to a new dimension. This personalised web war will be discussed, using as a case study the attacks on dissident activist Jeyadevan and his responses. The impact on actual political activists’ lives will be further discussed in my fieldwork analysis presented in Chapter Eight.



Figure 11 A text from vizhippu.net.

This section of the chapter will be using Web Sphere Analysis to understand the notion of cyber terrorism based on archived web sites. I use the archives to analyse the content of these websites, their structures as well as the discursive construction of violence using both images and texts.

²⁸ <http://vizhippu.net/node/2421> (accessed 30 April 2006)

The term 'cyber terrorism' or 'cyber terrorist' appears on all of the dissident websites. The LTTE is reported by all researchers on cyber security as the first group that used cyber terror or tactics of web attack (Vatis 2001; Denning 2000). But there is hardly any focus on cyber terrorism and the use of such forms of terror mechanisms by the LTTE, its front organizations and its cyber operations in the last 6-7 years in cyber security literature. Figure 11 provides an example to the use of the term 'cyber terror' and the kind of justification for the use of the term provided by many activists I interviewed. Vizhippu.net discusses the intimidation tactics unleashed against Jeyadevan and Bazeer, one a Tamil activist and another a Muslim who oppose the LTTE. The website quotes a threatening LTTE email send to Jeyadevan, this is featured in Figure 12²⁹.

²⁹ <http://vizhippu.net/node/2421> (accessed 30 April 2006)

-----Original Message-----

From: London [mailto:jayathevan@gmail.com]

Sent: 29 April 2006 21:05

To: baji.jayadevan@ntlworld.com

Subject: London Criminal gets a taste of democracy

Importance: High

<http://www.jayadevan.net/>

London Criminal gets a taste of democracy

Rajasingham Jayadevan popularly known as 'Undiyalaan' went into hiding on Friday 28 April, as hundreds of protesters gathered outside the Eelapatheeswarar Aalayam Limited on Union Road in Wembley London.

Despite the fact that the protest was organised on short notice and the fact that it was held on a working day, hundreds of Hindu devotees participated in the peaceful protest to demand that Undiyalaan stops using a Hindu temple as a money making machine.

Protesters both young and old were seen holding placards that called on Undiyalaan to "hand the temple back to the people". Other placards read "a temple is not a money making institution" and "if you want to buy three houses in London, get a job".

The British police were onsite to give protection for the 100s that had gathered. Police protection was requested for after the organisers received credible information that the ENDLF paramilitaries based in London were planning on disrupting the protest and turning it into a violent confrontation.

ENDLF's international head Virajha Ramraj is a close friend of Undiyalaan and is serving a lengthy prison sentence in Switzerland for a number of crimes. Undiyalaan is a regular participant in the threat issuing-cum-discussion show on Ramraj's underground radio station.

The Arabic Al-Jazeera television was also on site to film the demonstration. Participants said that they were bemused as to why a channel that carries messages for Islamic extremists was interested in the affairs of a Hindu temple.

One participant suggested that Al-Jazeera may have been invited by SMM Bazeer who is a close friend of Undiyalaan. The participant accused Bazeer of being the theologian behind the 'Jihad' Islamic extremist outfit based in eastern Sri Lanka.

One of the protesters claimed that his ex-wife worked as a help at the temple, and that Undiyalaan had used money he stole from the temple to seduce his ex-wife. The man who did not want to be named said "Undiyalaan should not seduce other men's wives with money stolen from a temple. If she left me and the kids for a man who went to work and earned money I could have understood".

Local political party members also visited the scene and assured the demonstrators that their voices will be heard at the highest levels.

British authorities are expected to take action against Undiyalaan within the next three months.

Meanwhile, demonstrators vowed that they will continue their campaign "until Undiyalaan returns the people's temple back to the people".

Figure 12 Email sent to Jeyadevan reproduced on Vizhippu.net

The email while attacking Jeyadevan targets Sayed Bazeer the head of Islamic Information centre in London. His name came up in the interviews in my fieldwork in London, where respondents claimed Bazeer had to restrict his daily movements for fear of being attacked as he was targeted by LTTE websites. Images of Bazeer morphed³⁰ with Jihadist literature are hosted on pro-LTTE websites. This email attempts to justify

³⁰ In computer animation process, morphing refers to an animation technique in which one image is gradually turned into another. (<http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/M/morphing.html>)

the claims and brand him as a terrorist having links with Islamic extremism. This is alarming for Bazeer, according to his colleagues I interviewed, as they named him to be one of very few activists from the Muslim community of Sri Lanka, working for the rights of Muslims caught in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and a famous critic of the LTTE operations in London.

Political allegations, personal scandals linked with women and sex, were limited to web forums prior to these intense web engagements that developed from 2001 onwards. These have become political weapons and tools in the political confrontations between pro and anti-LTTE fronts. The emergence of 'scandal' and 'cyber scandal' as a weapon of intimidation is an important factor as these scandals or personal attacks take prominence in both the political and web spheres. None of the websites such as theene.com, vizzhipu.net or Tamilaffairs.com are operated or contributed to by experts on cyber security. Yet the websites openly use the term 'cyber terror' for certain images and articles appearing on pro-LTTE sites such as Nitharsanam.com.

A key web site referred to by many of my respondents and noted in many dissident web sites and identified as the instigator of cyber terrorism is the LTTE operated Nitharsanam.com. I argue in Chapter Eight, cyber terrorism has focused mainly on macro frameworks of analysis such as threats to state infrastructures and state institutions. In my research, effects on individual political agents and their behaviour patterns as result of intimidatory web tactics are revealed. I define these effects and the study of such issues as research into 'micro-facets' of cyber terrorism and I argue that they are important aspects in the study of cyber security and cyber conflict. The targeting of dissident activist Jeyadevan through Nitharsanam.com and other pro-LTTE web sites, and his response to such attacks, and the cycle of web intimidation, is captured in my Web Sphere Analysis. In analysing the mini case study I argue that such cyber engagements do emerge theoretically from a power struggle to control the diaspora communities but such online struggles diverts attention to key macro issues such as Tamil homeland and Tamil nationalism.

4.3.2 Jeyadevan's story

R. Jeyadevan came to London in 1979 in the back drop of the political violence that was unleashed in mid 1977 after the general election which brought the United National Party (UNP) and its leader J. R. Jayawardene to power. J.R. Jayawardene was the first executive president of Sri Lanka, the election that brought him to power came with a mandate to introduce a new constitution and a new economic system to Sri Lanka. The aftermath of this victory saw several incidents of violence mainly unleashed against the Sri Lankan Tamil community. Jeyadevan, who completed his advanced levels examination in 1975, was 3 marks short of the grades required to attend university and was a victim of the education standardization policy of the state; he suffered severely in the 1977 violence and left for the UK.

In his political life, Jeyadevan was an ardent supporter of the LTTE and established a Hindu temple known as Eelap Patheeswarar Temple in Wembley and was its management trustee. It is widely believed that the money collected in approximately 35 Hindu temples in London was diverted to the LTTE. He was also a founding member of International Federation of Tamils (IFT), The Confederation of Tamils, Tamil Refugee Action Council (TRAC) through which he established the Tamil Community Housing Association. He also ran the LTTE English publication, *The Tamil Guardian*. Between 1990 and 2000 Jeyadevan was most influential LTTE political activist in London. But by 2003 there were certain discontents growing between the LTTE command and Jeyadevan. The height of this tension was during the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami when Jeyadevan and his colleague Vivekanadan travelled to the Vanni (the LTTE stronghold in Sri Lanka) and were placed under house arrest. The key behind this action was to force a transition of the temple authority established by Jeyadevan to a Tiger front organization named Sivayogam Trust in Tooting, run by Nagendran Seevaratnam an arch rival of Jeyadevan. Jeyadevan was forcefully made to comply to sign papers transferring the ownership of the temple during the period when he was held as a prisoner.

The friction between Seevaratnam and Jeyadevan goes back to the mid 1980s, when Seevaratnam who is also an accountant by profession based in Nigeria, and who had run

Tiger fund raising campaigns, moved to London in 1987. Seevaratnam, who is from LTTE leader Prabhakaran's birthplace of Velvettiturai, quickly established pro-LTTE operations and started fund raising campaigns. He also started the English fortnightly *Tamil Voice International* (TVI) to counter the *Tamil Times* an independent Tamil journal printed and published in London. In this operation, despite already being married, he managed to befriend and marry Jeyadevan's sister who was half his age. Jeyadevan managed to oust Seevaratnam from his operations in the late 1980s using the conflict between Seevaratnam and Anton Balasingham, the late LTTE theoretician, both of whom were struggling to be the top LTTE person in UK. But in the late 1990s Jeyadevan fell out with Balasingham over their different views to approach to the Anti-Terrorism Bill introduced in 2000. Jeyadevan opted to challenge it while Balasingham saw the option of taking the LTTE operations underground whilst avoiding a legal challenge to the Terrorism Act.

When Jeyadevan returned to UK after his incarceration he was a bitter man. Jeyadevan joined forces with the anti-LTTE organizations and political activists in London and established a significant web operation challenging the LTTE organization in London. He began to expose LTTE operations using the internet as a political tool and site, setting up websites with the help of other dissidents. These sites included www.Subidcham.de, www.Tamilaffairs.com and www.Srilankaguardian.org. The LTTE and pro-LTTE operators started to respond to Jeyadevan's web operations and they also became increasingly personal in their attacks. Nitharsanam.com targeted almost any individual it perceived as a threat to the LTTE or to the LTTE machinery and Jeyadevan claimed that Nitharsanam.com and sites like Tamileditors.com, Neruppu.org targeted him and his family.

The intensity of the attacks on him can be seen even at the height of the web storm around the impending EU ban on the LTTE. Nitharsanam.com was relentlessly attacking Jeyadevan. On its main page it carried three stories on 20 May 2006. The first story was responding to the web storm over the issue of EU ban of the LTTE based on a quote from an EU official named as Robert Evans claiming 'it is highly unlikely the LTTE will be banned in EU'. The second story is very interesting, it says 'ENDLF Ramarajan's

wife fell in love with Jeyadevan's Jeep and she is now riding it'. This is a strategy of developing scandals and using them as an insidious attack to dissident politicians.



Figure 13 Image of Jeyadevans vehicle³¹

Figure 13 demonstrate the new ways the LTTE is trying to subjugate the dissidents who are using the internet to challenge them. The image is captured from Nitharsanam.com, where Jeyadevan's vehicle is photographed along with a poster attached to it claiming it been used by his mistress. Jeyadevan claims such web publications as a new type of intimidation unleashed against dissidents who use the internet to expose LTTE activities. This is a new trend in cyberspace where personalized attacks have been used by the LTTE to counter the political organization of the dissidents. The images demonstrate to a certain extent the measures used by the LTTE fronts to silence such dissidents such as Jeyadevan

The third main story in the same page on Nitharsanam.com is titled as 'The father dances at the temple and the son dances with girls in the brothel.' This carried pictures of Jeyadevan's son with his friends and also the image of his daughter with a man (Figures 14³² and 15³³). These developments are captured in the web sphere and seem to be

³¹ <http://www.Nitharsanam.com/?art=17428> (accessed 1 May 2006)

³² <http://www.Nitharsanam.com/?art=17424> (accessed 1 May 2006)

different from traditional political engagements online. The attacks are becoming personal in each and every way that the victim find the notion of public and personal has broken down in cyberspace and political conflict has penetrated the personal space of the family.

கோவிலில் பணத்தடன் ஜெயதேவனின் மகன் விபச்சார
விடுதியில் - ஈழபதீஸ் வரன் கொடை.
[சனிக்கிழமை, 20 மே 2006] [மெஸஸாஜா]



More Photos Go to hear.....

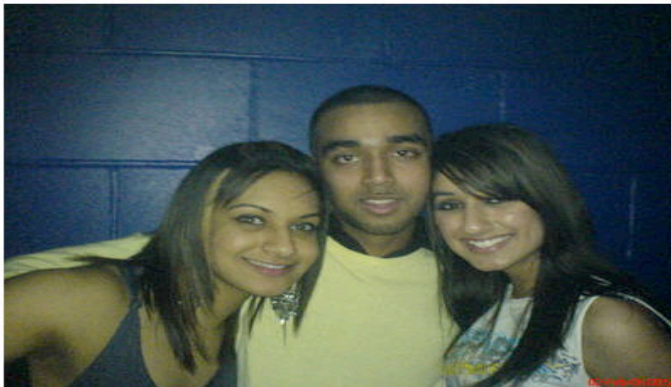


Figure 14 Images of Jeyadevan's son.



Figure 15 Images on Nerrupu.org of Jeyadevans son and his daughter.

The diasporans I interviewed fled Sri Lankan with their families in the first instance for the fear of persecution. They used spatial distance as a safe buffer between them and the actual battle theatres. Though they have become diasporan political activists, they did not expect such intimidation and terror.

These attacks can be further seen, on Nerruppu.org, which is a pro-LTTE site. On 1 May 2006 Neruppu.org carried the message, 'interested to know more information about 'money box' Jeyadevan', embedding the home address and home phone number of Jeyadevan, while stating in Tamil 'give us more information.' This is cited on Figure16³⁴. This is an intimidation strategy, which the pro-LTTE websites have carried out, the target is identified and hit multiple times. Psychological operations are an integral part of military tactics: both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces use it heavily, from propaganda leaflets to scare tactics. It is still difficult to achieve numerous psychological operations at one time on a selected target, so the LTTE has made use of cyberspace for this kind of multiple and ceaseless targeting of dissidents. The attacks on Jeyadevan are a classic example of this.

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http://www.neruppu.org/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1194808030&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1 & (accessed 1 May 2006)



Figure 16 Jeyadevan's address on Neruppu.org.

The discursive construction of Jeyadevan's image and the language employed is one aspect that needs to be analysed, as its the way the LTTE attempts to isolate its enemies and use the web. Such strategies are novel and the impact the web has had on it is tremendous. The significance of this is that, the analysis of conflict in cyberspace is taken beyond the traditional focuses of cyber conflict to focus on micro political spectrums such as effects on individuals and discursive production of power and counter discourse of power through texts in websites.

Foot and Schneider point out, 'The process of discovering/establishing the web sphere under study also includes defining the steps or procedures to be taken to identify the specific elements to be examined' (2004: 6). Thus depending on the characteristics of the web sphere, this process can involve a number of strategies and the above web trends can be elucidated with the use of both discursive and structural analysis of the web sphere. This is why I first introduced the web storms and analysed the contents of the web sites, on different levels. I took the strategy of identifying the key structural changes web sites underwent during this time. These include the text that was used, the images that were embedded, and in some case the changing templates of web sites as responding to the political developments. The discursive analysis of web pages, reading through the texts and images, pointed to a process of creating hegemony and counter hegemony between the pro-LTTE and dissident web operations. The next section looks specifically at the political tactic of intimidation and the very personal types of political attacks directed at individuals. These surfaced when I subjected the web sites to both a structural and discursive analysis and linked diverse political attacks on Jeyadevan to reveal the use of the web for the political victimization of rival activists. The next section looks at the further analysis of the web sphere which captured the response of people like Jeyadevan to such attacks using web space to counter the hegemony of the LTTE.

4.3.3 Jeyadevan responds

As Nitharsanam.com targeted Jeyadevan, the dissident websites mostly influenced by Jeyadevan countered these attacks by unleashing a similar campaign against Sethupuran Nadarajah, well known as 'Sethu' among diaspora activists, and identified as the web master of many LTTE led websites including Nitharsanam.com. These personalised web exchanges were visible even during important political developments such as the two web storms mentioned above, of the EU proscription of the LTTE and the LTTE air attack. The dissidents concentrated on targeting Sethu amidst these web storms. The counter attack was not merely a response to counter Nitharsanam.com, it unfolded more into a full blown offensive on the pro Tiger web sites and its operations.

Jeyadevan who, is also a part of this counter operation, in an interview told me,

Well I challenged Nitharsanam and I have taken on the site and its operators. I have exposed that they had the LTTE insignia and now they taken it off. They have to put in their mission statement that they are not the official LTTE site.

This counter attack can be analysed in two phases. The first wave is unleashed on the website and its operators, and the second concern LTTE activists on the ground. The LTTE activists, like the organization itself, function secretly which is a strength of the LTTE movement as a whole.


In the discursive analysis of this counter attack it is interesting to identify the manner in which the pro-LTTE sites and their handlers were exposed as 'cyber terrorists'. These discursive constructions and positioning have an impact on the LTTE web operations in total. LTTE web operations were mostly highlighted as a propaganda network. In attacks against Jeyadevan, Nitharsanam.com used photographs of him and his family and in the same manner the dissidents found images of Sethu, both to expose him and also to expose his link with the LTTE. The dissidents allege that Sethu, who was responsible for LTTE web operations, even created a domain named www.Jeyadevan.net, and an email address Jeyadevan@gmail.com, and started sending hate mails to Jeyadevan using the email address created under his own name.

Figure 17³⁵, represents the turn that the online political engagements have taken and the expansion of targets once more beyond the activists to their families. The image is from dissident website Tamilaffairs.com, which is accusing the LTTE of using the images of the children of dissidents, but resorting to similar tactics by using images of children of LTTE members in London for political intimidation.

This is a clear example of what I argue is cyberspace's role in creating new political issues that do not parallel developments in Sri Lanka. Instead these new conflicts concern issues that have become important because of the use of the internet for political purposes among the Tamil diaspora activists. Jeyadevan's case brings out the complicated nature of these engagements, and their impact on political priorities among diaspora activists and the focus of politics within the diaspora.

³⁵ <http://www.Tamilaffairs.com/news/dirty-sethu-target-children> (accessed 3 April 2008)

Dirty Sethu target children

3 April, 2008 - 08:26  News

LTTE's trench writer Nadarajah Sethurupan alias Dirty Sethu is carrying out a mass email campaign attacking the children of anti-LTTE campaigners. He has published damning news that young university going Tamil undergraduates in the UK are involved in immoral activities. By accessing the university students facebook website Dirty Sethu has revealed pictures of a daughter (of a prominent LTTE critic) in a university social gathering and have castigated the father of degrading behaviour. The pictures were presented to project a wrong image about the prominent Tamil member and his family.

The very same Dirty Sethu failed to give coverage about the children of the LTTE activists who have published pictures of their social activities in the same website. The pictures below relates to the son of an LTTE activist involved with Dirty Sethu. The father was the proprietor of the LTTE's Eelam House in London claimed to be sold for £900,000.



These photographs have been published to expose the shenanigan campaign of Dirty Sethu/Vinodanee and his associates. The independent media will equally publish further damning pictures, if the LTTE men and its sewage writer Dirty Sethu/Vinodanee continues to target individuals in an abusive and degrading manner.

Figure 17 Images from dissident web site Tamilaffairs.com

4.3.4 Dissidents resort to web intimidation

The attack on dissidents like Jeyadevan has sparked a significant response from dissidents as well, though the dissidents who earlier were even quite afraid to be politically engaged among the diaspora, have started to respond to the LTTE threat, virtually or in cyberspace, with cyber-attacks on LTTE operations. This full blown cyber engagement, using web sites, has had a significant impact on the traditional forms of web based politics such as informational campaigns, propaganda campaigns and strategies of electronic disobedience.

The first phase of the counter attack included dissident operated websites such as Subcicham.de, Elanasam.com, Vizhippu.com, Nerrupu.com and Tamilaffairs.com taking

on LTTE web sites which the dissidents identified as carrying out terror tactics. Thus these dissident web sites commenced a concentrated attack on the LTTE web site Nitharsanam.com and its web producers. Such attacks were also directed to pro-LTTE web sites such as tamileditors.com, yarl.com and Eelarnation.com. In the second phase of the counter-attack the dissident web sites launched a campaign to identify and isolate political activists supporting the LTTE. According to my Tamil dissident respondents, LTTE activists in London were soon exposed for using web operations, and considerable background details about these individuals and their connections with the LTTE were published online. In my interviews, the dissidents argued that such tactics were adopted to counter the LTTE and expose those activists that thrived on the secrecy of their operations and their networks. With dissident websites exposing these, and using targeted attacks on these activists, some respondents claimed that some pro-LTTE activists, such as some pro-LTTE councillors, have been forced to abandon or scale down most of their political operations.

The caption featured in Figure 18³⁶ is from Tamilaffairs.com which clearly identifies four London councillors in a pro-LTTE rally. They are identified as the ‘Gang of Four’ and the web site links these councillor’s with the LTTE, using the image of protest and their presence at it and also brings them together as one team working for the LTTE. The websites identified four Labour councillors of Sri Lankan ethnic origin and began carrying photographs of them participating in events organized to support the LTTE, and in a few months these councillors were identified as the Gang of Four. This campaign to isolate the so called ‘Gang of Four’ and their capability to organize rallies supporting the LTTE, had a significant impact with numbers dwindling in the events organized by them.

³⁶ <http://www.Tamilaffairs.com/node/358> (accessed 5 June 2007)

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Gang of four determined to challenge the authorities
 9 July, 2007 - 21:24 News

The four pro-LTTE local authority members Cllr Paul Sathyanesan, Cllr Daya Idaikadar, Cllr Eliza Packiyadevi Mann, Cllr Sashikala Suresh have decided to challenge the British authorities by publicising that they are holding a demonstration against the Sri Lankan government in the London heartland Trafalgar Square on 14 July 2007.

The gang of four Tamil Councillors involved in the July 2006 Hyde Park rally of the LTTE and many other demonstrations since then are espousing the cause of the LTTE vigorously.



Overjoyed Cllr Paul Sathyanesan, Cllr Daya Idaikadar, Cllr Eliza Packiyadevi Mann, Cllr Sashikala Suresh and her husband London Baba Suresh at a tamasha in Hyde Park in July 2006 sporting the proscribed Tamil Tigers. This tamasha led to the arrest of LTTE head A Christanthakumar (S Santhan) and LTTE's youth wing head Golden Lambers by the Counter Terrorism Unit of the Metropolitan police on 21 June 2007.

Whilst their application for the demonstration is being considered by the Greater London Authority, bundles of printed notices in Tamil and English have been placed in many Tamil outlets in London to publicise the event inviting people to attend. LTTE's nitharsanam.com which is the campaign organ of the Gang of Four gave brief publicity for the event for few hours today (9/7). The reason for the removal of the news in the website is unknown.



Another demonstration of the Gang of Four in front of the Unicef offices in Holborn in London last month saw LTTE activists holding proscribed LTTE flags without fear. The Holborn demonstration too was said to be organised by the leader of Gang of Four Cllr Daya Idaikadar.

The LTTE Councillors to this date have not made any public statements about the atrocities committed by the LTTE. Child recruitment by the LTTE in Sri Lanka is an issue currently widely spoken about in the Tamil community. Instead of taking an even hand approach of condemning both the Government of Sri Lanka and LTTE, these Councillors are carrying out without fear a determined campaign to strengthen the hands of the LTTE for it to maintain its status quo to keep its own people under subjugation.

It is also widely believed the Gang of Four are planning to hold the event to coincide with the last years event of the LTTE in the Hyde Park which was held under the pretext of remembering the 1983 July anti-Tamil violence in Sri Lanka.

These Councillors are said to be pre-occupied with the LTTE activities than doing what they were elected for as Councillors. In the last Council election Cllr Daya Idaikadar and Cllr Sashikala Suresh promised the Tamil residence of Harrow that they will facilitate an exclusive sport grounds for the Tamils. This promise remains unfulfilled and the Councillors are fully engaged in espousing the terror cause of the LTTE.

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Figure 18 Tamilaffairs.com identify Pro-LTTE councillors in London Boroughs.

The dissident web sites also exposed the LTTE's criminal acts and continuously exposed Nitharsanam.com as a site which carried actual threats to lives of the Tamil dissidents. On 16 August 2006, www.uthr.org carried this statement:

The LTTE-intelligence related web site Nitharsanam devoted 7 lines to the killing of Kethes. It began, 'Infamous traitor of the Tamil race Ketheswaran Loganathan was shot dead a short while ago. Known as Tamil Betrayer Kadirgamar Junior, he was deputy head of the government Peace Secretariat... This derisive snigger is the stamp of the killers, their very nature and their values that are the antithesis of decency and true heroism. The implicit boast in the killing and its timing is that this organisation can and would pick off its unarmed opponents at will.

The above analysis of web sites, inter site activity captured in web storms where rival web sites were trading attacks on each other, and observations made by the respondents, were possible because of two things. Firstly the Web Sphere Analysis framework captured these web sites and their inter-site activity, thus enabling us to view them as a unit of analysis. The web storms were two such examples as numerous websites could be

traced revolving around political issues. Trends such as the attack on Jeyadevan could be systematically analysed and presented as they happened along with their implications for political activism in the Tamil diaspora. Secondly the analytical framework proposed in Web Sphere Analysis of engaging online data with site producers and the offline stakeholders of the issues related to the web activity. These advantages in framing and analysing contributed to identify an important theoretical facet to online political mobilization. The research analysis pointed out the use of real identities of political activists especially in web confrontations. These findings contradict one of the key arguments for the use of internet for political mobilization based on the ability for activists to be hidden or anonymous in cyberspace (Turkle 1996).

Cyber theories focusing mainly on activism have claimed that cyberspace became a favourite tool for activists because of the ability to be hidden or, as Turkle points out, it has the potential for any one to create and make a projection of a constructed persona (1999). In my research the dissidents introduced notions such as 'safe space' and 'democratic space' in the context of cyberspace. These terms were used to stress physical safety rather than the traditional concepts of cyberspace as a site encouraging anonymity and safety based on features of anonymity.

The issue of anonymity and its advantages was first witnessed in the rise of hacker culture and the expansion of hackers online, and the expansion of the targets selected by hackers such as national defence establishments like the Pentagon. An Israeli hacker by the name of 'analyser', whose real name was Ehud Tenebaum (Jordan 2004:26), was famous for targeting and attacking the Pentagon's computer network. The increasing importance of anonymity and its link with activism emerged in literature on social movements (Olsen 2004, McDonald 2006), with the absorption of hackers into mainstream cyber activism and identifying them as being part of activist organizations rather than lone hackers.

Anthropologists such as Taggart (2006), who have examined hacker activism among Palestine youth organizations, call this 'encrypted identity' and claim it is needed for activists to challenge hegemonic discourse, while at the same time making it hard for

ethnographic research online. Activists began addressing each other, and also reached out to their audiences by their 'screen names' (2003:148). Jordan and Taylor (2004) bring out the transformation of the hacker group Cult of the Dead Cow (CDC) into a large scale 'hacktivistick', or activist group online, which they describe as a digitally correct activist³⁷ group. They point out the challenges in such research as the difficulty in looking at their operations through the fluidity of identities of individuals involved.

In contrast to the existing theories of anonymity and its importance in web based political activism, the tactical ploys in the Tamil diasporan web sphere are exactly the opposite of cyber enthusiasts who used the freedom of the net and its anonymity as an advantage in political activism. The argument for this has been the ability for political actors to be anonymous and thus evade the control of state or by the use cryptography to be ultra secretive in their operations. Anonymity has been a key feature in cyber theories which discuss political mobilization, for example current theories about Zapatista movement and its internet-savvy subcomandante Marcos, as secretive organizations of the anti globalization movement. Turkle claims , 'The fact that self presentation is written means that there is time to reflect upon and edit ones "composition", which makes the shy to be outgoing, the nerdy sophisticated'(1999:644).

Research into cyber activism brings out the problematic side to the notion of anonymity, due to the linkage between credibility and anonymity, thus as cyber activism involves a lot of anonymous identities it makes their objectives and practices superficially less credible (Gurak and Logi 2003:45).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the online activities of both pro-LTTE web sites and dissidents, explaining the clash of two rival political ideologies. The Web Sphere Analysis captured the 'web storms', or the intensified web activities between the rival groups, during key political battles. The web sites were de-coded to highlight their political significance and political attributes, such as the LTTE hegemony reflected in

³⁷ According to Jordan and Taylor (2004)'digitally correct hacktivism' is focused on the notion of 'rights of all to information'.

web operations symbolised in texts, images and structural features embedded in the architecture of web sites. It also explored the dissidents use of web space in intense political developments as reflected in the web storms. The chapter also introduced the level of politics to which the LTTE has had to resort to because of online politics. The attacks on Jeyadevan as revealed in this chapter demonstrate that the internet has been able to drag the LTTE away from its political position of fighting for a Tamil homeland and being representative of the Tamil people. The LTTE always managed to stay away from dirty politics and blamed the other political groups and parties for becoming involved in political scandals. The LTTE positioned its politics as having much deeper and higher importance and preserved it self as an example of an organization which did not get involved in petty political conflicts. But in countering Jeyadevan's campaigns and attempting to target Jeyadevan, the LTTE has been dislodged from their moral high ground in political engagements. This was an important aspect of Tamil diaspora politics which came out of my analysis on the internet and its use in Tamil diaspora politics. This is further explored from the view point of respondents in Chapters Six to Eight where I present the findings based on my fieldwork research. Chapter Eight discusses the use of the internet to unleash violence and intimidate political activists and the sorts of attacks discussed in this chapter will be looked at more broadly under the themes of cyber conflict and cyber-terrorism and based on interview data from the respondents. The Web Sphere Analysis showed that the political use of the web dominated by the LTTE for propaganda purposes has been surpassed by more interactive political engagements and the use of the internet for wider political objectives from 2001 – 2008, with more political stakeholders proliferating the LTTE dominated web presence and challenging LTTE's domination. By exposing the interactivity between rival web sites and activists the chapter also, makes the claim that the online has effects on the offline political conduct of political activists. It argues that the online is not a mere reflection of the offline but is a more dynamic phenomenon which can generate offline reaction to online content and interactions. Thus the analysis confirms the findings of my fieldwork research where the respondents were claiming there were real world impacts arising from online activities. There is a significant subsection concerning the political processes of the Tamil diaspora manifesting in these virtual spaces. These web sites are not purely interacting with each other; they are engaging with actual political activists and this maintains constant offline and online connections and relationships.

The Tamil dissidents also embraced the use of web technologies and for them it materialised as a source of power, a site of political practice and endowed them with multiple political options in shaping their political practices. These tensions which are emerging between the Pro-LTTE/LTTE factions and the dissidents for the use, occupation and political gains in cyberspace has made the study of political engagements among Tamil diasporans interesting and casts light on different dimensions within diaspora politics itself. The tensions in political engagement between the pro-LTTE elements and the dissidents again are a key feature in the chapter as these tensions seem to be taking a circular pattern with web engagements driving them. Unique features originating in cyberspace as a result of these engagements develop an inherent dynamic to spawn new political issues within the diaspora community.

In the case of the Tamil diaspora web politics I argue that the web initiative has affected political priorities among diaspora political activists that mostly focus on the developments within the conflict in Sri Lanka. This indicates a change in the nature of web politics. Whereas in 1995–2000 online activism followed the offline shifts in the battlefield now web politics spawns new issues beyond the battlefield which can affect offline activism. The impact of these engagements on their lives brought out on the notions of cyber conflict and cyber terror. These forms of cyber conflict tactics are discussed as expression of intensity in the struggles between the Pro-LTTE and dissident groups. This factor will be revisited, examining its importance as a political strategy and its effect politically in section Three.

Chapter 5. Political Symbols in the internet

5.1 Introduction

This chapter forms the second analysis based online research; it looks at the web content captured through Web Sphere Analysis. Chapter Four captured the high amount of interaction web sites have generated through inter-site activity and cross actor participation in the analysis of web storms. This chapter analyses web content that has been used as images to gain political advantage in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. These images I argue are made to be strong visual representations and the circumstances of their production are meant to have political effects.

In the first section of this chapter I focus on graphs generated using a visualization tool to display the amount of interactions some of the websites I have selected for my research have with other related websites. These websites included organizations ranging from LTTE operations, pro-LTTE fronts, anti LTTE groups, the Sri Lankan government, International institutions to local and international media organizations. The graphs are used to demonstrate the importance of the websites I have selected based on their roles. In this light I look at the use of images and texts in such websites as politically significant symbols and utilities in the Tamil diasporan political sphere. These images I argue are symbols of power, resistance and political identity, thus representing the discursive construction of political ideologies of the LTTE and the dissidents. The online political processes I introduce in this research are not categorically analysed in the existing cyber politics literature; this is why it makes these types of political formations and tactics important in expanding the parameters of knowledge concerning cyber political initiatives.

Thus I look at developments in online politics on a par with Tamil diaspora politics. I look at their importance at certain levels in the sphere of Tamil diaspora politics. One of the uses of these websites is deploying these sites for misinformation campaigns contrary to web politics such as in the Zapatista case or Chinese dissidents' web

operations which were used to provide accurate information. Another key theme discussed in the chapter is that the web images are extensively used for positioning the LTTE leadership in the context of the post LTTE split scenario from 2004 onwards. Finally, I look at the increased use of military jargon on pro-LTTE web sites attempting to establish an informed knowledge base among the diasporans relating to its military capabilities. I claim in this chapter that the use of web sites for political gains using texts and images is an integral part of the power project of the LTTE to dominate the Tamil diaspora. Finally the chapter engages with hack attacks that deface or hijack web domains; this is analysed as a form of political visualization. The term visualization has two distinct meanings, firstly in visual research it means the analysis of images and graphs to identify the social context in which they are produced and what meaning they can be assigned culturally. Technology plays a key role in modern times in how images are produced, positioned and displayed to the society. Rose points out that:

Technologies used in the making of an image determine its form, meaning and effect. Clearly, visual technologies do matter to how an image looks and therefore to what it might do and what might be done to it. (Rose 2001: 14)

Thus visual researchers such as Rose give images a deeper reading to unravel the meanings and the context in which they are produced. Secondly, the term visualization has a direct link with the technical vocabulary of Information communication technologies (ICT). One of the definitions of visualization in this discipline is: ‘Visualization can refer to: Graphic Visualization as in any technique for creating images, diagrams, or animations to communicate any message. Also used for Information visualization, Knowledge visualization, Scientific visualization and Product visualization’³⁸. Thus in this chapter I use the term visualization to denote the computer generated images and visuals to denote images or pictures used in websites captured for my research. I argue these web images are discursive in nature and represent ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ and one situated as a symbol of political power. In political engagements between rival ideologies and hegemonic projects I

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<http://www.experiencefestival.com/a/Visualization/id/579132>

argue such political visualization efforts on web sites end up becoming subjected to hacks, resulting in losing the original image or in my analysis the interface of truth.

5.2 Visualisation of web sphere

Prior to engaging with the use of images and text in online political processes among the diasporan websites I will introduce the importance of visualization by demonstrating the linkages certain websites have developed in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. Web Sphere Analysis was all about capturing web sites which were important for my research, and analyzing them in a single unit. This enabled the research to be carried out around inter-site activity and to derive political meaning. I am presenting below two graphs which depict the scale of interconnectivity of two different web sites, www.Nitharsanam.com (Figure 19) the pro-LTTE website, and the dissident web operation www.thenee.com (Figure 20).

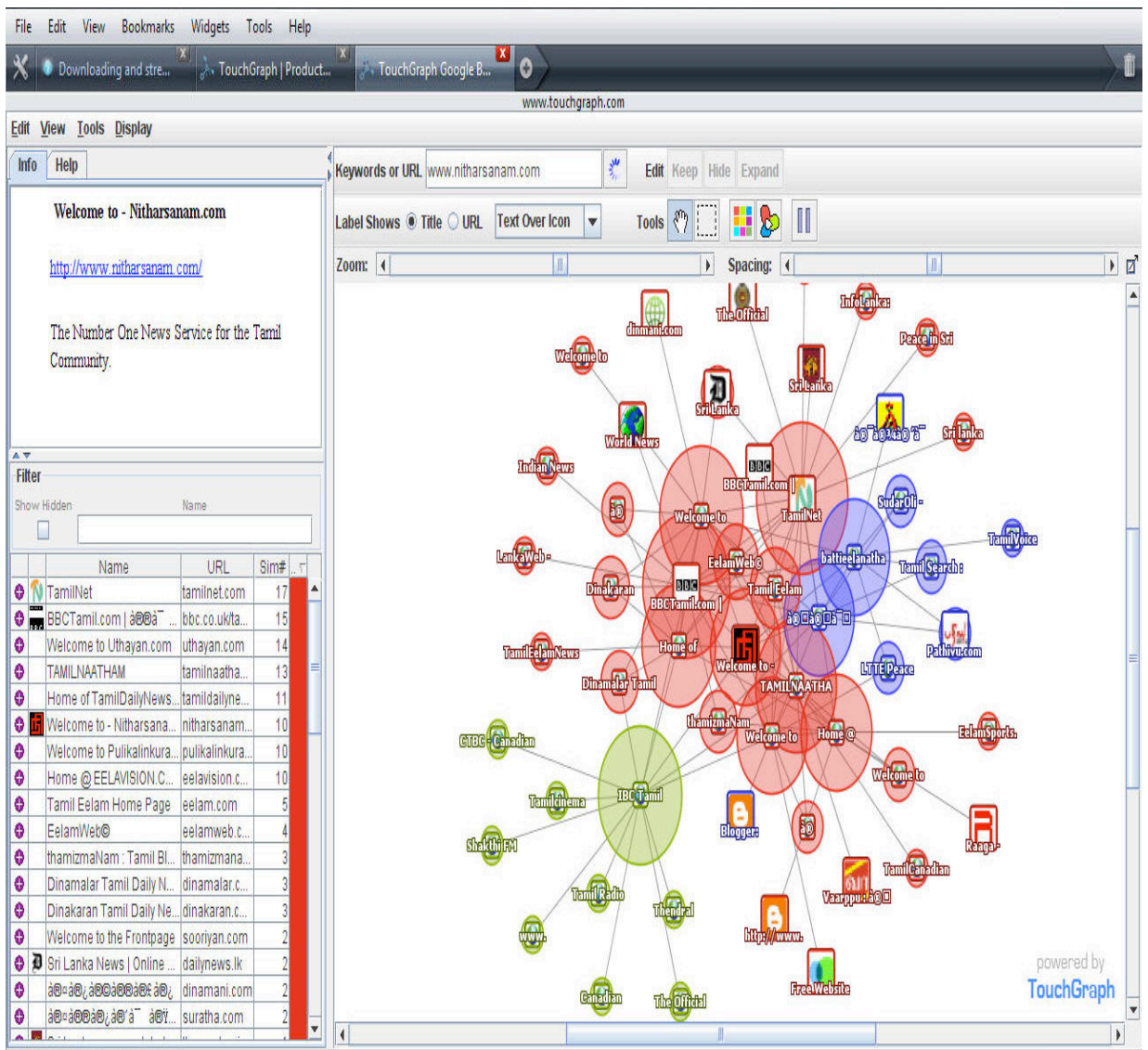


Figure 19 Visualization of the linkages the Pro-LTTE Nitharsanam.com has with other websites

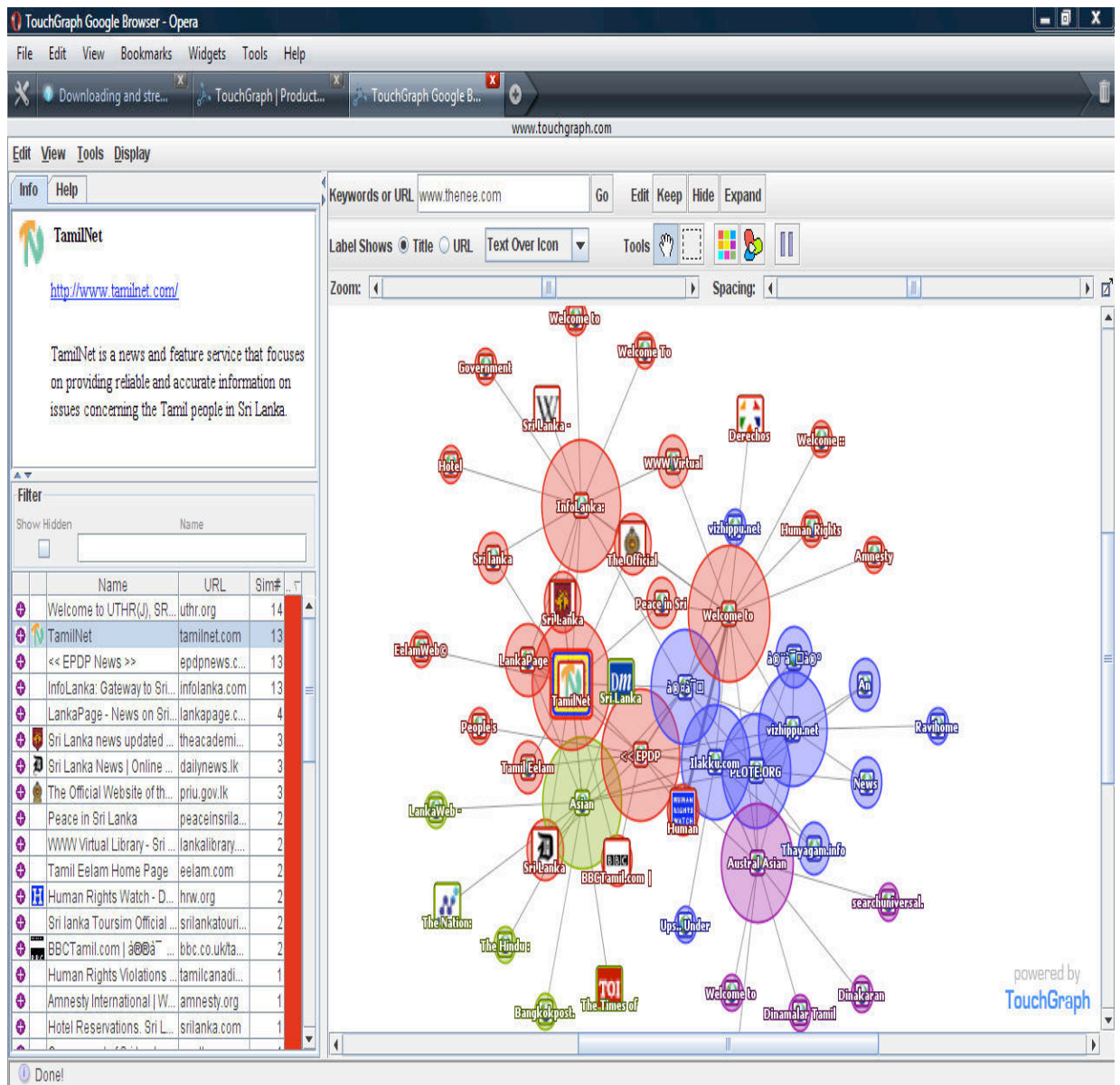


Figure 20 Visualization of the linkages dissident web site thenne.com has with other websites

To generate the above images I used a visualization aid which is embedded on the website www.touchgraph.com. Touchgraph is a business venture which specialises in providing computer generated visualisation services. Their website contains an integrated demonstration tool designed for generating visualisations of web networking using the search engine Google to visualise the levels of interactivity among web sites. This is done through using Google’s database of related web sites and the way Google views and identifies the networking of websites according to its data on the websites.

In the above graph which visualise the interconnection between the web sites, the larger circles represent larger domains or sites which are dominating the flow of information and symbolise the importance of websites such as Nitharsanam.com, Thenee.com and Tamilnet.com. In Figure 33 where the Touchgraph visualisation of the dissident web site Thenee.com reveals that Tamilnet.com maintains maximum inter-linkage with the dissident sites. These inter-linkages are also maintained through other web sites which link with the larger web domains. This visualisation helps to justify the comparative analysis, based on the rivalries and contestation between the pro-LTTE and dissident groups. The above two images were to visualize the interaction between web sites and their inter-linkages with important organizations

5.3 Misinformation campaigns

My online research and interviews with pro-LTTE activists highlighted the importance of cyber space in achieving tactical gains. Tactical gains included the ability to wage psychological warfare against the Sri Lankan government, against anti-LTTE elements and also to keep the diaspora Tamils closer to the conflict. LTTE operatives had to deal with Sri Lankan armed forces and their psychological operations which were an important weapon in the war against the LTTE for the Sri Lankan forces. The LTTE used cyber space to the maximum to unleash their own type of psychological warfare on the Sri Lankan state and dissidents alike. In this section I refer to the development of ‘deception/lies’ by LTTE as a weapon that can wage psychological warfare and to counter Sri Lankan government propaganda.

I show in this section the tactics are deployed in web sites reputed for being credible and consistent in reporting on the conflict in Sri Lanka. In particular Tamilnet.com acquired the reputation linking the alternative voice of Sri Lankan Tamil affairs since its inception in 1997. My analysis points out that even Tamilnet.com has from 2004 onwards become part of the misinformation strategy of the LTTE. Tamil dissidents whom I interviewed referred to the intentions of web sites such as Tamilnet.com and the websites are increasingly fused with the military prerogatives of the LTTE.

In one of my interviews with Sutha, the pro-LTTE activist who was earlier introduced in chapter Two, it was revealed that the LTTE was using the web for what he termed 'misinformation campaigns'. To expand on his analysis of the use of web politics by the LTTE he cited the example of the LTTE developing the story of a Tiger air attack on the largest Sri Lankan military base in the North. Such tactical advantages were exploited by the LTTE using cyber space to spearhead misinformation campaigns Sutha said,

It was a guessing game and the diasporans were waiting for the attacks and **at** the same time kept the Sri Lankan government believing that there will be no attack as all claims of attacks before the real attacks were misinformation.

The actual LTTE air attacks, which took place in March 2007, demonstrated the calculated strategies of the LTTE but the important factor raised in this argument is the strategic dependence on tactics such as the deception campaign. Such campaigns were used by the LTTE and pro-LTTE operations to build-up an expectation of the air attack among Tamil diasporans much before it actually took place. The hype of the air attack was important politically as it was a type of attack never carried out before by the LTTE in the history of the conflict.

On 11 August, 2006 seven months before the actual air attack, Tamilnet.com carried an article claiming, 'Tiger air craft rockets Palaly base, curfew in Jaffna', and tiger spokesman confirming the attack said, 'we will use our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines in an all out defensive measure to protect our homeland'. The construction of the text which is totally deceptive also goes on to introduce terms such as 'marine' and it was the first time this term appeared on a pro-LTTE website. The web page is captured and presented in Figure 21³⁹. The LTTE were staging a campaign and rallying the diasporans even prior to the actual attack. Thus it was more than a misinformation campaign as Sutha claimed. It was the virtual positioning of the war and the web was being used in this instance to bring in the cinematic effect of using a trailer.

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<http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=19186> (accessed 11 August 2006)

3RD LEAD

Tiger aircraft rockets Palaly base, curfew in Jaffna

[TamilNet, Friday, 11 August 2006, 15:53 GMT]

At least one unidentified aircraft flew over the Sri Lankan military base at Palaly firing rockets at around 9.30 p.m. Friday, sources in Jaffna town said. Sri Lanka Army (SLA) artillery fire being directed from the base stopped after the attack, the sources said. Meanwhile a curfew has been clamped on Jaffna town. The LTTE has vowed to repel the SLA offensive on the Elephant Pass area.



Military Spokesperson of the Tigers, Mr. Irasaiah Ilanthirayan (Marshall)

"We will use our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines in an all out defensive measure to protect our people and homeland," Mr. Irasaiah Ilanthirayan, the military spokesman of the Tigers told TamilNet when contacted to comment on the reports of aerial attack on Palaly military base.

Sri Lankan artillery elsewhere kept up their shelling towards LTTE controlled southern Jaffna from there large numbers of people are fleeing into Kilinochchi district.

The A9 road in LTTE controlled areas along which civilians were attempting to move was being targeted by SLA shelling, sources said.

The LTTE's official radio, Voice of Tigers (VoT), meanwhile urged civilians living close to SLA artillery fire responding to the SLA offensive would target camps there.

The Tiger radio urged civilians to stay 1 km away from Eluthumadduval, Pulo-pallai, Kilali, Kodikamam, Kachchai and Varani in particular.

Meanwhile, the Superintendent of Police in Jaffna, Erik Perera, imposed an indefinite curfew from 7:00 p.m. Friday in Jaffna.

Figure 21 Misinformation campaign of the LTTE

In the aftermath of the actual air attack in March 2007, the LTTE web operations continued with their 'misinformation campaign'. I argue that these misinformation campaigns come in a set of coordinated stages and they have interludes between each other where the real event is incorporated into the chain of events. In the second stage of the misinformation campaign based on the air attacks, the LTTE attempted to magnify the damage caused on the Sri Lankan air bases by its air raids. Pro-LTTE web sites depended again on the importance of image as a political object; they used images incorporating satellite imagery and the technologies of digital imaging depicting massive damages caused to the Sri Lankan air base by the air attacks. These images were of huge symbolic value for the Tigers and they used these images heavily on most of the LTTE and pro-LTTE websites to create a real time linkage to the diasporans with the actual air attack. Nitharsanam.com used satellite imagery of the Katunayake airbase and attempted to pin point the impact of the bombs.

The misinformation campaigns were important for the LTTE, enabling them to maintain a tactical edge over the enemy. On 28 April 2007 the Air Tigers struck again, bombing a Sri Lankan military base, and this triggered a response from the Sri Lankan air force where by the air force bombed many LTTE targets in several sorties in the North over the next few days. On 30 April 2007 Tamilnet.com broke another story. It said ‘LTTE claim Sri Lankan Mig 27 Jet fighter shot down’ as shown in Figure 23⁴⁰. The LTTE spokesman’s quote is very important: ‘our auto activate air defence system attacked the Sri Lanka Air force Mig 27 bomber when it approached our Ira’naimadu airfield’. Reports from the Sri Lankan government and other independent news sources verified there were no air force sorties carried out at that time.

3RD LEAD

SLAF bomber shot over Ira'naimadu

[TamilNet, Monday, 30 April 2007, 11:22 GMT]

Sri Lanka Air Force's (SLAF's) aircraft on a bombing raid south of Ira'naimadu in Vannai around 2:45 p.m. spewed large cloud of smoke after a explosion and the jet suspended the bombing raid struggling to maintain height, traders in Kilinochchi who saw the troubled aircraft said. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports from Colombo said a Israeli-built fast attack Kfir which took off from Katunayake Air Force base Monday has failed to return to the base.

Military officials of the Liberation Tigers told TamilNet that their anti-aircraft defence system is automatically activated when an intrusive aircraft is detected in Ira'naimadu area.

Figure 22 Tamilnet.com claiming the LTTE has shot down a Sri lankan bomber.

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<http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=22029> (accessed 30 April 2007)

LTTE: Sri Lankan MIG-27 jet fighter shot down

[TamilNet, Monday, 30 April 2007, 14:38 GMT]

A Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) jet fighter was shot down by Liberation Tigers air-defence system when the bomber approached the airfield of the Tamileelam Air Force (TAF) in Ira'naimadu Monday around 2:30 p.m., LTTE military spokesman Irasiah Ilanthirayan said. The SLAF bomber, following a loud explosion, went down into the sea, Mr. Ilanthirayan said.



Military Spokesperson of the Tigers, Mr. Irasiah Ilanthirayan (Marshall)

"Our auto activated air-defence-system attacked the Sri Lanka Air Force MIG-27 bomber when it approached Ira'anaimadu airfield on a bombing mission," Ilanthirayan said claiming responsibility for the attack.

The Russian made MiG-27 is a ground attack aircraft, originally built by the Mikoyan-Gurevich design bureau in the Soviet Union, and was intended to fly its missions at low altitude.

The bomber with a "crocodile nose," containing laser rangefinder, is capable of carrying large variety of bombs, unguided rockets, and missiles.

Figure 23 Tamilnet.com contradicts own news item

The LTTE's ploy of carrying out misinformation campaigns prior to the actual air attack, and then resorting to similar tactics to say they have the capacity to shoot down government jets, is an attempt to discursively construct, the LTTE's ability to dominate the skies over Sri Lanka and its ability to protect the skies or spaces of Eelam. A discursive analysis of the text reveals it to be far from a mere news article: the terminology such as, 'automatic air defence' and 'anti aircraft defence system' is a reiteration of LTTE's military strengths and this comes in the wake of the successful bombings made by its air wings. There were two articles on the shooting down incident and they were inaccurate as the articles were contradictory. While one article claims 'Mig 27 ground attack craft' was shot down, the other claims 'Kafir bomber' (Figures 22 – 23⁴¹) was the target. Thus the site producers may have missed the informative value but the intentions of the articles were clear, the need through this misinformation campaign was to establish LTTE's strengths and its claims to the skies.

The key issue here is the extensive use of Tamilnet.com to carry out the political and military tactics of 'deception'. This website was to be the counter media space in the context of the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka, it focused on the alternative information source of the developments in North and East of Sri Lanka and the plight of the Tamil people. Whitaker (2007) notes that the chief editor of Tamilnet.com wanted to develop

⁴¹ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=22028> (accessed 30 April 2007)

credibility among the readership of Tamilnet.com. This message according to Whitaker (2007) was communicated directly to the founders of the Tamilnet.com project by the late Sivaram Dharmaratnam as soon as he was appointed chief editor of Tamilnet.com. Whitaker summarises this as, ‘henceforth, its news stories were to be double-source and carefully fast checked, so as to be accurate beyond challenge’ (2007:121). Tamilnet.com is one of the largest information repositories which is constantly referred by other key web operations including international media, international governments and the Sri Lanka government and its other security and information agencies. This is very clear in Figure 24 of the inter-linkages Tamilnet.com has captured through touchgraph.

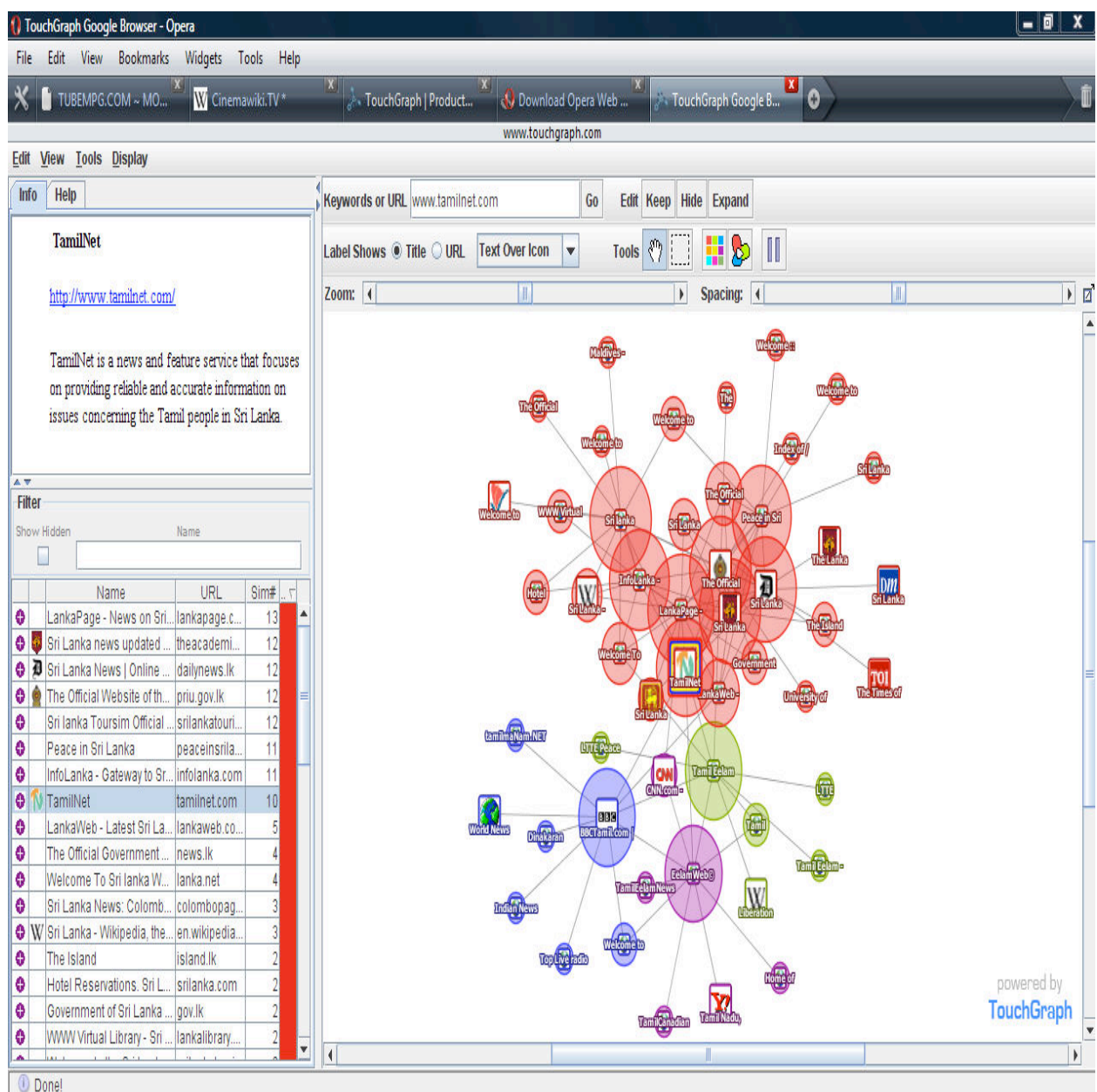


Figure 24 Visualization of the linkages the Pro-LTTE Tamilnet.com has with other websites

These changing tactics in online politics and the use of internet and websites such as Tamilnet.com for deception politics are having the effect of maintaining perception of the LTTE's military prowess which it perceives can work as a deterrent to dissidents while consolidating LTTE's support base and confidence among diaspora communities. Thus politics of deception using web technologies is an attribute of the LTTE hegemonic project to control the Tamil diaspora as well as a warning mechanism for any one who opposes their authority.

The virtual sphere enabled the LTTE to achieve the political objectives of maintaining a coherent grip on diaspora fronts whilst boosting its international image-building campaigns. While the Jihad movement did not care less about the international image they acquired from circulating images and videos of attacks and beheadings of their enemies or rivals, the LTTE filtered them and always tended to justify their use of violence. In the above example the Tiger spokesman always alludes to the 'protection of our people and homeland'. From the analysis of the politics of deception as a virtual strategy of hegemony I will analyse the use of text and images on their websites as a tactic for the political and military positioning of the LTTE.

5.4 From military symbolism to reasserting Tamil/LTTE leadership

The image of the LTTE and the mechanisms of its hierarchy are all based on decisions made by its leader Prabhakaran. The image of the leader is an important symbol for the organization, along with the image of the Eelam map used to symbolize the homeland which was always kept alive among the diaspora community by the LTTE. The recent confrontations with dissidents and the rise of internet use by the dissidents witnessed the LTTE leadership being challenged and its authority questioned. The split within the LTTE in 2004 was the catalyst for increased dissident activity, and demonstrated for many that the impossible is possible whereby the LTTE leader could be challenged. In the wake of such open challenges to his authority by one of his top lieutenants and this split spilling into the diaspora, the LTTE used an aggressive web campaign to reassert the importance and dominance of its leader V. Prabhakaran.

After 2004 there was a resurgence in net activity to re-position the LTTE leader as the sole authority of the Tamil community. This effort I identify as the 'resurgence of the cult of Prabhakaran' and try to analyse the role of cyber space in this political positioning. I also look in a sub section of this chapter at the LTTE's attempt to display its military strengths especially at a time when it is challenged from within and from outside. These challenges include: international efforts to curb transnational terrorism; the Sri Lankan government selecting the path of warfare to eject the LTTE from its strongholds in the East and North; and dissident diaspora challenges.

The LTTE as an organization has faced challenges from many quarters in the last few years and some of these developments depleted the organization militarily while others challenged it politically. The political challenges it faced were mainly from the dissident activists who were actively engaged in political campaigns against the LTTE, questioning its legitimacy in representing the Tamil people in Sri Lanka. As Prabhakaran has made clear, he and the LTTE are synonymous and not two different entities.

Pro-LTTE websites actively started to respond to these challenges to the leadership in subtle ways. In my research I analyse the web content especially the images and texts used from 2004 onwards by the LTTE as a means of responding to these challenges. This discursive construction is supported by the structural embodiment of the web sites with the message focusing more on the LTTE as a military outfit. The cult of Prabhakaran is not a novel phenomenon. It is the attempt to reposition Prabhakaran and his authority mostly through pro-LTTE web sites which traditionally featured and gave priority to objectives of the Tamil liberation struggle including the notion of the homeland and Tamil nation. The pre 2004 web sites were structured around two principles. The first was to pay significant attention to their leader but symbolically image-wise focus on the map of Eelam as the major symbol of the struggle while secondly, the LTTE was represented using the image of the LTTE flag. These traditional web images were substituted by the increased use of images of the LTTE leader. In a classic example of this transformation, photographs of the LTTE leader taken with the pilots who flew the light aircraft which attacked Colombo in March 2007 were circulated and posted on all pro-Tiger websites and international news agencies piggybacked on

them (Figure 25⁴²). Politically this was a significant challenge to the Sri Lankan state while sending a clear message to the diaspora to believe in the LTTE's strengths and its expanding military capabilities. The LTTE in all of the phases of war especially from the mid nineties projected military gains through cyber space extensively, even though it has lost significant hold over the boundaries of the so called homeland. These images also asserted the importance of the LTTE leader and his contribution to making the LTTE air attacks a reality.



Figure 25 The LTTE leader with the pilots of the Tamil Tiger air wing.

These images all included the LTTE leader and it seems the leader is projected in such a way that he is turned into a more of a symbolic avatar than an actual leader. This section of the analysis uses the structural analysis approach as one of the three key approaches to Web Sphere Analysis. I look at the use of images and the importance of each individual image that is embedded in the web sites and the political significance of these images of the LTTE leadership. Some of these images form the banners of certain websites and some are used in news articles. I argue that all these images have deeper meaning which is linked strategically with the text in these web sites for political gains. I discuss this argument based on the use of images of the LTTE leader with the text of his Heroes day speech in November 2007 on Tamilnet.com.

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<http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=21668> (accessed 26 March 2007)



Figure 26 Images which accompanied text of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran’s Heroes day speech 2007



Figure 27 Image which accompanied text of the LTTE leader Prabhakaran’s Heroes day speech 2005 on Tamilnet.com.

The Images in Figure 26⁴³ depict LTTE leader Prabhakaran in different modes. This annual speech of the LTTE leader is used by the Sri Lankan government and all parties interested in the Sri Lankan conflict to get a sense of the LTTE’s strategies and the policies that it will adopt for that particular year. Tamilnet.com produced three pictures

⁴³<http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=23870> (accessed 27 November 2007)

of the LTTE leader along with the text of his speech in 2007. This was the first time three photographs were used with the text of the heroes' day message. The web images were first used in November 2004 simultaneously with the text of the LTTE's leader's speech. This image is featured on Figure 27⁴⁴. These images of 2007 presented in Figure 26 are part of an attempt by the LTTE, using a number of photographs of the LTTE leader in various poses to reinforce his presence and authority. I analyse the importance of these images as visual symbols of political and military authority. The image has many meanings and its representation is extremely important. I try to locate the properties of each image and its contents. The contents include the background and the physical objects that surround the LTTE leader and the personal accessories that are visible in the images. These objects include the podium with the LTTE insignia, the gun belt worn around Prabhakaran's waist, three flags of Tamil Eelam, and the map of Eelam. Latour (2005) refers to the importance of objects and their visibility in the realm of politics and claims such an assemblage of objects forms political meanings in the modern world and highlights the need for such objects to be identified in the realm of politics and scholarly works of political science.

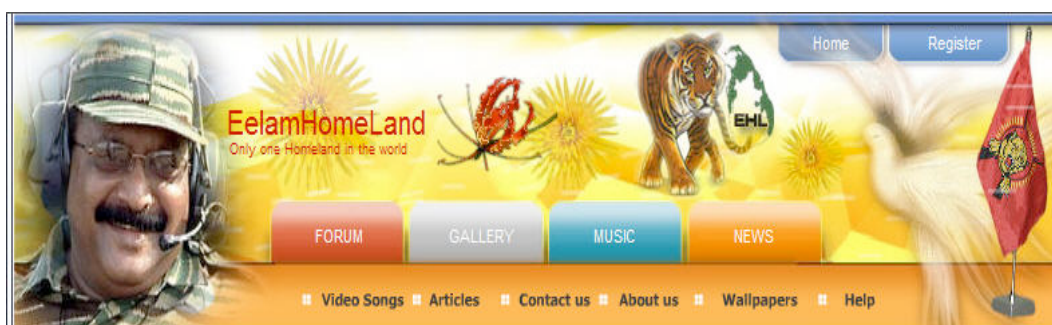


Figure 28 banner of the web site Eelamhomeland.com (accessed 11 July 2007)

⁴⁴ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=13487> (accessed 27 November 2007)



Figure 29 Figure of LTTE leader Prabhakaran with advanced rifle.



Figure 30 Figure of Prabhakaran with hand gun



Figure 31 Prabhakaran during the press conference in April 2002



Figure 32 Prabhakaran after the press conference in April 2002.

In analysing the repositioning of the image of Prabhakaran in the last few years due to external and internal challenges to his leadership I also look at the importance of dress and the digital imaging of the LTTE. Web sites such as Pathivu.com, Puthinam.com, Tamilnet.com, and Eelamhmeland.com depict the manner in which the LTTE leader is projected. Figure 28 features the banner of the homepage of the web site Eelamhomeland.com. Prabhakaran's face is portrayed in this with a communication head-set; the head set is a technological symbol and functions as an icon of the military and technological advantages achieved by the LTTE and the adherence to technology by the leadership. The next images (Figures 29 – 30) are from the same site. Figure 30 shows Prabhakaran holding a modern hand gun and Figure 29 shows that he is using an ultra modern AK 103 assault rifle. These images are used on the home pages of these web sites. These images are not the same type used in earlier propaganda campaigns which were mainly of Prabhakaran in the battle field. I contrast these images with images taken in 2002 of the LTTE leader during the time of the cease fire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE; there is a stark contrast from his current appearance with a clean shaven face and suit to match a politician's look rather than a military leader. Figures 31⁴⁵ and 32 feature Prabhakaran at a key press conference with his late advisors Anton Balasingham and S.P. Thamilchelvan. The new images appearing from 2005 – 2008 have re-positioned Prabhakaran as the military leader and the main pivot in the LTTE which is hard to depict in civilian outfit.

⁴⁵ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=6838> (accessed 27 November 2007)

These new images depict the need for a larger than life cult of Prabhakaran with the aura of a larger than life leader. This seems to be an effort to reinforce the notion of Prabhakaran's leadership and enhance his actual image which fits the digital age. The array of wallpapers⁴⁶ presented in Eelamhomeland.com demonstrates how important is Prabhakaran; there is no other image of any LTTE fighters among hundreds of wallpaper images hosted on this website, which is contrary to their normal public discourse elevating heroism and sacrifice of LTTE fighters in battle.

The increased use of images of the LTTE leader have dominated the web content of the pro-LTTE web sites since 2004 and it has displaced more traditional web images that the LTTE web sites tend to give priority to. It has also prompted the web producers to enhance their web formats from being lengthy text based to increasing the use of images and videos. The LTTE have also used the web especially since 2004 to demonstrate their military might. They started to use images and terminology in the web text to give a sense of intense modernization in their strike capabilities and the expansion of their military arsenal. These web sites presented analysis on the military strategies the group was adopting and introducing combat regiments within the organization. These web sites discuss the importance of 'Black Tigers', the suicide arm of the LTTE as their greatest military asset.

Such explicit self exposure by the LTTE of its military structure online makes it different from web operations similar to other organizations. For example this tactic is totally opposite to Zapatista type activism (wearing their ski masks, concealing themselves and idolising concealment as a political message of equality to justify the suffering masses.) The LTTE seems to be developing web savvy military machinery while going to great effort to construct a virtual military machine. The LTTE developed this inherent virtual link with the constant updating of their campaigns against the Sri Lankan armed forces; the classic example is the virtual reporting of the military operation 'Unceasing Waves 3' which was launched in March 2007 to attack the strategic military camp at the

⁴⁶ Wallpaper is the monitor / screen pattern or picture or other graphic representation that forms the background onto which all the icons, menus and other elements of the operating system are displayed and moved around. <http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/w/wallpaper.html>

Elephant Pass in Jaffna. This LTTE attack killed more than 1000 military personnel which is one of the largest peace time losses of soldiers in a single battle.

The LTTE has become heavily reliant on a campaign of huge image-building around its military symbolism and the reinforcing of its leadership. Below is an image (Figure 33⁴⁷) of the 21 members of the Black Tigers (the suicide wing of the LTTE). This image is more like an image from an action movie. These 21 men and women all perished in a daring raid on a Sri Lankan air force base in Anuradhapura area. These images were released after the attack. All members of the suicide team are posing with Prabhakaran. The LTTE has depended a lot on the web based projection of its structures and the virtual signature of an organization with massive military might. The commando raid on Anuradhapura cannot be compared to the scale of the LTTE operations such as 'Unceasing Waves 3' in 2000. Still the LTTE managed to project limited operations into spectacles of military victories with the extensive use of web images and videos embedded in web sites.



Figure 33 LTTE leader Prabhakaran with a team of BlackTigers.

The discursive construction of the LTTE as a superior military outfit is also part of the web campaign. The LTTE thus maintains a military machinery which is virtual in web

⁴⁷ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=23572> (accessed 23 November 2007)

sites spearheaded by Tamilnet.com. These websites managed to popularise terms such as TAF (TamilEelam Air force), Tiger Marines, Tiger Commandos, Tiger Underwater Demolition Team and Tiger Air Defence Units, all denoting technological advances made by the LTTE in developing an innovative war machine. These terms appeared after 2004 and seemed to be part of the attempt to bolster the LTTE's image as the supreme Tamil militant organization in the eyes of the Tamil diasporans.

Until the mid 1990s the LTTE was a guerrilla organization, and although they confronted the Sri Lankan military in conventional engagements and skirmishes there was no formal organization within the fighter ranks. LTTE fighting formations were formally organized into military units in the mid 1990s. The first three formations were an infantry battalion named after the former second in command of the LTTE Charles Anthony. 'The Charles Anthony Brigade' was the first fully-fledged infantry unit of the LTTE, the second infantry unit 'Malathee' was a women-only unit and finally the leopards of the special forces unit were named the 'Jeyanathan' brigade. These three infantry units and structures are recorded as the first real military formations within the LTTE. This was revealed in 1998 through the writings of the late Sivaram Dharmeratnam (1998) who was actually the pioneer in presenting the ethnic conflict on the web through Tamilnet.com. Sivaram was a brilliant political and military analyst and through his online contributions he was doing a favour to the LTTE by boosting its discursive shaping of the military machinery. Sivaram in one his articles provided an in depth analysis of the regimentation and development of the LTTE as a military organization.

From 2005 to 2007 there has been a significant increase in the use of military jargon on the websites most of which is related to modern forms and attributes of warfare and military hardware. As mentioned above terms such as marines, frogmen, advanced snipers, tank killer squadrons, air defence and specialized reconnaissance detection teams are a new form of jargon. These types of virtual military categorizations were used to depict the LTTE transformation into a technologically advanced fighting formation. To project this, the LTTE has identified the importance of the web and also it has understood that amidst this intense engagement, the advanced military orientations it has

achieved can be used as trumps in the psychological warfare waged against the dissidents.



 TamilNet	<p>Akkurate und vertrauenswürdige Berichterstattung nun auch in deutscher Sprache.</p>
<p>Reporting to the world on Tamil Affairs</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▼ News ▶ 2008 ▶ 2007 ▶ 2006 ▶ 2005 ▶ 2004 ▶ 2003 ▶ 2002 ▶ 2001 ▼ 2000 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ December ▶ November ▶ October ▶ September ▶ August ▶ July ▶ June ▶ May ▶ April ▼ March ▶ February ▶ January ▶ 1999 ▶ 1998 ▶ 1997 ▶ Features ▶ Photo Features ▶ Opinion ▶ Development ▶ TN Transcription ▶ Web feeds ▶ Feedback ▶ About us ▶ Home 	<h2 style="text-align: center;">Unceasing Waves III resumes - LTTE</h2> <p>[TamilNet, Monday, 27 March 2000, 10:18 GMT]</p> <p>The Sri Lanka Army suffered heavy casualties when the Liberation Tigers launched a "massive" sea and land assault in the Jaffna peninsula last night, the LTTE said in a press release from its London offices today. LTTE forces had overrun the SLA artillery base at Pallai destroying eleven artillery pieces and cutting the A9 supply route to the SLA bases at Elephant Pass and Yakachchi, the press release said. The SLA base at Yakachchi had been penetrated and fierce fighting was raging, it added.</p> <p>The full text of the press release follows:</p> <p>"Sri Lanka troops suffered heavy casualties as the combat formations of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) launched a massive sea borne and land assault simultaneously on Sri Lankan army bases at Thalaiyadi, Chempionpattu, Maruthankerni along the eastern coast belt of Vadamarachi and at Pallai and Yakachchi closer to Elephant Pass complex."</p> <p>"The LTTE's offensive campaign code-named "Unceasing Waves 3" erupted last night around 9pm and continues with deadly ferocity in these sectors. Special commando units of the LTTE broke through the army defense lines at Pallai and cutoff the A9 highway (Kandy Road) terminating the land supply route to Yakachchi and Elephant Pass bases. These two strategic bases guarding the gateway to Jaffna are now fully surrounded by LTTE forces."</p> <p>"In another development special commando units of the LTTE stormed the military garrison at Pallai and destroyed the main artillery base and ammunition dump. Eleven heavy artillery pieces were destroyed by explosives."</p> <p>"According to the latest reports LTTE combat units have penetrated through the Sri Lanka army's defence lines at Yakachchi military base. Heavy fighting continues at Yakachchi as the LTTE fighters are pounding the camp with artillery and mortar fire."</p> <p>"On the coastal belt the Tiger units smashed the army defence lines and are advancing towards Thalaiyadi."</p> <p>"The sudden and spontaneous assault by the LTTE's combat formations on several garrisons and bases at the gateway to Jaffna has taken the army by surprise and there was confusion and disarray last night in certain sectors. The LTTE field commanders confirm that the army has suffered heavy casualties and is struggling to remove hundreds of injured soldiers by military helicopters."</p>

Figure 34 Tamilnet.com on 'Unceasing Waves III'



Akkurate und vertrauenswürdige
Berichterstattung nun auch in deutscher Sprache.

Reporting to the world on Tamil Affairs

- ▼ News
 - ▶ 2008
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 - ▶ June
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 - ▼ April
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 - ▶ February
 - ▶ January
 - ▶ 1999
 - ▶ 1998
 - ▶ 1997
 - ▶ Features
 - ▶ Photo Features

Elephant Pass overrun - LTTE

[TamilNet, Saturday, 22 April 2000, 10:52 GMT]

The Sri Lanka Army (SLA) base complex at Yakachchi and Elephant Pass was overrun by the Liberation Tigers Saturday following two days of heavy fighting, the LTTE said in a statement from its London offices. Over one thousand SLA troops were killed in the ferocious battle and the remaining troops of the 54 division fled in disarray, the statement said. "The fall of this crucial base at the gate of Jaffna will facilitate the LTTE to gain its strategic goal of liberating Jaffna," the organisation said.

The full text of the press release follows:

"Yakachchi and Elephant Pass bases forming the giant military complex of the Sri Lankan army on the gateway to Jaffna fell to the combat formations of the Liberation Tigers this afternoon following 48 hours of fierce and bloody fighting. Over one thousand Sri Lankan troops were killed and the rest fled in total disarray."

"LTTE's Special Forces and commando units stormed into the Yakachchi military base in the early hours of the morning in a multi-pronged assault and overran the well-fortified camp after several hours of intense fighting. The LTTE commandos, who penetrated central base, destroyed several artillery pieces, tanks, armoured vehicles and ammunition dumps."

"Overwhelmed by the fury of the Tiger assault the Sri Lankan troops who desperately held the base without supplies and reinforcements for the last 2 days, fled in total confusion."

Figure 35 Tamilnet.com reporting the capture of the strategic Sri Lankan military Garrison

2ND LEAD (UPDATE)

Tiger marines conclude pre-emptive strike on Mandaithivu - LTTE

[TamilNet, Sunday, 13 August 2006, 13:56 GMT]

Marine Corps of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Saturday midnight destroyed the artillery launch pad in Mandaithivu, and Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) and Sri Lanka Army's (SLA) preparations to launch a seaborne offensive towards Elephant Pass, LTTE's Military Spokesman Irasaiah Ilanthirayan told media Sunday. Two Sri Lanka Army tanks were destroyed within the last 48 hours, along A9 between Mirusuvil and Muhamalai, where severe clashes took place. Small clashes were still continuing, he said. Tiger marines returned to their positions from Mandaithivu Sunday early morning, according to LTTE military spokesman.



Military Spokesperson of the Tigers, Mr. Irasaiah Ilanthirayan (Marshall)

"22 LTTE fighters have died, and 41 were wounded in the clashes so far within the last 48 hours," Mr. Irasaiah Ilanthirayan said.

The tanks were destroyed when the Special Forces of the Sri Lanka Army's 53 Division launched a fresh offensive Sunday noon.

When asked whether the LTTE operation would continue, the Tiger military spokesman said, their operation would continue till the defensive objective is accomplished.

Figure 36 Tamilnet.com reporting on a LTTE attack

The Figures 34⁴⁸ and 35⁴⁹ are based on the last major LTTE military push and military success in capturing one of the most strategic military garrisons in the North and a general preview of the last major military campaign by the LTTE, the 'Unceasing Waves 3' operation. Both these texts from March and April 2000 have references to limited military units of the LTTE but Figure 36⁵⁰ is from a 2006 LTTE statement where the term 'marine corps' appears.

The importance of the contrast between the 2000 and 2006 web reports on Tamilnet.com are not limited to the jargon which is trying to point out the technological advances of the LTTE military machine. The text is based on the press releases of the LTTE while the 2006 web pages carry the image of a LTTE military spokesperson. The LTTE resorted to providing real time information through the spokesperson and Tamilnet.com updated its website multiple times sometimes on one incident based on the spokesperson's update. The introduction of a military spokesperson symbolizes the

⁴⁸ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4968> (accessed 27 November 2007)

⁴⁹ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4874> (accessed 27 November 2007)

⁵⁰ <http://www.Tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=19219> (accessed 12 December 2007)

evolution of the LTTE into a conventional and well organized military organization going beyond the identity of a guerrilla outfit.

Even in the context of the major military operations such as 'Unceasing Waves 3' in 2000 or any prior military operation the LTTE did not use such military jargon such as 'Tiger marines', 'frogmen', or 'automated air defense systems'. This military symbolism has become a key trend in the pro-LTTE websites where the virtual codification of the LTTE military machinery has become a central attribute in its hegemonic discourse. The web has become the site of production of important symbols of military achievement by the LTTE. The images and texts are attempts to galvanize the belief of the Tamil diasporans in the capability of the LTTE to develop as a potent military force.

The LTTE believes that maintaining the image of the superior military power is critical for its political claim of being the sole representative of the Tamil people. In particular, the period of my research 2005 – 2007 was a time of military setbacks for the organization and it also saw a dramatic increase in the use of the web to visualize the military domination of the LTTE to the diasporans, highlighting the organisation's military strength despite its actual defeats. The two sections discussed in this chapter pertaining to the virtual veneration of the LTTE leader and the increased use of military jargon in pro-LTTE web sites is a sign of the virtual importance of the militarization of web space.

The web operations of the LTTE discussed above in the case of the discursive construction of its military strength and the use of visuals for political domination is quite a distinct departure from web sites and web spheres that have been studied up until now such as the Zapatistas and cyber-Jihadists. In the case of the Jihad movement which is more concentrated on carrying out anti western propaganda or recruitment drives, websites merely demonstrate the violence and attacks the fighters make on western interests and forces. The next section argues that with the increased importance of image as a political entity the face of a web site becomes a site of contestation and conflict where rivals attempt to destroy these images of political expression. This is my

interpretation of the hacks captured on the Web Sphere Analysis of rival web sites in the struggle between hegemonic and counter hegemonic forces in the Tamil diaspora.


5.5 Hacker wars

The types of cyber conflicts and cyber violence and misinformation campaigns may be new, in replacing more traditional cyber attacks such as hack attacks, hijacking of domain names and email bombings. Nevertheless there are recent hack attacks which were captured in the period of archiving websites. The web site is an agglomeration of texts and images, and alternatively it is an image/snap shot of the political position or ideology it is representing. This image generating potential is tied to the generation of knowledge. Thus it has the ability to evoke a collective imagination and the websites use this strength to reinforce the discourse of Eelam, the LTTE as the sole representatives of Tamil people and the importance of the national liberation struggle waged by the LTTE.

Here I introduce a hack attack on the Eelamnation.com website, which is a pro-LTTE website with a significant number of hits and with a long term cyber presence operating since the late 1990s. The domain of the website was hijacked on 1st February 2007 and a notice appeared on its home page claiming the site had been put up for sale (Figure 37). The site administrators had to immediately react and used another pro-LTTE website Sangam.org to carry a message publicly claiming Eelamnation.com had been attacked and has been re-hosted under a different domain. The Web Sphere Analysis also enabled the capturing of the message reappearing on Sangam.org (Figure 38⁵¹) on behalf of Eelamnation.com, as the archiving process in Web Sphere Analysis constantly focuses on the web sites which are interlinked which is a vital strength in Web Sphere Analysis.

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<http://www.sangam.org/2007/02/EelamNation.php> (accessed 2 February 2007)



Eelam Nation

Championing the Cause of Tamil Freedom

This Website is for Sell !!

Dear Readers, Visitors & Well wishers
Eelamnation.com team is going to sell the website www.eelamnation.com in a handsome amount. If you are wanting to have this **Domain, Hosting & Site** then please fill up the form below and submit it. **Bid for eelamnation.com**. We will contact with you within next 2-3 days about the final price of eelamnation.com

Note: www.eelamnation.com is very much popular new site. Everyday more then 1000s of visitors & readers visit this site to find the latest news about Eelam and World.

Thanks & Regards
Eelamnation.com Team

Fill the Form below to Bid for eelamnation.com

***Name:** *indicates a required field.
Address:
Price in USD: [Write the price you offer to buy this website]
***Email:**
Country:
Phone:
***Subject:**
Message:

Figure 37 Hacked Eelamnation.com site

EelamNation.Net

Notice:

Www.eelamnation.com site hacked!!!

We inform our readers, visitors, clients and well-wishers with regret that some vandalistic elements opposed to the genuine aspirations of the Tamils for peace and freedom as championed by eelamnation.com had hacked the website on February 1, 2007.

As it is a very popular website which is visited daily by hundreds of Tamils and human rights organizations to get the latest news and views and analyses on the Tamil issues in Sri Lanka, cowardly anti-Tamil elements have been hard at work to discredit and undermine its work. They have posted a message that reads—"THIS WEBSITE IS FOR SALE" which is totally incorrect.

The owner of the site has already lodged a complaint with the proper authorities about this act with the view to bringing these culprits of this cyber crime to justice.

Considering the interest of our readers/clients we have hurriedly come up with another domain: <http://www.eelamnation.net>

Until we retrieve the eelamnation.com site, you are kindly requested to visit www.eelamnation.net site.

Sorry for the inconvenience.

Eelam Nation Editorial Board

Figure 38 Sangam.org reporting on the hack attack on Eelamnation.com

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter included observations made on the web sphere focusing mainly on the uses of cyber space for political engagement and political purposes. Including the rise of LTTE military symbolism on the net, the resurgence of a type of leadership image building in the LTTE which I analyse as the 'repositioning the cult of Prabhakaran', and I discuss the use of hack attacks as an effort to disrupt spreading the message of power and domination through the virtual visualisations of political objects. The LTTE as this chapter argues use cyber space as a location for their military strength to be displayed to diasporans as well as a space in which to assert its authority. These visualizations discussed in the chapter are snapshots of the LTTE effort towards defining the collective imagination of the diasporans based on these visual objects.

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The research also reveals the virtual build up of the LTTE as a powerful military organization and the reinforcing of the image of its leader. The novel factor was the duration of the LTTE's dependence on this virtual development of its organization. In the pre 2001 era the actual military build up of the LTTE was reflected in cyber space along with its successful offensives; with these success drying up the LTTE is observed building up on its virtual offensives with the objective of gaining a political impact in the diasporan political space. Commenting on the importance of digital images, Furstner claims, 'they can be used where ever images and the knowledge on images form the core of scholarly enquiry' (2005:898). This chapter highlights the possibilities of digital imaging and the competition it has with real images in a time when image is becoming extremely important in politics, with images carrying huge political significance in the politics of the web.

The analysis in this chapter presents new dimensions of cyber politics that were traditionally limited to analyzing political practices influenced by information flows. I argue that cyber space can generate visualizations that are deceptive, and purposely used as political tactics supporting LTTE strategies geared for maintaining hegemony among Tamil diasporans. This chapter also reveals an alternative dimension in the politics of power and its manifestation in such conditions; until recently power in the diaspora space for the LTTE was about maintaining hegemony and control to guide the Tamil diaspora community. This chapter contributes to the thesis by revealing the multiple dimensions in the use of web objects and web space for political engagements. It demonstrated the methods required to discursively and structurally analyse the meanings of texts and images on selected web sites.

Chapter 6 Power and Space in Web Politics

The way we tell stories or any tales of discovery is in terms of crossing and conquering space.

(Massey 2005:4).

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is based on my fieldwork findings in London. The research opens up various dimensions to understanding Tamil diaspora politics online and the impact of online technologies on Tamil diaspora political processes. This chapter focuses on two concepts emerging through the analysis of the data from my respondents on cyberspace. I focus on two key concepts that were constantly alluded to by respondents using the different terms of: 'space' and 'power'. The respondents extensively used terms such as 'dominating', 'taking over', 'controlling' and 'resisting' in the context of cyberspace. These terms are mostly affiliated with theories of power in political theory so in this chapter I shall look at the dimension of power theoretically in the context of Tamil diasporic politics online. Throughout my interviews these activists insisted that cyberspace has brought about a democratic space for politics where some claimed it was a safe place but for many it was identified as a space for mobilization. The chapter looks at this concept critically and explores the reasons behind the constant reference to the term space in most of the interviews.

The analysis brings out the different approaches to politics in cyberspace of pro- LTTE and dissident activists. I explore the shaping of the virtual political practices of the Tamil diaspora's political activists due to their different approaches to cyberspace. The tensions in these approaches are identified in the struggle between the pro-LTTE elements working to control cyberspace in maintaining the LTTE supremacy among the Sri Lanka Tamil diaspora under one coherent political ideology and the Tamil dissidents who oppose this. Interestingly, the dissidents spoke of cyberspace as facilitating a unrestricted presence and gave them the feeling of being in a new space for doing politics.

Thus I will look at the importance of cyber-politics while trying to make sense theoretically of the relationship between space and power in the context of diaspora political engagements online. The first half of the chapter looks at cyberspace and power, specifically at power-relationships that are identified by political activists. These activists pointed to the use of cyberspace for constructing and maintaining hegemonic discourses for the domination of the Tamil diaspora community. They also presented diverse observations about the importance of politicizing cyberspace to resist domination. Their feedback and arguments about the power dimensions involved in political practices in the use of the internet are presented in the first section of this chapter

The second section of the chapter looks at the importance of 'space' in these political struggles in cyberspace and its repercussions in the lives of diaspora activists, as social relationships and political engagements carry significant value in political analysis. The chapter introduces these different views of the respondents and engages with them critically. The chapter looks at the impact of such perceptions and experiences of the political activists and how they have contributed to the opening up in new dimensions in the study of online political engagements in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. It also reveals the personal experiences and perceptions of these Tamil activists. Based on both accounts of dissidents and pro-LTTE activists, cyberspace has become a site of locating politics rather than a basic medium of communication.

6.2 Power: in spaces of politics

In all my interviews with the respondents, I identified a common use of certain terms especially covering the political importance of cyberspace and its advantages in political practice. This word pool consisted mainly of terms such as 'domination', 'control', 'resistance, and 'challenge' in the context of political practices. Tonkis states that power can be a difficult phenomenon to observe but it gives itself away in space. One of the most visible ways of exercising power, after all, is to occupy or to control space (2006: 60). The respondents did highlight such forms of practices in cyberspace and this is why I am simultaneously analyzing space and power in the context of cyberspace and online diasporic political engagements. The interesting development in my research was the

manner in which cyberspace was presented by respondents. The Tamil dissidents perceived it as giving themselves more political opportunities and simultaneously offering them a kind of alternative, free and safe space for politics. Pro-LTTE activists vehemently defended the notion that it was an important space that should be controlled and dominated. The interviews shed light into the struggle between the hegemonic project of the LTTE and the counter hegemonic discourse of the dissidents. Looking at Mouffe's view of hegemonic processes in society, she argues that it is politically instituted and according to her analysis the terrain on which hegemonic interventions take place are outcomes of previous hegemonic practices (2005:805). This is an interesting observation which captures the pro-LTTE and dissident clash. The LTTE established its diaspora presence from the early 1980's as mentioned in Chapter One. This entrenchment aided the LTTE in politicizing cyberspace. This is a continuation of the hegemonic process, building on the LTTE's earlier apparatus of hegemonic structures within the diaspora.

6.2.1 Power: a short review

It is important to include a short analysis of the relevant literature on power in order to identify the forms and constitution of power within the context of political engagements in cyberspace. I will suggest that the online political struggle of the Tamil diaspora can be framed as a power struggle and that analysing online engagement adds to understanding of the notion of power. This short review will outline the classical dimensional views of power before looking at the post structural approach to power found in Foucault's work.

This review will start by looking at the debate that occurred in 1960s and 1970s among American political scientists such as Robert Dahl, Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz. Steven Lukes outlined the two dimensions of power that guide this debate and introduces his own 'third' dimension of power. Lukes identifies the pluralist critique made by the Robert Dahl on C. Wright Mills analysis of American democracy in his work *The Power Elite* published in 1956. Mills claimed that only when influential segments in American society were capable of influencing and being part of the government in the USA. Dahl challenged this notion by highlighting the importance of methodologically assessing and

researching the way power works within American politics. In his major work, *Who Governs* (1961), he looked at political decision-making in the city of New Haven in the 1950s and stressed the importance of observing and studying the actual behaviour of political agents and deriving conclusions based on analyzing such behaviour.

Dahl suggested that power was located in the decision-making process. In *Who governs* (1961) he looked at the political nomination process, public education and urban renewal. His research included data collected through newspaper reports, official documents and accounts of participants (Clegg 1992: 53). Hauggard (2002) points out that Dahl could not find any specific group dominating any of the spheres of political nominations, public education or the urban renewal sectors in his research and thus came to the conclusion that there was no single power elite that controlled all spheres of government in New Haven. Thus Dahl advocated the 'behaviorist' methodology and his theorization conceded that power was divided unequally but nevertheless it was the people's intentions that led to the establishment of governing authorities.

According to Dahl, power was all about people and their relationships, which are manifested in power relations. He argued, 'let us agree that power is a relation, it is a relation among people' (Dahl 1957:203). In the larger context of the power debate, Stuart Clegg declares that Dahl's work is a landmark in the analysis of power (Clegg 1989:11). The importance of Dahl's analysis, as Lukes identifies, is that he points to the difference between 'actual' and 'potential' power. Lukes, in his categorization of the power debate, identified the arguments raised by Dahl and his fellow pluralists as 'the one dimensional view on power' by which he meant:

Power involves a focus on behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation (2005: 19).

His influence on theories of power was not limited to Dahl representing a certain distinct school of thought but it triggered a debate which led to the theoretical advancement of power by Dahl himself. It also set into motion, a more energetic interest in engaging with the concept of power by social scientists.

A significant critique of Dahl's theorization came from the political scientists Bachrach and Baratz (1962; 1970). They brought in a new dimension to the pluralist view on power, which they termed the 'second face of power'. Dahl's critics pointed out that his pluralist view of power only brought out the public domain of power and did not have the capability to unravel the private domain (1962). They were referring to the agenda-setting factor in policy making which could neutralize the ability of public participation.

Based on Bachrach and Baratz's work, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (1970) Lukes claimed that their central point was: 'to the extent that a person or group – consciously or unconsciously – creates or reinforces barriers to the public airing of policy conflicts, that person or groups has power' (200: 20). This analysis of power by Bachrach and Baratz is framed as 'two dimensional view' of power by Lukes. He claims that they criticize the behaviorist analysis of power made by Dahl and other pluralists. (2005: 22). Bachrach and Baratz attack Dahl at the point where he developed his conclusion on power as being located at instances of decision-making. They claimed Dahl's focus on decision-making, 'unduly emphasised the importance of initiating, deciding, and vetoing' (1970: 6). The duo pointed out that there is in practice a covert exclusion of interests of individuals or groups which will prevent legislative bodies, committee from taking action about them. This was a conclusion which they arrived at looking at issues facing the Black community in the USA.

In *Power: A Radical View* (PRV) (1974) Lukes introduces his own analysis of power. He situates his analysis as a response to the key debates on power in 1960s starting with Dahl and his pluralist views on power, which Lukes identifies as the 'one dimensional view of power' and the critique on Dahl's views put forward by Bachrach and Baratz which Lukes called the 'two dimensional view of power'. He identifies his own conceptual framework of power as the, 'three dimensional view of power' (1974). The central premise of Lukes's analysis is based on a comprehensive critique on Bachrach and Baratz. Lukes claims that though Bachrach and Baratz criticized the behaviorist approach of Dahl they too are very much committed to behaviorism as a methodology in observing the exercise of power. He claimed 'In the first place, its critique of behaviourism is too qualified, or, to put in another way, it is still too committed to

behaviourism – that is, to the study of overt, actual behaviour, of which ‘concrete decisions’ in situation conflicts are seen as paradigmatic’(2005: 25).

The advancement Lukes proposed in analyzing the concept of power is based on understanding the working of domination. He claimed:

A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want to have – that is, to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts? (2005:27)

He argues that social structures and cultural patterns have a significant effect on the decision making of individuals and this structural dimension has been missed out in the ‘two dimensional analysis’ of power. He states:

Is it not the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial? (1974: 28).

Lukes’ contribution to developing an analytical framework for power was important because of his analysis of the working of domination and its diverse forms of deployment by individuals or organizations. His analysis also highlights the lapses in behaviorist analysis which Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz (1970) championed, where the source and effect of power can be located at times of actual conflict. Lukes (1974; 2005) claims that insidious power sometimes works at nullifying conflict by maintaining total compliance among the subjects influenced by the source of power.

Foucault’s contribution to the understanding of power presents a clear break from the one, two, and three dimensional analysis of power. He, according to Clegg, broke the monolithic view of power because ‘central to Foucault’s conception of power is its

shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances' (1992: 154). Foucault points out those modern forms of power and its linkage with knowledge have spawned new forms of domination. He concentrated his analysis on exposing the domination of the individual through discourse, social institutions and social practices.

Foucault's discursive analysis of power located the individual as an effect of power created within the flows and relationships of power that function as a network cutting across bodies of human beings. The important aspect of Foucault's contribution to power is his attempt, as Lukes rightly observes (2005:88), to introduce a 'micro-physics of power'. In other words Foucault did not perceive social life to be enacted in a single space of society, but rather within a society which has multiple layers or dimensions and for Foucault these dimensions formed and shaped the domination and subordination of people. The micro-physics of power was the lens in which he exposed such detailed and multi dimensional workings of modern power. In his famous prison talk interview, whilst responding to a question about the history of repression, Foucault points out his intentions in the analysis and unearthing of the attributes of power: 'But in thinking of the mechanisms of power, I am thinking rather of its capillary form of existence, the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies' (1980:39). This post-structural orientation that Foucault develops through a discursive engagement on power has drawn significant criticism. The main criticism from realists is his attempt to dissolve human agency and present a power field where agency is discursively trapped in every power relationship. Lukes terms this undermining of the autonomous moral agent in Foucault's analysis of power as an 'Ultra radical view on power' (2005: 88). Foucault in fact did a U-turn in his analysis of the human being as an effect of power by trying to reinforce the fact that power is productive and not just repressive. For example, in his later writing he explores concepts such as governmentality 'by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other' (1987: 19). Lukes argued that by trying to deviate from his position on the idea of power constituting the human subject, Foucault's ultra radical view of power dissolves (2005: 97). Best and Kellner though urge that Foucault brings out 'an intense vision of oppression' (1991 54), while emphasizing he should not be reduced to a fatalist philosopher. They further claim the argument that is made against Foucault which

illuminates his analysis of individuals as ‘hapless and helpless victims’ (1991: 55) misses out the vulnerabilities of power and its manifestations in places that are mentioned in his work where he claims resistance to power takes place.

The notions of ‘domination’ and the achievement of ‘compliance’ are both important in my thesis as I locate my research around the struggle between two rival political groups within the Tamil diaspora. This section of the thesis will deal with the dimensions of the power struggle between the two groups and their use of cyberspace. I will also look at the importance of Foucault’s analysis of power by suggesting that the diaspora activists’ use of web sites is a discursive production of domination and that sites used by the Tamil dissidents actively challenge hegemonic interests of the LTTE. I will look at Foucault’s and Lukes’ key claims to locate the exercise of power, the use of domination techniques and the working of resistance in cyberspace. The role of power in cyberspace and the theoretical premises that the online and the offline can intersect are aspects on which I focus on in this section. I look at the instances where domination is imposed in the case of the LTTE and simultaneously identify the moments when it is resisted by Tamil dissidents. This analysis on the notion of power will be used to understand the role of the Tamil diaspora politics and its interface with cyber technologies and the cumulative effect on the working of politics of domination. It also will look at the individuals and the role of such individuals as agents of power or as subjects of a ‘false consciousness’ where domination is a hidden force. I will also look at the internet as a site for asserting political agency among activists to defy the dominant discourse and as an alternative network where repressive technologies such as LTTE international operations can be challenged and resisted. The working of power will be assessed through the separate analysis of viewpoints and real life experiences of political activists belonging to both pro-LTTE elements and dissidents.

6.2.2 Pro-LTTE view on power

I will start this section with Sutha’s views on cyberspace and power. His yearning is quite clear when he told me casually while sipping a caffè latte in a Starbucks near the Holborn tube station, London. ‘I want to see two flags flying in Sri Lanka, and the Tiger flag should symbolize the existence of two nations.’ Sutha revealed that he became

involved in politics in 1995, 'I followed the conflict from Sri Lanka to Nigeria to London as a diaspora child.' Sutha was born in Sri Lanka but his parents emigrated to Nigeria where he said he was in 1983 during the time of the violent riots in Sri Lanka. He became a prominent political activist when he took over a leading English publication for the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, and developed a budding relationship with the late Anton Balasingham, the LTTE theoretician who was based in London. Sutha explained that he was mainly lobbying against the Sri Lankan government campaigning on Tamil rights at international organizations such as Amnesty International, the EU and the Home Office in London. He also mentioned the added advantage of being a Tamil diaspora activist with the ability to use English and the dual identity of being Tamil and being British.

Sutha shared his views with me on the advantages of cyber politics. In this discussion he outlined a two pronged approach. The first was a threat perception which the LTTE and all its affiliated organizations are most conscious of, the threat from the Sri Lankan state. In this context Sutha was focused on challenging state hegemony. He told me: 'the web is genuinely de-territorialized, the web is free of state centric focus, especially as the operational apparatus is dispersed'. He further said: 'The web has made us be on our toes. Its like an unceasing time field where, for political activists, the game never ends.' Sutha stressed that being and occupying the web is the same time. He told me, 'if you are not in web space you are not a relevant player.' He added,

The importance of cyberspace was enormous with the speeds of access and massive reach it had. We had to be on top of the political scenario and to be aware what is happening in Sri Lanka. Then only we could be guiding the political themes in the diaspora community and it was an important tool to be used for us to be ahead.

This is a strong indication of the notion of presence as speed and immediacy are properties of the architecture of power in web space. As Sutha said, 'The presence decides the quality of the game'. The sum of all these observations is linked to the strategic thinking that has been invested on cyberspace by the LTTE since its inception of terror tactics in 1997. The LTTE's strategic approach to the Tamil diaspora is linked to its fundamental political objective of being the single voice of the Tamil nation. The approach Sutha takes to politics in cyberspace involves strategic manoeuvres, as he says

‘guiding the diaspora’, by which he means the forms of domination that the LTTE has developed that will be deployed in cyberspace.

The second strand to Sutha’s approach to cyberspace and online political engagement is his emphasis on the need to be in control of cyberspace in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. He told me about the dispersion of messages from the LTTE leadership and the use of cyberspace for this rapid dispersion to keep the presence of the LTTE and its leadership felt throughout the diaspora centers. What Prabhakaran does in his annual speech on Heroes Day (27 November) is to reiterate the commitment for a Tamil homeland and, in a coded way to, provide the setting for the war each year. This becomes like the episteme for the Tamil diaspora or the supreme knowledge which they need to have to be part of the political effort. Thus what Sutha was saying is that they shape cyber political engagements or the political space accordingly. From Sutha’s views it is clear that the LTTE is keen on being free from the hegemony of the Sri Lankan state interventions within the Tamil diaspora but at the same time to establish a frontier controlled through the LTTE. Fuglerud (2001) commenting on the LTTE’s political project, claims that the LTTE is in a process of ‘embedding’ their own activities as cultural constructions and in the context of the diaspora to identify each and every diasporan as being part of a national liberation struggle for the formulation of a homeland where they will ultimately return as citizens.

What I uncovered in my interviews with Sutha was that he was acknowledging the antagonisms that are present in the Tamil diaspora space. The antagonisms operate as the LTTE vs ‘the state’ and the LTTE vs ‘any dissenting voice’. Sutha further claimed that,

The Tamil nationalist bloc sets the field, for everybody. The shape of diaspora community rests on the pattern set by the LTTE and its leadership as it represents the aspirations of all the Tamil people and everyone has to be in this to achieve the ultimate goals.

It is interesting to analyse the spatial metaphors Sutha used in his interview regarding cyberspace. They included terms such as ‘battle field’, ‘political field’, ‘domain’ and ‘territory’. Foucault in an interview revealed that the infusion of power and control of power has given provenance to such spatial metaphors. He agrees that territory is a

geographical notion but he claims that it is a more of a 'judico-political' one which is controlled by a certain kind of power (1980:68). The notion of 'setting the field' in cyberspace or 'the Tamil spaces' in cyberspace are territorial strategies, employed by individuals or groups to attain or maintain control.

Following the interview with Sutha, there is an interesting dialectic which emerges in cyber political engagement: the feeling of being free and the need to dominate. Sutha said 'we battle for the "idea" as it's the most important in cyberspace'. This illuminates the role of the idea as knowledge and the desire to build a control mechanism in this new space. Foucault in an interview titled 'Questions of Geography', responding to a question on the relevance of spatial metaphors to geography and the strategic importance of it, claims that 'once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effect of power' (1980:69). Thus, following on employing this Foucauldian analysis, Sutha is laying out the need to dominate this space and accepts that it is made out of a matrix of power relationships. According to Foucault's view on power relations:

What would be proper to a relationship of power, then, is that it be a mode of action on actions. That is, power relationships are rooted deep in social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above "society" whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream about... a society without power relations can only be an abstraction (2000: 343).

Sutha is preaching a mode of action geared towards domination and it is presented very subtly while demonstrating the deep rooted urge of the eternal need to control any political space. His response and dismissive attitude towards the dissidents reflected the overall pro-LTTE view of the dissident Tamil diaspora political role. What Sutha attempts to reiterate point blank was that the political space was controlled by the LTTE and there is no alternative political space even in cyberspace. Still his responses did prove his awareness of being involved in a larger political engagement and conflict which was not limited or parallel to the traditional conflict the Tamil nationalist bloc waged against the Sri Lankan state. Sutha, in his responses, symbolised the strategic thinking of how political spaces can be controlled which is very reflective to the LTTE operational methods.

Kumar heads an organization which is mainly a Tamil nationalist lobby centre, focused on human rights, but it is also a strong pro-LTTE operation and one of the earliest established Tamil lobby organizations in UK. He was formerly a production assistant at the Wellawatte spin and weaving mills in Colombo, Sri Lanka, which is known as the citadel of trade unionism in Sri Lanka that had witnessed the emergence of many trade union leaders and the development of the politics of protest. Kumar got involved in the Tamil nationalist movement when his brother was among the 22 people arrested (including Sathyaseelan, Mave Senadiraja, Kasi Anandan) in 1979, all of whom belonged to the Tamil radical youth organization 'Manavar Perawai'. This organization was the inspiration for many militant groups which emerged later on including the LTTE. 'I was doing a Masters degree in UK and returned to Sri Lanka to secure the release of my brother.' In this visit he was asked by the founders of the Tamil Refugee Rehabilitation Organization (TRRO) to establish TRRO as a charity in London, and he later founded his current organization which was mainly for political lobbying as the TRRO had no mandate for lobbying in the UK as it was established as a charity.

'The power of this space and the potentials are enormous. Earlier we were able to do specific campaigns and agitations and write a mail to a minister or a parliamentarian. Now we are able to hit multiple targets and carry out multiple political functions and this is a great force for us', Kumar revealed in his interview. He comments on the ability pro-LTTE networks have developed to supersede earlier forms of hegemonic power sources, from mass rallies and the handing over of petitions. The space has thus altered for him and a new space for struggle has opened up which offers a wide array of political powers.

6.2.3 Dissidents' view on power

Nallu has a history of being part of the Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist movement and the militancy. She is a former member of the LTTE who left it disenchanted. She resorted to campaigning against the LTTE and led a life virtually under threat from the LTTE. She had to flee Sri Lanka and live in safe houses in India and is now settled in London.

Currently she is part of the vanguard of Tamil dissident activists who are countering and resisting the LTTE ideologies and political practices based in London.

I posed her the question ‘Does the web give you the power to challenge or resist the hegemony of both the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE?’ She told me,

The web gives you an ability to resist certain things, such as LTTE dominations. I feel this ability comes through the security the internet provides. The web is also in a way a secure mechanism especially for political activity. Especially, as a dissident activist, I can find LTTE people at my door step as they will trace any dissenting Tamil community member and the consequences can be quite scary.

This struggle demonstrates similarities with Mouffe’s (2005) analysis of power and hegemony, where the configuration of power relations around which a given society is structured is a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects. Thus for the dissidents cyberspace has provided them with opportunities to develop their own sets of power relationships and to resist hegemonic advances from constant challenges.

In Nallu's view, the LTTE domination was an impediment to dissident political actions and she resented the fact of being powerless to act along with her conscience as a dissenting political activist. Being pursued by LTTE hit squads in Sri Lanka and India, and living life constantly shifting between safe houses shows how Nallu has been living in fear. For Nallu the notion of power or being empowered meant challenging and resisting the LTTE and also the Sri Lankan state which she felt was not working towards safeguarding the basic rights of the Tamil people. The safety of the political spaces offered through cyberspace allowed Nallu to operate and challenge the LTTE ideologically.

The LTTE front offices throughout Europe and its well-established networks have full-time money collectors, propaganda people, researchers and data entry offices employed to keep track of money being collected from the diaspora community. They oversee new arrivals, where they are settled and also maintain records of their families living in Europe or in Sri Lanka. This includes frequent visits by these individuals to houses for collecting money or distributing propaganda leaflets. These individuals include LTTE

hit-men who are involved in intimidation, abuse and harassment of any Tamil diaspora member who refuses to pay, or who tries to organize community events that are not sanctioned by the LTTE fronts. This is a network which is working for the LTTE and which believes in the total domination of the public space of the Tamil diaspora. These LTTE outfits have limited dissident networking and coordination by denying them any space for political mobility. This is the key reason why the dissidents have found alternative spaces of politics which they tend to call 'democratic spaces' and 'safe spaces'. For the dissident, challenging these dominant networks is a political task, and cyberspace is seen as a key space that the dissenting political activists realize function as a point of resistance against dominating networks and institutions.

Nallu, in her explanation of how she can resist LTTE and state domination of political spaces through the internet, spoke about the ability of cyberspace to have enlarged or created political spaces which cross state boundaries easily. She was pointing out the ease of political coordination through cyberspace. The key fact is Nallu's identification of this as a major source of power. According to Nallu,

Because of this transcendence it gives us a sense of power and also it has allowed us to organize events in multiple locations such as, Toronto/ London, New York/ London. The dissidents unlike the LTTE did not have resources for globally mobilizing activists. We did not have the strength to challenge the LTTE and also if we were doing it physically the LTTE would stop us using their henchmen and unleashing violence on us. This is why I think cyberspace and internet has given us the power to mobilize and a safe space to mobilize in.

In the middle of the Sri Lankan conflict such spaces opened up through cyberspace that enabled dissident activism has played a major role in affecting the LTTE and the state's balance of power. In military conceptions, according to Hirst 'we are concerned here not merely with specific built environments but also with wider spatial patterns. War organizes space in subtle ways, not just in fortifications or battles. It often links together structures and places that seem to us to belong to very different orders' (2005:54). The diasporic communities spread out in Europe and the North America are subject to hegemonic pressures from their host countries as well LTTE networks operating with efficiency of a transnational movement. Thus as the dissidents reorganize themselves in such spaces as part of the conflict itself, cyberspace has become the organizing space linking the dissident movement. As 'power relations are rooted in the whole network of

the social' (Foucault 2000:345), the political spaces opened up in cyberspace seem to have a vast array of power networks circulating through it and reaching the social and political around us.

Rengan is a solicitor based in Ilford (London) and a key member of the Tamil dissidents. He is known to his friends as the solicitor who will read all web pages on Tamil politics before studying his cases. In an interview with him regarding power and cyberspace in the context of his politics Rengan remarked, 'if we hadn't had this facility we would be nowhere and this is quite clear with the increase of interactivity in cyberspace and the responses websites generated in the last decade'

Jeyabalan who is a dissident revealed that as a political activist, cyberspace made the dissidents possess some indirect and, unseen power. He said,

As dissident activists we could use cyberspace and the communication technologies to challenge the LTTE which was not possible at such speed or effectiveness using the traditional print media and the most important thing is you can get the LTTE panicking and responding. That's why I feel it's a kind of unseen and indirect power that can be generated using the internet as a political tool.

According to Jeyabalan these capabilities enabled the dissidents to develop their own political project and challenge the LTTE circles. This is important as the notion of indirect, unseen power can be analysed in allusion to Steven Lukes' (1974) third dimension of power, which has the potential to dominate and have an insidious presence throughout the political sphere. The important point here is that the levels of domination in cyberspace are, in one aspect, very open and straightforward but in some spaces of politics they are submerged or function at an insidious level. Lukes argues:

Power can be deployed to block or impair its subjects' capacity to reason, well, not least by instilling and sustaining misleading or illusionary ideas of what is 'natural' and what sort of life their 'nature' dictates, and, in general, by stunting or blunting their capacity for rational judgement. (2005: 115)

According to Jeyabalan the dissidents have managed to challenge the discourse of Tamil Eelam and national struggle of the LTTE which, in Luke's (2005) sense of domination, has kept the Tamil diaspora believing in the struggle of the LTTE and believing in the importance of Tamil homeland. Thus cyberspace has been used as both a site of resistance against this domination and as a medium to contest the domination which, in Lukes terminology, can be identified as false consciousness, generated by pro-LTTE elements in the political sphere of Tamil diaspora. Cyberspace has become a meaningful expression of dissident agency where dissidents championed a counter discourse to the LTTE operations and where the diasporan subjects of the LTTE discourse were urged to set themselves free.

Keeran, who was introduced earlier, in the beginning told me 'cyberspace has become a decentralized power zone'. He brought forward this idea based on his experience as an activist and his interest in online politics. Keeran is one of the few activists actively observing the internet and its use in the political processes in the Tamil diaspora. Keeran was hinting at the control the LTTE was exercising on the diasporans and this capacity to infiltrate their political boundaries that cyberspace has created. As territoriality and the classification of boundaries are political strategies designed to attain particular ends, they are subsets of power relationships and containers of power relationships. Keeran emphasized the importance of his point on 'decentralized power'. He told me,

Five or six years ago cyberspace was dominated by the LTTE and the Tamilnet and for every one the truth was the Tamilnet, but what has happened now is that especially with the rise of sites like Thenee, the balance has shifted. There is no one truth. The LTTE just can't lie to the Tamil diaspora. I personally know even now LTTE sympathizers have started to look at dissident web sites. There are over 50 dissidents sites now and the LTTE is trying new sites such as pathivu and puthinam to back tamilnet, but the truth is that there is no one power in cyberspace it is now distributed and finally the Tamils have a choice to see and hear alternative voices and see alternative politics to the LTTE.

The notion of 'truth' which Keeran brought out is important as the LTTE maintained through its web operation the discourse of the Tamil nation. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is a working of power and but, Foucault claims, though discourse is produced by power there can be 'a point of resistance and starting point of an opposing strategy' (1980:101). This is the type of de-centering of power and the ability to resist and

challenge the LTTE's 'discourse of truth' that could be understood from Keeran's claims based on his experiences as a dissident political activist.

6.2.4 Summing up power

The forced migration of the Tamils created diaspora centres from London, and Toronto to Sydney and thus made these centres important hubs for the conflicting parties in Sri Lanka. These hubs function as international centres that are important to the sustaining of the Sri Lankan conflict. The significance of web space and web based technology has been the opening up of spaces which were dominated even within these transnational hubs. These hubs emerged as strategic centres for the conflict in Sri Lanka that were continuously fortified and controlled by the LTTE. Fortification of space has been perceived as a method of acquiring and maintaining power, from remote strongholds, to cities which were designed as fortresses and walls protecting borders to political sovereignty. Fortification has been a symbol of power and dominance (Hirst 2005). The opening up of web space has made such dominations and fortifications obsolete and, to political players who use these new spaces, this is seen as a new form of democratic space.

There are two key significant approaches to power in the context of cyberspace and political engagement online which emerges in this analysis. Power aspirations such as those expressed by the LTTE, using terms such as hegemony and domination, are denominators of a state-centric discourse of power. From the LTTE view point the Eelam or Tamil nation controls the spaces of the Tamil diasporan. The second is the systematic resistance that emerges; the dissident engagement in cyberspace seems to be displacing the traditional one track aspiration of the LTTE to dominate. The internet constitutes points of resistance for the dissidents enabling them to encroach the LTTE fortifications forcing the LTTE to rethink their strategies in cyberspace.

There is an interesting power attribute of changes in processes of domination and resistance in cyberspace from the power dynamics that existed prior to cyber engagement. This is the strategic fact that, 'hegemonic cultural practices will always attempt to fix the meaning of space, arranging any number of particularities, disjuncture

and juxtapositions into a seamless unity: the one place, the one identity, as in for example the nation' (Natter and Johns 1997: 150). The reality in these scenarios is that hegemony being the process that naturalizes both space and social relations, is like any form of power: never fixed or inevitable but always open to exposure, confrontation, reversal, and refusal through counter-hegemonic practices. The power struggles that I discuss, and the use of cyberspace as a site of struggle as well a source of power especially in the counter hegemonic interests of the dissidents, represents the plurality of autonomous struggles waged throughout the micro levels of society. These struggles are inherently political and are power driven. In Foucauldian terms, they act as 'Micro logical strategies' since power is decentered and plural, thus space becomes a key aspect within this plurality. This is the reason why the notion of space is explored in the next section of the chapter. The other fundamental reason being 'power' and 'space' were constant referrals made by my respondents in the forms of political struggle in the context of cyberspace.

6.3 Space

Modern diaspora theories are informed and influenced through research on globalization and global flows. Such spatial flows indicate transnational movements of people, culture and capital. The implications of transnationalism⁵² are profound for any argument for a progressive politics that tries to transcend both the spatial limitations of political imagination and reformulate notions of community, identity, and solidarity beyond surpassing limitations such as nation state boundaries and ideologies. Diaspora theorists who analyse the phenomena in such contexts clearly argue that diaspora formation itself is going beyond marked spaces such as nation states. Karim notes that the 'milieux that diasporas seek to create are not bounded by the borders of nation states – their rhythms resonate transnationally to mark out non-terrestrial spaces that stretch out inter-continentially' (Karim 2003:10). If the diaspora itself is a manifestation of deterritorialization, or a symbol of global flows, it is interesting to seek the perception of

⁵²What I understand as transnational politics, is based on the notion of transnationalism broadly alluding to the development of multiple ties and networking of people and institutions across the nation states. These linkages have spawned new global forces and academic research have focused on issues based on transnational forces from capital flows, inter-governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, politics, services, social movements, social networks, families, trade, citizenship, corporations, migration circuits, identities, public spaces, public cultures. The notion of cyberspace, virtual communities and cyber politics have widen the horizon of such research

Tamil diasporans using and being in cyberspace, which is also a technologically deterritorialized entity. In this text the political importance of cyberspace and its spatial attributes that make it important according to the respondents are discussed below. This discussion is mainly divided into two subsections according to the identities of two groups of respondents; the two categories are the Tamil dissidents and pro-LTTE activists. Later on, the views are juxtaposed to investigate whether the emphasis on space by these political activists brings out new revelations about the role of cyberspace in online political engagements.

6.3.1 Dissidents on space

The dissident political leader Nallu's comment on cyberspace has become an opening statement for the analysis of importance of political space as it is an epitome of the impact of cyberspace on political mobilization and from the dissident point of view the opening up of alternative spaces for politics. Nallu remarked, 'We the anti LTTE movement in the Tamil diaspora have risen through the web.' It is well known that the Tamil dissidents were challenging the LTTE from the mid 1990s and there were reports of LTTE intimidation, attacks and even killings of such dissidents to intimidate them. The reality of the Tamil dissident movement was that, though there were isolated clusters of dissidents, there was no one movement or mobilization against the LTTE until 2001. Thus Nallu's statement seemed a contrast to the history of Tamil dissidents in the Tamil diaspora. It is also clear that the dissidents have become more active, especially among the diaspora since early 2000 and they have demonstrated more active and organized political mobilization challenging the LTTE openly, which was a new phenomenon in the Tamil diaspora. I asked what she actually sensed and what role cyberspace played in her political activities as a dissident activist. She told me,

It is so obvious for us as the problems and challenges we faced in political activities, we could not easily organize, our comrades in Europe could not mobilize, and our activities were restricted. We did not have the ability to mobilize as a network of activists. Dissidents and people who supported dissidents were attacked by LTTE and our publications halted. There were many intimidations against us such as of dissenting activist Jeyabalan and Rengan. Now internet has given us this ability to be in places and do political mobilization, organization and the LTTE cannot stop these activities. Look at the

way SLDF runs, we run it totally online, all our engagements and political activities are organized through internet.

The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum (SLDF) is an important Tamil dissident organization that was founded in London by a group of activists in 2004. Nallu is a founding member of the the SLDF. It has become an important organization for mobilising dissident political activists and people who are interested in Sri Lankan politics. Another founding member who did not wanted to be named told me that in their first meeting the activists who formed the SLDF unanimously decided not to put the term ‘Tamil’ as part of the organisation’s name. The SLDF was formed broadly to look at the issues affecting minority communities in the back drop of the Sri Lankan conflict. SLDF holds discussion meetings with different international and Sri Lankan stake holders and attempts to intervene in both policy making and grass roots organizations in Sri Lanka.

Though SLDF was founded in London, its members are located within many European states as well as in the USA and Canada. Thus Nallu was pointing out most of the coordination among these members is carried out through the internet. The SLDF constantly sends e-mails of texts, journal articles, country reports and interviews on the Sri Lankan conflict to its members using a mailing service.

The Sri Lanka Democracy Forum is a global network of activists committed to promote democratisation and inter-ethnic co-existence in Sri Lanka. Presently there are people connected to the network in the following countries:

- Australia
- Canada
- France
- Germany
- Great Britain
- India
- Japan
- Sri Lanka
- Norway
- The Netherlands
- USA



Figure 39 The main logo of Sri Lanka Democracy Forum

The above insert is from the website www.lankademocracy.org⁵³, the website of the SLDF (Sri Lanka Democracy Forum). The countries of the network that the SLDF website indicates are all major Tamil diaspora hubs and such networking in these nodes was only possible for pro-LTTE organizations a few years ago. The dissidents did not dare to organize in this manner. The logo of SLDF is a globe with the title covering the total image of the globe; this is symbolically indicating the reach that the SLDF has achieved. Significant amounts of coordination and mobilization of the SLDF membership is done online for efficiency and safety, according to members whom I spoke to in my interviews. The SLDF web operations point to some of the arguments the dissidents were making especially on issues such as democratic space, safe space and strategies of mobilization. These websites have significant political value both at operational levels and at the symbolic level.

The internet tends to assume the role of an information provider, especially of news stories in the context of Tamil diaspora. I asked Nallu as political activist the level of impact the internet has on diaspora politics as a news provider and its potential beyond that role. She told me,

No definitely not, news alone, that is more on the superficial level. We do understand and strategize our political plans using the internet. And we use it to sense the vibes of all political currents as they are felt on cyberspace. It for me gives a sense of connection. For, example I feel the affinity to somebody in Germany through cyberspace, it's like some kind of a transcending. I equally feel someone is thinking like me, the email has become a interactive thing taking the shape of a discussion. I use to hold discussions through out the world with our members and it is our site for interaction

The term 'rising through the web' may reflect that Nallu was bringing out an over enthusiastic response to a mere technological utility. However, in the lengthy discussion I had with her it became increasingly clear that she was aware of the limitations for dissident politics given the rigid controls and intimidations that the LTTE resorted to among the diaspora community (by virtually controlling or violently shutting down any space for dissent). She highlighted the importance of cyberspace for challenging these structures of control.

⁵³ <http://www.lankademocracy.org/about.html>

Laguerre (2005: 129), in his research on Haitian diasporan politics, tries to grapple with the role of web forums and their impact on diasporan politics. He then constructs the concept of 'virtual diasporic space' which, he claims, is a particular region of cyberspace that provides a virtual spatial infrastructure for diasporans to engage in online communications for real world benefit to themselves, the homeland, and the host land. This is also interpreted as a kind of a virtual gateway linking diasporic individuals and groups. The response from Nallu stretches the notion of diaspora space beyond the communicative element Laguerre is theorizing. Nallu was trying to point out that dissidents have regained the ability of voice (speaking out against the LTTE), action and developing political relationships among the diaspora for mobilizing against LTTE domination. She was stressing the importance of the internet as a conduit as well as a site for political action which had a significant effect in overall Tamil diaspora politics.

Nallu also revealed another dimension to why political activists similar to her have begun to make increasing use of the internet. The Sri Lankan Tamil diasporan political activists, especially the dissidents, were mostly self-funded, unlike the LTTE activists who had enough financial power in doing politics. In this aspect the cost effectiveness of the use of internet according to Nallu is an important 'leveler' in the fields of political conflicts. Also she pointed out it would not have been possible if this was in Sri Lanka where access to the internet is relatively expensive. In this political engagement Nallu pointed out that technological access is one of the most important things for current day political activism.

Jeyabalan's main concern when he arrived in the UK in 1991 was the lack or almost non-existence of political space in London for 'Tamil voices' (a term used by Jeyabalan throughout the interview emphasizing the need for alternative voices other than of the LTTE), as LTTE had a strong control over the Tamil political space in London. He stressed the importance for Tamil people to be free of LTTE dominance and be free to express views and have political affiliations other than with the LTTE. In my interview with Jeyabalan about the impact of cyberspace on his politics and the general political strategies of Tamil dissidents, he brought out an interesting observation based on his personal political engagements:

The Web space enabled us to position a democratic Tamil movement leading to the democratization of the Tamil political space in London. This is my experience as a journalist and dissenting activist, LTTE could control or intimidate us or just shut down our operations, like when we try to put publications in Tamil shops they will be taken off immediately. Through such control the LTTE limited dissident activity and limited the areas we could operate.

Jeyabalan stressed that the diaspora political space desperately needed an alternative voice because of the level of control. He told me,

In the Tamil diaspora everything was controlled from Jaffna, thus cyberspace gave the people who opposed the LTTE a chance to bring out their voices. The diasporans had to go with the voice of the LTTE and accept what the LTTE said to them. The ability to find our own voice and speak out and mobilize against the LTTE using the internet strengthened the anti-LTTE movement which is the alternative voice of the Tamil people.

The argument Jeyabalan attempts to make parallels Nallu's reasoning that cyberspace for Tamil political activists is a site from which to deploy resources for political engagements. He identifies the inherent features of cyberspace such as the constant reshaped boundaries which prevent it from being subjected to LTTE control. The internet has become in some aspects a primary political field which was not controlled through various hegemonic projects.

Jeyabalan highlighted the economics behind being politically active in cyberspace, mainly the relatively cheap economics of political engagement in the sphere; 'another key reason I shifted to cyberspace was financial reasons and secondly the media was an expensive enterprise. Printing costs, publishing costs and the total control of the LTTE meant there was no medium to operate freely.' The LTTE maintained a significant international operational network and it had the financial strength and assets to maintain its control over all possible political activities and outlets amongst the diaspora communities. This was a major advantage the LTTE diaspora network possessed, forming a formidable buffer to maintain their territorial hold in the diaspora.

Raj, the dissident activist, who was introduced in Chapter Two, told me, 'The cyber democratization and opening up of political spaces is significant in countering the

LTTE.’ It was interesting to see that all my interviews with Tamil dissidents on the impact of cyberspace on their lives tend to reveal that they approached it as a site for politics rather than a communication medium. I asked from Raj what he meant by ‘democratization’. In response Raj brought out an example which referred to efforts in the early nineties by a dissident Sri Lankan Tamil journalist who emigrated to Canada in 1986. He told me,

A Sri Lankan Tamil by the name of George Khrushchev started a political magazine called Thayagam. This magazine took an anti LTTE line, the LTTE immediately imposed a wide ranging ban on the Tamil community on supporting, selling or reading this magazine. The pro-LTTE groups led a smear campaign against the family of the editor, giving him death threats and branding his wife a whore and intimidating his children on their way to school. This compelled him to terminate operations in fear. Soon after the web revolution in mid 1990s, Khrushchev re-launched his magazine online, and since then he has taken-on the LTTE and the LTTE was unable to stop him and he continues his writing.

The above example can be put down as a classic example of the development of communication technologies and the ability to disseminate information, but in this case what Raj was pointing out through his historical analysis of the fate of dissident Tamil political activists was the yearning to be located in a political space which was free from LTTE control and its intimidatory tactics. The dissidents were looking for a spatial boundary within which they would feel safe. Raj introduces the importance of cyberspace in this sense as a site for politics as well a socially constructed space for politics, where social and political relationships can develop and grow without being subjected to any subjugation.

Raj revealed cyberspace was an important political space for him personally. He told me,

Internet gave us a kind of safety, as the dissenting views came out operating using the internet made you feel safe. As dissidents we carried elements of fear in our lives. We still remember the cold blooded murder of Sabaratnam in 1994 carried out by LTTE hit squads in Paris and also the gangs that target dissenting activist. When you are in a political process it is important to be safe and it is a fundamental reason why the use of the internet for dissenting Tamils was important. This is why I think it creates a democratic space. The LTTE had the ability to strike fear into the lives of dissenting Tamil activists and using the internet is one way of over coming it.

Raj's reference to Sabaratnam's murder is very important in locating the importance of web politics and the safe space it provides for dissidents. Dissident activists had a hard time even voicing opinion against the LTTE in fear of attacks by pro-LTTE activists within the diaspora community. Sabaratnam's murder in Paris on May 1, 1994 in front of his family members by two LTTE members was a stark reminder of the threat the dissidents faced within the diaspora communities. Sabalingam Sabaratnam was murdered because he was finishing a book which was to be released in France written criticising the LTTE. Many dissident activists have been threatened and assaulted for publishing against the LTTE. These included the attacks against the journalist D.B.S. Jeyaraj in 1993, Tamil dissident activist Vaithyanathan Loganathan and journalist and academic Selliah Nagarajah.

Nagarajah is a political analyst and a lecturer in law attached to the University of Western Australia and a dissident activist. He was threatened by pro-LTTE activists in October 2005 and Human Rights Watch (HRW)⁵⁴ indicated clearly that the pro-LTTE group issued death threats on Nagarajah. In London the staff of the anti-LTTE radio station the Tamil Broadcasting Corporation has been subjected to threats and intimidation and its director, V Ramraj, received many death threats.

Raj was trying to bring out the importance of web politics in the light of attempts by the LTTE and pro-LTTE groups that were targetting dissident activists. The dissidents were struggling for modes of organization and mediums of expression within diaspora communities, thus cyberspace has been used to facilitate both these needs. Raj then applied his thinking to very recent political processes he was involved in and a program he was organizing along with his fellow dissident activists. This was the commemoration event of Kethesh Loganathan, the Deputy Secretary General of Sri Lanka Government's Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process (SCOPP), and a former member of the Tamil political group EPRLF. He was assassinated in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The Late Kethesh was one of the few dissenting Tamil political activists based in Sri Lanka and his assassination triggered public defiance in the diaspora community against the LTTE.

⁵⁴ <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2006/lte0306/3.htm>

The Kethesh Loganathan memorial meeting in London was held on Saturday, 31 March 2007, at the Conway Hall.

Raj, who was a key organizer of the events held in London and in Paris, revealed that many of the things which were needed for the organizing of the event were accomplished online. The online collaboration among dissidents ranged from deciding on printing and the page settings of the commemorative publications to coordinating dissident participants from all over the globe. Raj pointed out that the dissenting political activists used web space as a political space to congregate and make decisions in this event. He pointed out that although the dissenting community was spread out across Europe it was important to keep the coordination and preparations going on despite the disruptions made by the pro-LTTE fronts. Elaborating more on the significance of web space and the technological factors providing the gateways, Raj spoke of his experience on witnessing how the more senior political activists and members of the Tamil diaspora are depending on the web. 'People who are active are now extremely depending so much on this technology,' he said, 'for example even the older generation activists who are not literate in such new technologies have resorted to making their children to use their expertise and knowledge on.'

In my interview with Keeran on the use of cyberspace for political purposes, he said he would like to discuss his personal experience and its impact on him as an activist. Similar to all dissident activists, his response was based around the argument that the LTTE did not allow any political activist to occupy a political space or let a political space be created in the diaspora unless they accepted the LTTE's political positions and spatial parameters of its operation. 'We have recovered what we have lost through cyberspace' said Keeran, 'it has given us a democratic space and this creation of democratic spaces has sent a powerful challenge to the LTTE.' I probed him on the use of the internet as an information tool and asked if it was the premier use of internet in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. Keeran told me, 'more than an information utility cyberspace is becoming part of life and in socio-political usage it is affecting the way elections are held, how money is circulated and how it challenges all types of power structures'. He told me, 'dissidents like us use it to do publications, popularizing the anti

LTTE messages to organizing and mobilizing against the LTTE, and we have used the internet significantly.’

The main point Keeran was raising was that the internet and the use of internet politics have opened up opportunities with which the dissidents were incapable of engaging prior to its inception. His articulation of cyberspace was more as a democratizing field and a political launch pad and he also spoke of cyberspace as a place rather than being a pure medium of communication. His argument was that the qualitative significance of cyberspace was that it offered attributes of a place and as a means to infiltrate places of politics within the diaspora securely held by the LTTE.

This is parallel to what Nallu described earlier about the dissident movement emerging through the web, and what Jeyabalan and Rengan corroborated. In the current context the dissident movement is very active physically in political operations in London and the interviews revealed that the dissidents are very conscious of the spaces which they were able to occupy for political action. Some significant engagements are in cyberspace and this space has enabled them to find alternative sites to counter hegemonised physical spaces in London by the LTTE fronts.

The dissidents appreciate cyberspace as a medium of communication and in some moments of political engagement they identify its potential to be a place and its networking potential and the power of such procedures. Laguerre (2005) talks about the formation of informal alliances in the case of diaspora political activism online where strategic alliances can be made between political groups. This, according to him, allows the process of flexible membership. This is predominantly in his research on the political engagements of the Haitian diaspora. In the case of the Tamil dissidents who are not as organized as the well established networks of the LTTE such real time and transnational alliances between different dissident groups are critical for mobilization politically against dominant LTTE operations. In the case of the Sri Lankan diaspora politics I argue that cyberspace functions as a space not just for networking but for the convergence of different political groups with similar political objectives. The crisscrossing between political spaces of different individuals who are against the LTTE

and the speed that the dissidents could operate in, bypassing spaces and flows controlled by the LTTE, demonstrates the power of mobility. In fact, mobility itself is transformed into an attribute of power within a diaspora space which was well guarded by a hegemonic player.

In a discussion of the role of cyberspace and the scope of political opportunities in online politics, Jeyadevan said,

When the alternative groups started aligning together and develop an anti LTTE movement, our campaign took a massive focus on the internet, and this enabled this movement to bypass the LTTE spaces which depended on pure domination. The internet was important for the LTTE and the diaspora was using it for information and to understand the political situation in the Sri Lanka. The LTTE maintained its position of as the top dog until the dissident web sites started and the whole domination was challenged. The LTTE feel this challenge that is why they attack me and all other dissidents because we have become a threat to them.

The importance in the context of cyberspace is to what extent it was significant in this surge in dissident activity. Jeyadevan points out,

Regarding the LTTE monopoly over media, there was totally a hardcore LTTE support base, and no space for alternative force (democratic force) and the other groups did not challenge the LTTE. The dissidents saw the effectiveness of internet and also we could position the alternative voice even if we still could not control the areas which were under the thugs sponsored by the LTTE. We do not need to be out in the street to challenge the LTTE I use emails and also write to sites to expose people such as Shanthan, Sethu and other LTTE sympathisers.

These groups who were opposing the LTTE virtually did not have any ground in which to operate in or in other terms a political space, 'As we needed a space to campaign the cyber network had the ability to influence the Tamil community', said Jeyadevan. This was what they were yearning for as dissidents because 'the LTTE strength was secrecy, and ruthless control, but when we shifted to online politics the political space was opened up'. The dissidents were mostly discussing the political potentials that cyberspace opened up for involvement in political activity, Jeyadevan is demonstrating how these opportunities have even enabled them not just to challenge the political positions of the LTTE but the LTTE organizational apparatus which is a significant

network of individuals and different organizations ranging from Hindu Temples and charities to cultural forums.

Rajanayagam was another key respondent in my fieldwork, a veteran of Tamil diaspora politics and a human rights activist. He ran the most published Tamil magazine in the whole Tamil diaspora the *Tamil Times*. Rajanayagam started publishing *Tamil Times* in October 1981 and the magazine was published till December 2006. A veteran of the old left movement in Sri Lanka he is a lawyer by profession and is a key member of the Tamil dissident activists in London.

Rajanayagam said the events which led to the burning of the Jaffna Public Library at the end of May 1981 by government backed Sinhalese thugs triggered the need to publish the *Tamil Times*. He said the decision was taken after a meeting of a dozen Tamil professionals living in the UK who pledged support for him to start the publications. He said in the first edition of the magazine, he used the editorial to outline the purpose for which the *Tamil Times* was established. These included, discussions on democracy, human rights violations in Sri Lanka and Tamil rights. Rajanayagam emphasized ‘we did not want to side with any political party or group. I outlined this in our first publication. Even the TULF leader Amirthalingam who was the leader of the opposition in the Sri Lankan parliament asked me in 1982, to make *Tamil Times* the official journal of the TULF, but I flatly refused.’ Rajanayagam also claimed, the LTTE tried to disrupt the publishing of the magazine by trying to threaten the sponsors and also prevent shops from selling it. The importance of the *Tamil Times* is the pioneering effort of few political activists from London and its wide reach as a Tamil publication. *Tamil Times* was started even prior to the LTTE presence in London and later on, the the magazine had to constantly struggle with the LTTE for political space as the LTTE started dominating the diaspora sphere.

In relation to the use of cyberspace for politics Rajanayagam stressed the key point all dissident political activists were talking about, which he highlighted having critical importance. He said, ‘cyberspace has opened up space and opportunity for non LTTE groups, activists to communicate and operate without fear of being targeted.’ The key

point which he brought out about cyberspace as a 'safe space' was also brought out by other dissidents such as Raj, Rengan and Jeyadevan.

6.3.2 Pro-LTTE view on space

The pro-LTTE respondents spoke less about the concept of space, but they did speak about the concept of 'power' through terms such as 'dominate', and some even used the term 'hegemony'. In their short references to the notion of space and democracy they were focused on being in control and the democratic elements cyberspace offered were identified as sites of resistance to the domination of the Sri Lankan state.

In my interview with Sutha, he claimed that the dissidents did not represent Tamil people's aspirations and effectively did not have a say in the political struggle. While claiming that there was no threat from dissidents Sutha stressed that the Tamil diasporan politics in cyberspace will be under their control and will be politicized with the object of separate homeland. Sutha said,

What do the dissidents represent? Do they represent the Tamil people's aspirations? If they are against the LTTE are they supporting the Sri Lankan government? I do think the dissidents have a political position to take either they are for the Tamil people or they are traitors.

Sutha's response reflects the hardline position the pro-LTTE and LTTE operatives take regarding dissident activists. It also reveals the crux of the conflict between the two groups in question where spaces for politics remain under the authority of the LTTE. The dissidents are denied any alternative space for politics in the diaspora. The LTTE interpret the diasporan space of politics as one homogenous unit in which they are in total control, based on the notion of Eelam or the place called Eelam. By adopting this approach to cyberspace the LTTE is displaying a retreat to place or depending on using the controls they apply in geographic places they control in Sri Lanka. Political ideologies and mobilizations based on geographic interests to Massey, is a kind of denial or an attempted withdrawal from difference. She claims it as a politically conservative haven and a position that fails to address the real forces at work (2005: 5). Approaching

the LTTE's control of the diaspora space and its application of similar tactics to restrict cyber mobilization suggests similarities with Massey's observation of situations where multiplicities generated in spatial relationships are being ignored. The pro-LTTE elements did not understand the challenges brought out through dissident web counter attacks and the efficacy of multi-pronged attacks using multiple websites.

The main challenge to dissidents is based on the fixity of the notion of Eelam or homeland. The political space which has developed based on this fixed entity has a tremendous political impact commanding the politics and social life in the Tamil diaspora. The LTTE has recently been pushed out of major strongholds in Sri Lanka and the map of Eelam does not actually match to what they control now on the ground. The reinforcement of the homeland and the spatial existence of it have consequently been supplemented by web spaces built and dedicated to it.

Kumar, a Tamil political activist and a leader in the pro-LTTE lobby in response to the discussion concerning the opportunities cyberspace has created for politics told me,

Cyberspace has provided an enormous space for political activity and it has created recent debates varying on various perspectives. This space has become a powerful tool, to respond to Sinhala nationalism providing academics, scholarly response to issues such as Tamil settlements, village name changes archaeological discoveries. Such a space couldn't be formed or occupied in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka, it is impossible for any scholarly or academic justification of the LTTE's position to be released. It is interesting when Kumar brings out this point that it has similarity with Rajanayagam's point on maintaining the notion of Eelam despite its physical non existence. Kumar stressed the role of academics and the space academics found in using cyberspace for justifying the real parameters of Tamil Eelam even though it was a virtual homeland. He said there are many academic contributions online especially in websites such as Tamilnation.org which discuss archaeological discoveries which Kumar claimed hold the key in the discursive construction and maintaining of the hegemonic discourse of Tamil Eelam. One clear example is the Tamilnet.com restructuring of its home page to provide a dedicated space in which to discuss Tamil names accredited as place names in Sri Lanka and discuss their etymology. The effort is

to claim these area names, place names and geographic names and even rituals as all having etymological roots in the Tamil language and Tamil culture which is as established historically as the Sinhala civilization. In Kumar's response he highlighted the LTTE's need for spaces where the politics of nationalism can manifest in multiple forms which creates counter spaces against the sovereign state space of Sri Lanka.

6.3.3 Space and democracy

It is clear from the respondents' comments on cyberspace and its political impact on them both at personal and political levels that a difference of opinion on the concept of space can be observed between the pro-LTTE respondents and the Tamil dissidents. The above data indirectly points to the tensions arising between the articulation of spaces and opportunities for the political activity of Tamil dissidents and the contrasting LTTE view on cyberspace. The contrast hangs on LTTE fronts maintaining a view on cyberspace as a space to be contained, enclosed and controlled. In contrast the Tamil dissident politics demonstrate the view of cyberspace as a double entity, both a site and a set of relationships.

Their usage of terms such as 'democratic space', 'safe space' and 'political opportunities' are based on this dual articulation of space. Tamil political activists look at cyberspace as an entity that cannot be totally controlled as there is no one single grand integration of all spaces of politics. Cyberspace is a classic example of the multiple locations of spaces of politics and its manifestation of seamless connections in the new forms of transnational politics. It is also important to introduce the notion of democracy, as it was used by all of the respondents across the spectrum of dissidents to pro-LTTE activists.

There was a constant allusion to the term democracy in a large number of interviews where respondents were attempting to locate themselves and their politics in relation to cyberspace. The notion of democratic space or democracy in the context of the Sri Lanka conflict has different connotations. The difference emerges from the context in which it is used. The dissidents throughout the interviews used the term democratic extensively and they used the term 'democratic space'. They stressed the ability to

politicize spaces democratically with their political engagements, claiming that this politicization is highly effective in cyberspace. This use of the term democracy needs to be clarified from the point of view of the dissidents. They use the term democracy or democratic space to refer to the possibilities and space for politics that are not dominated or controlled by the LTTE or the discourse of LTTE led Tamil nationalism. Democracy in the eyes of Tamil political activists and in the context of Sri Lankan politics also represents the aspiration of belonging to the mainstream political process, the yearning for the state to accept the multi-ethnic identities which make the Sri Lankan polity.

By contrast the pro-LTTE or LTTE activists use this term to denote freedom from the control or domination of the Sri Lankan state. The notion of democracy that both these sections represent is theoretically linked to the spaces of politics. The views on democracy and expectations based on democracy vary from the right to be a participant in the political processes of Sri Lanka to expectations of the state recognizing the antagonisms that have divided communities across ethnicities.

In my research these antagonisms are further complicated within the Tamil diaspora, with political identities in diaspora Tamil nationalism conflicting with one another. For example, the pro-LTTE ideology of securing the political rights and citizenship rights of Tamil people through the formation of a separate state conflict with the finding of a political solution within one Sri Lanka, based on the devolution of political rights of the Tamil dissidents. When political activists bring out the notion of 'democracy' based on their political objectives, it can be useful to use radical democratic ideals to analyse the workings of contested political identities.

Radical democracy comes in the wake of the failure of classical democracy to adequately address problems of cultural difference (Blaug and Schwarzmantel 2000: 10) and it urges democratic theory to understand and analyse contemporary issues which include new political identities and the complexity in political communities. Radical democracy also looks at the spaces that emerge in the context of political struggles and resistance to forces of hegemony and the ability to politicize spaces of political opportunity and the struggles for representation in such spaces. Spaces created through diasporic politics in

cyberspace represent sites of contested practices and aspirations. This is very much reflected in the way the dissidents and the pro-LTTE elements take on political issues such as Tamil rights, Tamil grievances and Tamil representation.

The notion of democratic space signifies the alternative to a dominant discourse that was controlling the diasporan sphere and also the need for the democratic expansion of Sri Lankan state policies. Such tensions brought out in my interviews will, in a radical democratic interpretation, emphasize the numerous social relations where relations of domination exist and must be challenged if the principles of liberty and equality are to apply (Mouffe 1993: 236). This brief section does not intend to engage in analysing theories of modern democracy. Instead, it attempts to locate the multiple references to democracy by the respondents in this fieldwork in a theoretical framework.

The dissidents, by emphasizing the need for space and by positioning themselves strategically in cyberspace, were responding to an acute shortage of political mobility within the Tamil diaspora. In general the notion of lack of space for these political actors had several interpretations including the geographical fixities of power such as the control the LTTE had on the means of political expression in London through publications, properties and full-time employees. They also included the inability to find locations, operational limitations such as intimidation and threat to life, and to develop relationships needed for political processes across communities nationally and transnationally. The respondents spoke about space across a spectrum of variables which included political location, safety, relationship building, organizing in relation to politics, and cyberspace as part of their own experience as political activists and leaders. Nallu, Raj, Keeran; Rengan and Rajanayagam all referred to the notion of 'safe space' and Kumar, Jeyadevan and Nallu spoke about 'relationships and organization'. These arguments were illustrated at length in engaging with the respondents' observations and experiences.

The two different approaches adopted by the LTTE and the dissidents to politics in cyberspace can be analysed in the context of the academic debates on space where the limits of space and what the 'spatial' meant became important points of discussion. Lefebvre at the beginning of his critical work *The Production of Space* claims the 'word

“space” had a strictly geometrical meaning’ (2000: 01). His analysis of space attempted to bridge the gap between philosophy of the notion of space and spaces created in day-to-day life of individuals. His analysis included issues such as what meanings can be given to spaces created by practical social activity and whether spaces can be occupied by social groups. Thus Lefevbre examines not just metaphors of space but the actual events of both in and through the physical and social spaces and relationalities that people live in their lives.

Based on the experiences of the political activists, cyberspace performs the role of a qualitatively new space at the point of their political engagements and this is also emphasized in the scale of impact the online has on generating changes in their lives and political activities. The dissidents do have a clear problem of political mobility in certain physical spaces, and this emanates mainly from the fear factor. Cyberspace for them had provided opportunities of understanding certain aspects of politics by allowing them access to political fronts that they would have not been able to access previously. It is imperative that what can be grasped from these findings is the complicated architecture of cyberspace. Technologically mediated spaces provide facilities for political participation which significantly stretch beyond the communicative dimension. Cyberspace for some activists has become an important site of politics and a site politically important and at the same time facilitating social and political relationships that were imposible before.

Even respondents of the pro-LTTE network confirm the notion of cyber space as a space for politics by reiterating the birth of a new political space which they term as a ‘net battlefield’. Yet they maintained that it was a territory that could be dominated despite the fluid nature of cyberspace. They identified the main focus of politics in cyberspace as a battle both within the Tamil space for control and hegemony and to counter the Sri Lankan state. In this context I argue that the LTTE’s political strategy in cyberspace is informed through approaching it as a territory or frontier. The LTTE view on cyberspace and the political importance of cyberspace had changed over time. The LTTE realized its potential as an information disseminating tool and it realized the communication potentials of the internet even in the infancy of the web. However, the LTTE’s approach to cyberspace from 2004 onwards seems to have changed from viewing cyberspace as a

utility to a space of political importance which should be controlled. This realization has transformed into an intense struggle for dominance with the implosion of the Tamil diaspora politics parallel to the rise of Tamil dissidents in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora community, revealing the changing nature of cyber political engagement in the diasporic sphere. Whether explicit or implicit, control over territory is a key political motivating force and appropriation of space or specified territory results from the interplay of social and political forces. In this sense territoriality can be seen as a spatial expression of power. The notion of controlling cyberspace is in a way to preserve the hegemonic discourse that what the LTTE represents to the Tamil diaspora. As such cyberspace has been subjected to control because of the need to keep the discursive construction of Eelam and the LTTE sole authority in the Tamil nation building intact.

Contrary to the above, the Tamil dissident view of cyberspace is not limited to the view of cyberspace as a territorial entity subjected to be dominated. The dissidents also do not specifically see the need for it be controlled, paralleling ideologies of territorial politics or as a reflection of a national space. They had multiple views on cyberspace in regard to online political engagement, spanning from enhancing mobilization, political organization to viewing it as a unique location/space. This made it inherently impossible to be dominated by hegemonic interests such as the LTTE dominating diaspora centers globally. This was a process of resisting the hegemonic discourse of the LTTE.

These tensions are manifested and become key political struggles as the Tigers attempt to hegemonize every diasporan space under their control, evoking Eelam/ the state and treating cyberspace as a meta space of the larger Eelam space. The dissidents have a more decentralized approach to cyberspace where they perceive it to be an opened up entity, not subjected to dominations or based on fixed spatial rules. These contradicting views and contests contribute to certain changes in political action and political issues that have dominated the diaspora politics in the last two decades and a half. The unique feature in this approach to web politics is that political struggle between these two groups produces remarkable insight into interesting developments to online politics, especially the relationship of space and the manifestation of power relationships in this dimension. The research is focused on understanding what shapes the political activities in cyberspace and its impacts on Tamil diaspora politics. Thus I am also interested in

looking at dynamics of politics at the moment of practice rather than the processes, so as to explore the changes in the political sphere once people take to online politics. The importance of the above analysis of my respondents' views on cyberspace and conceptualizing them to frame 'space' and 'power' sets up the scene to explore the dynamics of politics in the Tamil diaspora.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter is the first step in engaging with my fieldwork research and the data coming out from my interviews. It integrates with Chapter Four to introduce the notion of power and space and the contestations for power as manifested in cyberspace from the dimension of web operations and from the point of view of political activists. I focused on respondents, linking their role in cyberspace with their political activities. Two issues of power and space are clearly identified in this chapter based on what the respondents said about cyberspace and how it had played a key role in political activism. These two areas were analysed as conceptual frameworks in this chapter. The first section looked at the workings and manifestation of power as there was a struggle between the pro-LTTE fronts and the dissidents, exploring the workings of the hegemonic discourse and the counter hegemonic challenges. These struggles are nevertheless based on the drive to maintain or dominate political spheres. Thus the chapter looked at its workings in cyberspace and the political activists' views and experiences of being part of the struggle. The cyberspace based and cyberspace focused struggles were analysed in theoretical frameworks of power mainly using Foucauldian interpretations of power, discourse and hegemony.

The second section of the analysis was on the notion of 'space' and this was explored in the context of the political activists claiming that cyberspace offered them new spaces for political action. This view had the connotation of a place or political site and they also explained the expansion of political opportunities in cyberspace. These views were engaged in the chapter to look critically at the importance of such perceptions. This investigation was complicated because there were contesting views on the same notion of space by the dissident Tamil activists and the pro-LTTE respondents. Though cyberspace cannot be structured as a qualitatively different space, it does point to the

generative power of cyberspace and its political potential in locating, facilitating and mediating political practices of Tamil diasporan political activists.

There is a clear pattern emerging in this final analysis of these interviews concerning the notion of space and power within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora politics with the emergence of the dissidents and the expansion of spaces of politics, especially in the context of online political engagement. Cyberspace is presented by many diasporan political activists in almost all the interviews in a double sense, as ‘a space for politics’ and ‘a space that has to be politicized’ in their struggles. The interviews demonstrate that some of these cyberspace based spaces of politics have redefined the way diasporans have done politics and reprioritized political goals. The pro-LTTE fronts are being made to rethink new strategies of holding spaces and controlling them than sticking to the traditional strategy of maintaining a single political hold on the diaspora.

Thus all these new struggles as demonstrated in the interviews have contributed to creating new immediacies in the sphere of Tamil diaspora political activities. Such new political issues spawned in and through cyberspace sidelined the tradition of political actions for establishing a Tamil homeland as more immediate political issues within the diaspora. The dissidents using cyberspace for politics has forced the LTTE to shift its political actions from being limited to the national liberation struggle and the establishment of a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka. Dissidents like Jeyadevan, Nallu, Keeran and Jeyabalan have, through the use of cyberspace, made the LTTE enter the realms of grubby politics which they tended to argue that they never would get into. By dragging LTTE into such political engagements and making such political issues priorities for the LTTE operations, cyberspace has managed to open up different levels of political engagement in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. This diversion is not limited to the struggle for political identity and the struggle for political domination. It affects the change of political strategies of mobilization discussed in the next chapter and the new modes of more immediate conflicts that have emerged in cyberspace that will be discussed at length in chapter seven. The next two chapters reveal how such new political issues which have been created in these spaces of politics spawn new struggles within the diaspora and shift the focus of the conflict from Sri Lanka to a different sphere of diaspora politics. This is why in my research on the impact of online politics

on the political process of Tamil diaspora becomes quite critical when looking at online cyber engagements. There seem to be multiple social and political changes across these new spaces, especially at the moments when politics shifts to spheres such as cyberspace, and its connection to real-world politics is felt by political activists and in begin to shape political processes.

Chapter 7: Strategic implications of diaspora politics online.

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores and investigates the effect of online politics on political processes and the political decisions of Tamil diaspora political activists shaping their day to day political engagements. The structure of the chapter explores two themes which are identified as important in the politics of the Tamil diaspora and the use of the internet for political purposes. The first theme is presented as ‘political opportunities’ focusing on the use of cyberspace to extract opportunities for political advantage in the struggle between pro-LTTE activists and Tamil dissidents in the diaspora. In the second theme I look at the changing forms of political strategies and emerging challenges for political activists in keeping up with the new technological advances required for political campaigns, lobbying and mobilization strategies. This chapter also captures the tensions erupting between the pro-LTTE activists and the dissidents and the struggle to capture political advantage through the strategic and tactical use of cyberspace for mobilization. These two themes encapsulate the effects of cyberspace and the internet on political strategies of Tamil diaspora political activists. They include attributes of resistance or the ability to resist dominant networks while tracing the manner in which such dominant networks attempt to rearticulate their dominance in cyberspace. The themes also explore the problems of envisaging dominant structures in cyberspace. Domination needs to be re-thought in cyberspace as existing political structures that are visible in diaspora politics could not be superimposed directly onto online politics.

The research further reveals the immediacy of online politics and the intensity of political action with the capacity to generate political issues beyond the mere mirroring of developments in Sri Lanka and the ethnic conflict. These developments are based on political issues originating within the diaspora itself, with cyberspace a key location with in which these issues originate. The chapter goes deeper into the emergence of these new political issues and looks at empirical evidence of such changes based on interview

material from my fieldwork, and explores if significant changes have taken place in the realm of online diaspora politics. I introduce a mini case study of the use of online technologies by the Zapatista rebels for political purposes. The case study is a compare and contrast exercise to identify the use of cyberspace by the Tamil diaspora political activists against an organization such as Zapatista which has been the subject of extensive academic research concerning the use of the internet for political activism. Political strategies discussed in this chapter are further explored in the next chapter on cyber conflict.

7.2 Cyberspace: politics and diaspora politics online

The internet's potential for political participation has been debated for more than a decade now (Barber 1997; Browning 1996; Welman 2003). As Chadwick points out the issue is no longer whether politics is online, but in what form and with what consequences (2004: 1). The notion of cyber-politics is identified as a set of political processes which includes many features of traditional politics. It is mainly argued in the above literature that traditional political strategies are being rearticulated in new spaces and that the emergent set of new type of politics are shaped by the new spatial architectures that cyberspace offers.

Cyber politics include an array of new themes which emerged around the communication technological revolution before and after the inception of cyberspace. These include the notion of informational politics, politics of visibility, new democratic spaces and activism, new political mobilization and strategies engaging technologies. These themes have a burgeoning literature around them and, in my research with the emphasis on diasporic political activists, more can be added to the existing knowledge foundations, revealing new insights into the dynamics of cyber politics. The research looks at the politicisation of the online sphere in the Tamil political struggle and the struggle reflects a struggle for control, coupled with new uses of technologies for political ends. These new political spaces and political strategies mediated in cyberspace can respond to the needs of newly emergent themes of activism such as radical democracy, new social movements and identity struggles.

7.3 Empirical analysis

There can be no political analysis of the Tamil diaspora without the LTTE being mentioned, as the LTTE has developed such an organic affiliation with the Tamil diaspora. As Sriskandarajah points out, without doubt the LTTE has fostered the politicization of diaspora life. He points out that the LTTE and its front organizations have been very successful in exporting Tamil Eelam to the diaspora and in recruiting diaspora Tamils to its liberation project. This has been accomplished primarily by making developments in Sri Lanka more proximate to the diaspora (2004:498).

Tamil diaspora politics and the role of the LTTE have been mainly understood as a network which is aimed at running a smooth funding mechanics and a significant propaganda arm. The Tigers believed that running this sort of dual operation channelled their resources to pursue the military means of the conflict, whilst simultaneously maintaining the image of a liberation struggle alive in the western arena. This is identified by Fuglerud as the LTTE shaping the very nature of the diasporic imaginary by constructing a common identity in exile (Fuglerud 2001:198). My research looks beyond this view of LTTE control: it looks at the phenomenon of the rise of Tamil dissidents in the diaspora and the struggle that shapes the Tamil diaspora political terrain before pro-LTTE and the dissidents.

The complicated nature of the research originated from the constant changes that took place in Sri Lankan politics and political developments in the Tamil militancy with effects felt through the diaspora during the period of my research. The split in the LTTE in 2004 was the earthquake but the after effects were felt beyond the Eastern Province where the rebel leader Karuna split with the Northern leadership. The tremors did not stop from there with the election of a new president in Sri Lanka in 2005, whom many political analysts identified as a nationalist who would withdraw from the Cease Fire Agreement (CFA) signed in 2002 February between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. The change of Sri Lankan presidency in 2005 saw rapid changes occurring in state policies and outlook towards handling the conflict. The LTTE kept pressure on the new government with suicide bomb attacks and stepped up some military offensives in the Eastern Province.

The new phase of war started in July 20, 2006 with the LTTE closing a key sluice gate supplying water for 30,000 families in the Eastern Province in the 'Mavil aru' basin. The military engagements soon led to the LTTE being totally dislodged from the East within a year with the capture of strategic area of Thoppigala (Barons rock) on 11 July 2007. The next key development was the Sri Lankan government officially pulling out of the Cease Fire Agreement on 2 January 2008.

These developments within the period of my research had a massive impact on the landscape of the diaspora politics. This was reflected in the strategic changes the LTTE was adopting to maintain its status quo despite the developments in Sri Lanka, while it provided the alternative forces which challenge the LTTE an impetus to mobilize. This is another reason why I focus particularly on the dissident dimension and the role of dissidents in Tamil diaspora politics. The timing of these developments and the importance of cyberspace for this intense rivalry plays a significant role in the Tamil diaspora political sphere. None of the key academic research on Tamil diaspora activism looks at the dissidents as they were not a force in diaspora politics few years ago.

In the next section I focus on unearthing the past and current experiences of my respondents on political engagements online, based on their actual political encounters and experiences. I outline the changes observed in political practices among the diaspora activists and the opportunities and challenges cyberspace has opened up for political engagements.

7.4 Two dimensions of online politics

In this section I have identified two key dimensions in the political processes of the Tamil diaspora where an online political engagement has created a difference in political activities. The first dimension looks at the new 'political opportunities' cyberspace has opened up by reflecting on comments made by the respondents.

7.4.1 Political opportunities

This section looks at the operational value of cyberspace for political activists. The identification of opportunities seems to vary between the Tamil dissidents and the pro-LTTE activists. The importance in this section is locating the nature of cyberspace as a medium of politics enhancing the options for political activists and being a site or staging ground for politics. My research illuminates this complicated matrix as signifying its potential to be incorporated in the study of politics and its ever expanding importance from grassroots to mainstream politics.

Raj told me, 'democratic political operations were made possible by the Internet revolution'. He was referring to the significant rise in dissident activity within the Tamil diaspora, and this movement challenged both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state. According to Raj,

The rise of the dissident movement was kick started with the 2002 peace process. For the dissidents one of the most important aspects for political action was safety and also to be doing politics democratically. We did not want to resort to the dirty tactics and politics of violence LTTE was resorting to in the diaspora by threatening people and threatening families of activist. But using web the dissidents could sometimes challenge the LTTE and it opened up many political opportunities from web based journalism to mobilization. These political spaces in web space facilitated a democratic process which is positive for the Tamil diaspora.

The allusion to the term democracy was discussed in the previous chapter and discussed in theoretical frameworks on contemporary frameworks of democracy. In this chapter I look at its political significance in the political practices of the Tamil activists. The term democracy in the context of cyberspace is used to explain the impact of the internet and web technologies on political processes in general. The term e-democracy or digital democracy has been a key focus area on research into the political impact of the internet. The UK based Hansard Society is a key player in the process for implementing and driving E-democracy in Britain. It defines E democracy as:

The concept of e-democracy is associated with efforts to broaden political participation by enabling citizens to connect with another and with their representatives via new information and communication technologies (Hansard Society 2003)

This simple but commonly used definition of E-democracy looks at the state and its linkages with the citizens and the options in making horizontal linkages citizens in civil society as well as vertical linkages between civil society and policy makers.

In a more advanced definition Hacker and Van Dijik analyse it as:

A collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space, and other physical conditions, using information and communication technology or computer mediated communications instead, as an addition, not a replacement for traditional political processes (Hacker and Van Dijiki, 2001:1).

The later definition looks at the utility of cyberspace in expanding democratic political practices and attempts to locate it within the traditional spheres of politics. The respondents in my fieldwork allude to cyberspace as possessing attributes of a political place or site. The existing notions of E-democracy look at the expansion of choices of citizens and political participation, which is very relevant in my research as well, but I try to look at the way the notion of democracy is constructed in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. The dual apprehension of cyberspace as a political medium (utility) and a political site does expand the role of internet based politics and the continuous speed of evolution of cyberspace against traditional media and communication technologies. Thus the impact of cyberspace in political engagements does have profound changes in the way politics is done and in the reshaping of political strategies.

Raj, responding to the question ‘Why do you think the net is important?’ or ‘why has Tamil nationalism shifted to cyberspace?’ said, ‘I think after the Zapatista the LTTE has used the internet revolution for maximum political actions, as they have the skills, expatriate community (diaspora) and the need for propaganda.’ The role of Zapatista in popularizing informational politics and the significant differences in online political processes within Tamil diaspora web sphere is discussed further as a separate case study in this chapter.

I asked Raj ‘What about state and LTTE control and the ability for the net to challenge hegemonic discourses?’ Raj’s response was, ‘Well there is a democratization of the field as the UK and the Sri Lankan governments are not in control and the diaspora internet

revolution is helping to break the state structures as well' and he went on to say, 'Net politics have surpassed the military technological potential of both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan military.'

Raj meant two things. Firstly neither the LTTE or the Sri Lanka Army dictating the mode of the battle as cyberspace and the speed or immediacy within which things could be changed in cyberspace has changed the pattern of a single entity dominate political field. Battle fields have proliferated so there is no longer one theatre of battle. Secondly, he pointed out that spaces have emerged that neither the LTTE or state military could penetrate as these new democratic spaces in cyberspace could not be targeted by the available military machines of the LTTE or the Sri Lankan state. I introduce some contradictory claims to this in chapters Four and Eight where I bring out the new types of violence spreading into these new safe or democratic spaces and I examine the efforts made by political activists to safeguard them; in this context I discuss the use of cyberspace in bringing the war not just to the doorstep of diasporans living in London but to the heart of their personal spaces such as their family.

Raj identified the configuration of the internet and its use for him as a political activist. This is why he was trying to explain its potential to challenge and resist the hegemonic powers of the LTTE networks. He also spoke about this providing a space for a continuous struggle, 'cyberspace has become a site of struggle, it may be textual, but discussions, writing articles have become a political process and this is a continuous struggle. Look at the role UTHR(J).org plays their reports on the situation in Sri Lanka on cyberspace has become key critiques of the LTTE. They are not just mere reports the texts have become a weapon for us.' This type of response relates to the current understanding of conflict and patterns of war of it being a type of living text. As Gray argues, 'war is a living text, after all, and we are all of us bound into it, of it, even as we tell our parts, as it writes our future' (1997:2). Gray brings out the manner in which war is reproduced in new spheres such as cyberspace and electronic networks. His key argument is based on the lethality of warfare that manifests itself in these new technological spheres. In the context of Tamil diaspora politics, from the media rhetoric to actual ground-based warfare, text has become a critical component of war and remains

a key military asset for propaganda and psychological warfare. The use of texts to display the LTTE's military innovations was discussed in Chapter Five.

With literature on cyber politics often referring to the notion of internet as an information medium (Laguerre 2005a; 2005b), I queried my respondents on the value of information in political activism. I asked Keeran, if it was the 'news' value that made him use the internet. Keeran, in his response stressed the fact that, cyberspace has become a part of his life and was significant in his political activities. He also elaborated on the actual importance of news through web space in the context of the conflict and political activism among the diaspora Tamil nationalists.

Keeran's analysis of the LTTE use of the internet for mobilization provides insights on the use of technology, especially media by the LTTE even prior to the inception of cyberspace. 'From the late 80s to 90s it was VHS and CDs but from 1997 it totally shifted to the use of cyberspace. Within this time line 1996- 2001 the Tamil spaces in the internet were dominated by the LTTE, 2002-2007 the internet saw the LTTE been challenged by dissidents.'

Keeran also revealed that the IT revolution in South India in the late 90's boosted the LTTE. He told me some findings from his own online research on the LTTE and the Tamil national question, 'There has been a significant use of internet by Tamil diaspora...For example in 2000 when you type Tamil and hit the search button it's the 5th significant language with the largest sites, behind English, Hebrew and Chinese. As the Dravida movement used lots of technology from India as well, the LTTE is reputed for its innovations and also merging with South Indian technologists'. The Sri Lankan state was unable to change most of the discursive constructs of the LTTE among the Tamil diaspora, especially on concepts such as 'separate state', 'final war', 'heroes days' and Keeran told me, 'the LTTE has demonstrated an ability to challenge or make discourses in cyberspace and the government couldn't even react with evidence based responses move on from text based to information visualization which can build confidence and trust.'

Keeran brought out examples of the successful use of the internet as a mobilizing strategy. According to him the LTTE managed to connect the Tamil diaspora to the LTTE's major offensives in Sri Lanka using cyberspace as a virtual conduit. He pointed out military operations codenamed 'Unceasing Waves' in which LTTE fighting formations managed to over run major military garrisons in the North and East of Sri Lanka. The LTTE's employment battle tactics such as the wave formations of attacks were discussed in Chapters One and Five and the importance of 'Unceasing Waves' was discussed in Chapter Five. Keeran told me, 'In the attacks against the armed forces in March 2000. It was updated every hour as if all the Tamils were being part of the larger battle and this magnified everything.'⁵⁵

⁵⁵ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=4874>

The image shows a screenshot of the EelamWeb website. At the top, there is a banner with the text 'CIVIL WAR' and 'Gallery'. Below this is the 'EelamWeb' logo and a navigation menu with links: Map, History, LTTE, Operations, National Leader, Our People, Audio, Civil Admin, Martyrs, and FAQ. The main heading is 'LTTE OPERATIONS'. Below this is a large graphic featuring a red flag with a yellow sun and the Tamil text 'ஓயாத அலைகள்' (Unceasing Waves). The graphic also includes a portrait of a man in a military uniform, a tank labeled 'EW', and several circular portraits of individuals. Below the graphic is a section titled 'Unceasing Waves' with three columns:

Waves-4	Waves - 3	Waves - 2
Fighting Still going on, always underconstruction until this operation end.	Vanni, Elephant Pass and Jaffna Battle.	Kilinochchi Battle
Waves - 1		
Mullaitivu Battle		

Figure 40 LTTE field commanders and Eelam Wars on Eelamweb.com

Keeran was referring to one of the most successful uses of the Internet by the LTTE for political goals exclusively in the Tamil diaspora. In politics one of the most important aspects of making things public is the visualisation what is political. This factor has been extracted by the LTTE to the maximum in such web spheres.

Figure 40, relates to the online web campaigns and the website has specifically focused on the wave attacks by the key battle strategy of the LTTE the web site cited is

www.Eelamweb.com⁵⁶, which has been updated with complete information from the battle field. The political significance of this website is its links to all major phases of the ‘Unceasing Waves’ battles. These battles have been the definitive phases of military confrontations in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. More importantly, since 2006 the fourth phase of the war is ongoing. This website has managed to produce a link to phase four of the conflict thus enabling any interested party, mainly Tamil diasporans, to instantly be connected with battlefield information and updates. This is the level of battlefield integration the Tamil diaspora the LTTE was able to achieve using the internet, which Keeran was trying to explain in the interviews.

Keeran’s view was that such real-time updating of developments was used as a key foundation for political mobilization. The ability to harness high levels of battlefield integration with the diaspora and mobilize it for political advantages demonstrated the control of the LTTE. Keeran who once ran a cyber café said, ‘Now there are more than 200 websites controlled by the LTTE apart from Tamil and English, they include French, Dutch, German, Norwegian language websites’. The LTTE began their web operations in 1995, with the launch of Tamilnet but it was re-launched in 1997. In this stage Keeran said ‘The Sri Lankan government did not care and did not respond or do anything but the LTTE fronts capitalized on them’. States are currently increasingly attempting to regulate social and political behaviour online and are monitoring the use of the Internet by groups and movements considered to be a threat to political stability (Chadwick 2006). The Sri Lankan state missed the crucial period of the mid to late 1990s when the LTTE began its web operations.

Keeran said it was important for Tamil diaspora political activists to maintain their control in the diaspora, as it was vital to keep the community connected to the conflict, thus the only medium which provided real time updates within the conflict zone was the web. LTTE elements used to have their fund collection mechanisms running at the height of major confrontations and to legitimate this, the internet has provided the ideal information tool which the LTTE harnessed to synchronise the war effort with the

⁵⁶ <http://www.Eelamweb.com/operation/>

diaspora politics. This maintained the crucial link, like an umbilical cord intact between the LTTE and the Tamil diaspora.

Keeran as a dissident Tamil diaspora activist also noted that,

The importance of web is that you cannot simply operate any political party or movement if you don't know how to operate in cyberspace. Especially for the dissidents for example like the Thenee group (the group behind the website www.Thenee.com) from Germany, the starting of the website enabled them to make connections and also to urge dissidents to come together and Thenee.com really demonstrated the power of cyberspace and its political importance when the LTTE actually realized the damage it did for them and their web operations such as the Tamilnet.com.

Keeran's allusion to the Thenee group is important in locating the importance of web politics in the Tamil diaspora political sphere. The Thenee group now has begun to mobilize within Europe and to establish links with other democratic Tamil organizations and dissidents. One example is the partnership it has with the Sri Lankan Democratic Forum (SLDF). Keeran who constantly maintains links with the Thenee group claimed that most of the dissident events in France and Germany are now organized by the Thenee group. The emergence of the Thenee group as a political force is an important contribution online politics has made in creating spaces and facilities of mobilization to dissidents. The Thenee group first emerged as a web operation and then transformed into a fully fledged diaspora political unit.

The knowledge of cyberspace is critical for the political movement as the activists could not establish their claims anymore unless they had a well entrenched cyber presence. This demonstrates that internet politics has moved on from being a mere add-on to political action on the ground to a vital foundation of political action and a mandatory requirement for any political movement.

Web presence has become an important feature in political action and political processes. This has been emphasized by researchers on the importance of maintaining of web process and its political implication. Arnold and Plymire's research on the Cherokee Indians reveal that this community has developed a web archive for the preservation of

their tradition (2000). Similarly the 'Maya Project', launched in Guatemala, maintains a web presence to preserve a cultural space for twenty two indigenous cultures (Becker and Delgado 1998). The urgency for web presence has become a significant political value while providing the critical infrastructure needed for political processes especially for minority groups. Both pro-LTTE elements and the dissidents are finding that the opportunities cyberspace has given them are politically important and both realize the political actions that they take online have real life ramifications.

Rajanayagam, another dissident activist and a very senior figure among the dissidents, referring to the use of the internet by the dissidents, said 'the last few years saw the proliferation of non LTTE websites, which included a vast array of political lines including moderates, critical of the LTTE websites, and out and out anti LTTE'. While acknowledging that LTTE gatherings are mainly organized through cyber mobilization tactics, he said that the dissenting community's political mobilization was spread out along the globe. He told me, 'they made cyberspace one place to hold their political discussions and in the last 6 months this resulted in the ability for the dissidents to organize meetings in London, Canada, Berlin, Paris.'

Dissident Tamil activist Rengan summed up his view on cyberspace and politics of Tamil diaspora by claiming 'all websites operating in the Sri Lankan Tamil web sphere were set up for political purposes'. In the discussion of politics of mobilization using internet and how things have changed Rengan started off with an interesting revelation. He told me of the total suppression of internet use in the areas the LTTE control in Sri Lanka,

LTTE has established total control of internet usage in areas under its control and no house can have internet, the facility is available only in public spaces run by the LTTE which they had the ability to control, and monitor internet usage.

Rengan was trying to expose the LTTE approach to controlling and dominating any political sphere which is under their reign. Rengan took this example to point out the LTTE tactics of controlling the political spaces in London. He spoke about the Tiger's rigid control of the media spaces in London and the manner they dealt with anti LTTE publications like 'Thesam' magazine and the newspaper 'London voice'. They were

totally barred from being sold at any Tamil business in London. Such hurdles were politically negotiated through spaces and sites and by transforming such publications into internet based operations prior to breaking into the physical world.

In my interview with dissident Tamil activist and journalist Jeyabalan, he provided again some factual analysis of the importance of the informational politics of the web for political action and activism. For him the importance of cyberspace was the ability to declassify or expose the veil of secrecy of the LTTE operations, which was one of its key strengths. He pointed out at the same time how the dissidents exposed the state and its role in human rights violations and discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka. He told me, ‘that the net has significant influence on the state and the LTTE and introduced two examples to support his claims. These examples are discussed below and I try to look at their significance in the context of online politics.

In June 2007 the Sri Lankan government decided non resident Tamils who were residing the City of Colombo should be evicted and sent back to the North within 24 hours. This was due to security intelligence warning of Tigers infiltrating the city to attack a high level target. The news of this eviction was made into a huge issue by the LTTE fronts, with a combination of websites and email lists targeting international governments, civil society organizations, and human rights organizations positioned it as a ‘genocidal attempt’ by the Sri Lankan state. The effect of the mobilization against the government made the state revoke the decision within 24 hours. This, Jeyabalan points out, was a successful internet campaign which got results.

In another example, Jeyabalan revealed that during the post Tsunami period, the LTTE abducted children from some Tsunami camps in Batticaloa and Ampara districts. International agencies such as the UNICEF and Human Rights Watch (HRW) brought this matter to light. In these instances the LTTE vehemently denied these allegations. Then the political head of the LTTE Thamilselvan claimed:⁵⁷

⁵⁷ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=14396>

We were shocked and disappointed when the UNICEF put out the report. However, we appointed a special committee under the (LTTE) Peace Secretariat to investigate and verify the information in the UNICEF report. The committee went to the east and investigated the list of under age persons who, according to the UNICEF report, were with us. It found that persons whom we had handed back to their parents after we found them to be underage, persons who had left the LTTE and had got married and others who had gone back to their families were in the UNICEF list as persons who were still with the LTTE. We have pointed this out to the UN Secretary General with sufficient proof. The committee is continuing to verify the UNICEF list despite the practical difficulties on the ground. (2005)

But Jeyabalan pointed out, the LTTE could not be in denial of all the abductions they were responsible for, as with the case of the abduction of 23 children in 2006. On 18 December 2006 LTTE abducted 23 students all under the age of 18 from a tuition class for GCE Ordinary Level examination in the village of Vinayagapuram in the Ampara District. There was a massive web campaign highlighting this event and with the local and international media being alerted using emailing campaigns by various political activists. The LTTE later had to back track on these claims when the story of the mass abduction in the Ampara district came to light and with the massive web campaign by dissident organizations. The web demonstrated the importance of being able to counter the LTTE and make LTTE change their stance and accept the mistakes they made, which even agencies such as UNICEF were incapable of achieving.

According to Jeyabalan, the LTTE earlier denied the story but they later apologized for it and put the blame for it on an area commander and released the children to the parents. Jeyabalan went on to say,

For the first time in the history of the LTTE, they apologized for a particular incident and not even for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination did they apologize publicly.

Jeyabalan insisted that the use of email had huge political significance in his political life as well as its impact on the online politics. He pointed out also the unique spatial attribute of political spaces emerging in cyberspace. He told me, 'emailing also has created a mobilization space'.

The screenshot shows the TamilNet website interface. At the top left is the TamilNet logo. To its right, the URL 'www.tamilnet.d' is displayed in a green box. Below the URL is a yellow banner with the text 'Reporting to the world on Tamil Affairs'. On the left side, there is a vertical navigation menu with a 'News' header and a list of years from 2009 to 2005, and months from December to January. The main content area displays a news article with the following text:

4TH LEAD
Amparai LTTE commander orders release of 21 students
 [TamilNet, Tuesday, 19 December 2006, 05:57 GMT]
Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Amparai District Special Commander Ram has ordered immediate release of 21 students and 2 teachers who were found in the custody of an LTTE unit in Amparai Tuesday, LTTE's Military Spokesman Irasiah Ilanthirayan told TamilNet. The cadres were removed from operational duty and an internal investigation was on, the LTTE spokesman quoted Commander Ram.
 The Tiger spokesman described the event as an "unfortunate episode."
 The LTTE cadres had taken 21 students, 15 girls, 6 boys, their teacher and the owner of a private tutoring from Vinayagapuram in Thirukkovil in Amparai district around 9:00 p.m. Monday while the students were attending a preparatory tuition for the ongoing GCE (O/L) examinations.

Figure 41 LTTE claims responsibility for abduction

Figure 41⁵⁸ is from the lead story of the Tamilnet.com on 19 December 2006, where the LTTE went public in accepting the responsibility for the abductions. The key factor in cyber politics is the effect that it has had as a tactical tool, where the LTTE is forced to respond by relying upon the internet to counter the political moves made against it.

The next section looks at the same theme but from the view point of pro-LTTE activists, give looking at both sides of this diaspora political sphere with help to understand the recent tensions within the diaspora political field. Exploring the role of cyberspace in the new phases of politics where a clear division within the Tamil diaspora emerges concerning the future of Tamil nationalism and the militancy. The workings of two political power projects, the obvious conflict for control of diaspora politics both ideologically and physically, and the role of cyberspace as a political place as well as a political utility, sheds light on the political significance of new technologies.

⁵⁸ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=20660> (accessed 27 November 2007)

I will start with Sutha's take on cyberspace. He told me,

Politically it is a different kind of battle ground, it is not the same political field I have experienced in my life. The importance is this is different battle field which requires different strategies. This is why we need to be ahead and need to be present online. These new requirements do always challenge us to think differently on our political strategies.

This is an interesting observation, not only because the notion 'battle ground' locates cyberspace as a site for political action, but because the moment it is given this connotation of place it can be viewed as a political space defined by a set of political practices that should be geared to this 'different battle'. Landzelius attempts to bring out this new type of political analysis of the politics of cyberspace involving indigenous groups and diaspora movements. She claims that 'we witness the deployment of cyberspace not only as a staging ground, but a virtual battle field for sovereignty in the name of ethnicity' (2006: 14). Sutha refers to the use of cyberspace as a staging ground that has the capability to contribute to the military output of the conflict. The importance again is the capability of cyberspace to link diasporan activists to mobilize them to work together to advance the military position of the LTTE.

This application of the battlefield concept concept cyber politics in the Tamil nationalist movement concurs Sutha's emphasis on the need to be ahead in the game, and this refers to the importance of speed as an advantage in cyber politics. As speed is a power property in the political battle field this demonstrates of 'first strike' capability and a capacity to out manoeuvre the enemy. He went on to say,

If I don't have access to the internet I will be useless as a political activist. The internet has made things change fast not just within cyberspace even in political tactics we have to keep up with the speeds that have altered the mobilization process. I realized when I miss what happening in the internet for a day the next day I feel my world has changed. Speed and presence for us has become crucial in this new environment

This is a similar observation to dissident activist Keeran and both sides of the Tamil political spectrum demonstrate the vital necessity of web presence for political

mobilization and the effects of real time connections and speed that are critical strategic assets for political action. Sutha added that there can be mobilization despite geographic limitations. He seems to be clearly aware of the immediacy and speed which cyberspace has created and he is desperately trying to adapt because, as revealed in the earlier chapter, his aim was to dominate cyberspace.

Sutha's intention to capture the political opportunities that cyberspace offers proves that web sources are in constant competition with each other for the privilege of providing information. They compete for inclusion as well as prominence in all manner of information spaces. They also compete to be the leading information source, the source that matches the information requested or given at any particular time. The competition is particularly fierce for placement in 'authoritative spaces' (Rogers: 2004). Rogers claims that web politics is capable of becoming information instruments that can challenge the versions of political realities that exist in day to day politics. These realities are constructed in 'authoritative spaces' (2004: 3). In the Tamil diaspora there is severe competition between the LTTE, the Sri Lankan state and the Tamil dissident group to achieve the status of 'legitimacy' as this holds the key in mobilization of Tamil diasporans. The notion of legitimacy stands for voice and representation, the sustaining of a hegemonic discourse of truth which makes it a significant political struggle.

The cases described above emphasise the fact that political spheres and places of politics are shaped through cyberspace and that cyberspace is an important space for politics. Sutha kept on hinting this, referring to his own political engagements while he emphasized the emergence of a new discipline and new opportunities. Sutha believed that cyberspace is a new political site, a new political space, and political processes or political activism in the political space of London or in Europe cannot be achieved in the same pattern or same format.

Pro-LTTE activist Kumar also said that in political engagements the facility to continuously update political developments within the diaspora and Sri Lanka had an important political value. He told me,

Another edge is the ability for continuous updates; this helps the diaspora community to be up to date on the political developments in Sri Lanka. It helps political activists to challenge the Sri Lankan state. With the ability for real time update all of us can review our responses and also make us link better with international agencies. The real time updating is an impact factor in online political action along with the ability to get information so quickly is as important. It enables us to formulate quick and effective lobby material.

The added advantage of this updating and verification process is the ability to develop good relationships with international organizations which can have an effect on the Sri Lankan state: 'when we use this information on discussions, we develop a better network.'

To sum up the section on political opportunities, it is clear that the ability to use cyberspace, and its political significance for diasporas, varies based upon its political objectives. For the diaspora Iranians, according to Graham and Khosravi (2002:10 – 11), cyberspace was greatly important to understanding the depth and breath of the diaspora community as it helped them to reorder certain relationships while making them aware of being diasporan and of their duties to the community. Similarly to the pro-LTTE networks, the Kurdish diaspora were relying heavily on the internet as they used its safe environment to pursue the Kurdish diasporan objective of creating a Kurdish nation state (Landzelius 2006: 23). This is similar to the concept of safe space raised by Tamil dissidents in my interviews. The political opportunities that cyberspace provided for activists had effects on minority communities who make up the marginalised ethnic groups. Hala Fattah (2006) brings out the case of Turcomans and Assyrians who live in Iraq and use the internet to discursively construct their identity and political significance by tracing and sometimes inflating the importance of historic events. Such inflations or discursive constructs of history are common in the Tamil nationalist web domains. The significance of the Tamil web sphere is its active influence on offline political activities, absorbing them online and developing a unique set of dynamics where new political issues are hatched online that can affect the offline. This continuous relationship between the online and the offline in the Tamil diaspora web sphere makes it more than a purely informational medium in the context of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka.

The political opportunities the Tamil political activists discussed in the interviews have some unique features in them as well as certain, more traditional, advantages in politics

with the development of communication technologies. A distinct feature from the dissidents' point of view was the internet as a space of politics and a political position or place. These, they claim, can generate effects of political power with the potential to be used as launch pads into dominated or contested spaces in the Tamil diaspora which the LTTE control. The classic example which came was the discourse of nation and the LTTE's representation of the liberation struggle for the Tamil nation. The dissident political activists claimed that the use of cyberspace based political strategies enabled Tamil diasporans to access different versions of the truth about the struggle and not only the LTTE version. They claimed this had a dual impact where the LTTE image was challenged and secondly the dissidents had viable justifications for their claims on the actual actions of the LTTE, which were extremely difficult to visualize to the diaspora.

In this level of analysis based on the observations of the political activists, it is clear that they seem to understand significant changes in politics and political strategies within the larger context of Tamil diaspora politics under the influence of cyberspace. The observations and interviews focus mainly on the changes of politics due to cyberspace opening up a new set of opportunities to these political activists. Thus these observations, mainly from Tamil dissidents, can be linked to the earlier responses pertaining to the spaces of politics in cyberspace. Though some of the observations are linked to more traditional arguments concerning internet driven politics, such as information distribution, propaganda and networking, there seem to be unique insights into processes of democratization and power relationship in new spaces of politics.

7.4.2 Political strategies

This section looks at the shaping of political strategies of Tamil diaspora activists based on the impact of the internet. I try to engage the changes of political strategies that activists brought out in my interviews including experiences which they claimed were triggered because of politics or political use of cyberspace. This section is focused on the practical methodologies of political activists in their day to day political practices in contrast to the opportunities discussed above.

Raj pointed out, ‘the web operation for Tamil politics is very significant. Look at the tamilnation.com of Satyendra which is a massive archive of information and not just that a cultural, historical archive...’ He highlighted the notion of information and the uniqueness of the internet was the way it could order, arrange and store information and the ability to use it for tactical and strategic reasons. The notion of information politics was first developed by Manuel Castells (2004). His analysis was based on how governments functioned and performed not through classic government – citizen exchanges and deliberations but rather through the mediations of the press and broadcasting media. This was elaborated in his seminal *Power of Identity* (2004).

Raj was talking of strategic shifts in the political practices of the LTTE especially the strategies of maintaining fear among the diaspora. The LTTE is able to politically pressurize Tamil diasporans by using cyberspace as a gateway to launch its strikes on dissenting Tamils both in the diaspora and Sri Lanka. This is similar to Richard Grusin’s (2004) recent discussion on the use of information politics for strategic reasons. He used the term ‘premediation’ to conceptualize the most extreme form of informational politics, where officially planned events, such as war, are ‘pre-screened’ so that viewers may become accustomed to the realities ahead. This type of information politics is close to certain web politics of the LTTE, where they had pre fabricated stories of strikes concerning targets which are later actualized. This LTTE strategy will be discussed at length in the chapter on Web Sphere Analysis.



Figure 42 Image of murdered Tamil dissident

Figure 42⁵⁹ is from an article from the LTTE front operated Neruppu.org , which appeared on 11 March 2008, The person depicted is Kumar Sathisaran (alias Shanthan), an area leader of Tamil party TMVP (Tamil Makkal Viduthalai Pulikal) with two images positioned either side of his picture naming him as being wanted and offering a reward. The TMVP is the political front of the former paramilitary group popularly known as the Karuna group, named after the Eastern commander who split with the LTTE in 2004. Shanthan was murdered on 21 May 2008. Many dissidents spoke of the LTTE strategy of identifying their targets and describing them on web sites prior to the actual killing. This is a classic example of the LTTE use of cyberspace and the shaping of political strategies on par with its militant practices and its insidious use of cyber tactics as tool of political intimidation.

The LTTE is attempting to shape the political identity of the diaspora Tamils as Tamils of the Eelam nation which it is trying to establish. Tamil dissidents by contrast are pointing out their successful infiltration and exposure of secretive political operations of the LTTE. Their deployments in cyberspace were successful in attacking the LTTE and making the LTTE respond. This makes it hard for the LTTE to be secretive. For the LTTE the notion of secrecy contains two fundamental meanings. First, the operational efficiency for LTTE transnational network to function without any problems and secondly, it enables their ideological dominance over the diaspora, which includes the ability to maintain a single voice and feed the diaspora with one dimension of information particular to the struggle. Jeyadevan points out both these dimensions of secrecy were, to an extent, shattered through the web based political operations of the dissidents. D.B.S Jeyaraj, the Toronto-based journalist, was one of the pioneers exposing the LTTE, and his website Transcurrents.com, plays a significant role in exposing the LTTE. Jeyaraj was physically assaulted even prior to his use of cyberspace but he seems to have increased his readership and challenges to the LTTE with the use of the internet. The LTTE traditionally projected themselves being in possession of an invincible war machine. Among the diaspora such standpoints were challenged with information reaching the diaspora community concerning the deaths of LTTE leaders and military

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http://www.neruppu.org/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1205262959&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1 & (accessed 11 March 2008)

defeats. ‘These have a major impact on the LTTE’ Jeyadevan claimed. The LTTE international operations were subjected to crack-downs by the host states of the diasporas as well. These crack-downs in USA, Australia and France dented the LTTE’s international operations. The dissidents claimed that some information of the LTTE secrets were exposed prior to this online and that such information helped successful raids on LTTE rings operating within the diaspora communities.

Jeyadevan suggested another example where by the LTTE’s secrecy and the actual facts behind their propaganda operations among the diaspora community were exposed. He claimed, ‘the best time for attacking the pro-LTTE fronts is on the Heroes day celebrations. We expose the reality behind the Heroes Day celebration and the LTTE operations. We have campaigned online and proven that these Heroes day activities in London are a violation of the Terrorism Act.’ The Heroes Day or Great Warriors Day popularly know-in Tamil as ‘Maaveerar naal’, is a day inaugurated by the Tiger leader on Nov 27, 1989 to commemorate fallen Tiger cadres in battle. Now the event is more of a diaspora mobilizing event for the LTTE and a mode of maintaining the notion of ‘battle’, the ‘Tiger’ and ‘struggle for homeland’ alive. The zenith of this is a huge cultural pageant organized in diaspora hubs which depict heroic acts of tiger cadres and different methods of raising funds in the name of the homeland.



Figure 43 Heroes Day poster 2005 from Tamilnathan.com

National Heroes Day

An Introduction

Tamil Eelam's National Heroes Days are celebrated for the three days ending November 27, which is the day the first LTTE fighter gave his life for the freedom of the Tamil Eelam nation. Heroes Day celebrations first started in 1989 when it was held on a single day, November 27.

From 1990-4 the programme was held over a seven-day period, ending also on the 27th. Since 1995, it has been held for 3 days ending again on the 27th.

Maveerar days are held by people all over Tamil Eelam in honour of the LTTE freedom fighters. During these celebrations people light traditional oil lamps at home and in public places and ceremonies are held in which Tamil Eelam's national flag is proudly raised. People also engage in prayers for their nation, speeches are delivered by prominent people and the portraits of freedom fighters who died are suitably garlanded.

Figure 44 An introduction Heroes Day

The above two figures are from the websites tamilnathan.com⁶⁰ and Eelamweb.com⁶¹, Figures 43 and 44 depicts a national Heroes Day celebration event in the Tamil diaspora, which is visualizing the graves of the dead LTTE fighters, whilst the second explains briefly what National Heroes day means within the Eelamist discourse. The web sites are powerful sites for actualizing the events strongly linked to the conflict, while the images are helping to mobilize the diaspora community for the support of the LTTE.

Jeyadevan points out the numerous political opportunities and strategic maneuvers cyberspace has offered them as dissident Tamil activists. He identifies this trend as, 'a whole new mechanism for political action'. He provided insights into their campaign of exposing LTTE activities in London; in this case he referred to how the dissidents using the web managed to expose a funding operation run for the LTTE through a Hindu temple in Colindale. Jeyadevan said, 'We used an email campaign to expose this and we targeted the local MP Andrew Dismore, and he had to respond to it, and within two months the temple was raided by the police'. Email campaigns have grown in significance and have become a strategic tool rather than a purely tactical asset in political activism. Jordan and Taylor (2004) emphasize the connection email has to actual political processes and its prolific impact at times where information becomes a danger to the life of the person who possesses it. This was quite similar to the

⁶⁰ http://www.tamilnaatham.com/advert/20051030/heroes_day/

⁶¹ <http://www.Eelamweb.com/maveerar/introduction/>

experiences of dissidents who were subjected to intimidation and harassment for possessing information that was harmful to the LTTE but eventually were exposed through the web. Jordan and Taylor claim, 'when the writing comes from a besieged community that is in revolt then individuals must take personal risk to make sure the information spread. Once the information reaches the internet it explodes' (2004: 95). Here Jeyadevan was pointing out the fragility of information and its transformation into robust political issues. This is the strategic importance of information and its solidification in cyberspace.

Sutha told me, 'working electronically is a force multiplier as you pool resources.' He was first referring to his newspaper and the ability to expand the publishing and circulation operation globally and in real time. He said it is re-printed in other diaspora centres, with a mere switching of formats suitable to Tamil diaspora communities in other states. He was stressing the notion of speed, immediacy which he identified as properties of cyberspace which facilitated information dissemination. He tried to use the term 'force multiplier' to highlight these technological aspects. I asked him further to explain the term force multiplier, as it's a recurrent term in literature on concerning advantages of the internet. He told me, 'I transfer the template of the paper to the guy in Sydney. He changes the advertisements and reproduces it in real time and our reach has expanded significantly since our cyber operations began.' In an attempt to determine if Sutha was trying to bring out the communication aspect and the development of the technology I asked if he was outlining the development of cyberspace as a communication tool, his response was,

No, it's much more than communication, and also politically it is a new way of doing things, but not a new way of doing old things. We have resorted to political strategies with the changes internet brought forward such as the increasing demand to be alert, the speed and presence as I keep emphasizing these things affect the way we do politics now.

Political actors are increasingly attempting to use the internet to enhance their presence and legitimate their activities in ways which are genuinely new but still have affinities with the older media strategies (Jordan and Taylor 2004). I was probing into what political activists like Sutha felt about this. He elaborated on what he meant by saying,

‘it is a new form of doing politics, and it’s a new form of democracy’. The notion of the political necessity of the web is another factor which Sutha emphasized in his evaluation of the web and its impact on him personally, where he said it was a totally new thing. Not being present in cyberspace would be a drawback in maintaining his political project and, in particular, maintaining the dominance of the LTTE ideology would become impossible. Sutha, to back up his claim concerning cyberspace offering new kind of politics, told me, ‘it was all about new disciplines and new opportunities’.

Sutha’s key perception of cyberspace was its role as a new kind of battlefield demanding innovative political strategies to cope with the challenges that it offers. He told me, ‘the hegemony of ideas is never complete and we want to battle for ideas and resist ideas that counter our ideology in cyberspace’. This is parallel to the idea of Tamilness and the notion of Tamil nation that the LTTE was trying to create within the diaspora. Cheran (2001) theorises that the new Tamilness which is created especially in the context of diaspora as a nationalist project spearheaded by the LTTE ideology. He claims that it comes in the background of attempts to reterritorialize Tamilness, where transnational Tamilness is created as a consciousness of the heroic Tamil race or ‘puli thamil’ (Tamil Tiger) which is contrasted in the earlier interpretation of the victim Tamil diaspora. This is the political ideology reflected in the notion of the ‘battle for ideas’ which Sutha was illuminating. The LTTE constantly strives to maintain a continuous support network for its military project within the diaspora, and thus events like Heroes Day celebrations became critical points for harmonising support and loyalty for the tiger project.

In my interview with the pro-LTTE activist Kumar, he highlighted a new shift in strategic decision-making to do with political mobilization strategies. The political process shifts to cyberspace and integrates strategies of mobilization with online technologies. Kumar revealed that prior to planning campaigns for mobilization or for lobbying against the Sri Lankan state he would look at how political processes now work in the web and plan accordingly. He told me,

It also helps us to shape our campaign and my organization focus on what is required to be done to respond to the Sri Lankan state immediately. Now we observe what’s happening online and we try to analyse which web site is important and how we can encounter the government and challenge the Sri

Lankan leadership. To understand the emerging political trends we first observe how web sites and internet is used and then we design our own strategies to counter the political strategies of Sri Lanka and pro-Sinhala activists.

In this context, Kumar was providing a fresh insight into developing political strategies on the web. He was explaining how the pro-LTTE activists had moved on from the strategy of simply hosting information in the web looking at the web as a more dynamic source and site of political activity. Thus what Kumar here stressed was the important need to understand political shifts in cyberspace by drawing out political strategies. Such reasoning points to the fact that political strategies applied within the diaspora are constantly changing because of the extensive use of the web and its effect on politics within the diaspora community and in the international context.

The Current literature on political mobilization online from Jordan (2004) to Chadwick (2006) is focusing on the online political strategies adopted by activists. Kumar emphasises a contradictory view to this. According to him his organization adopts online political strategies after observing the forms of political processes that take place on the web. Thus what he is arguing is that they have moved on from the static political strategies that are used on the web to strategies that are responding to dynamics of the web. What Kumar is pointing out, both operationally and philosophically, is a new way of doing things on the web. As Sutha pointed out earlier 'it is a new way of doing things, not doing old things in a new way.'

Especially since new dimensions in cyber politics are opening up and they are not mirror images of the social and political relationships nurtured offline, they bring with them opportunities and challenges to political activists. In the case of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, political engagements span both macro and micro political spheres, As Laguerre points out, 'to say that the networks and circuits of virtual diasporic spaces are not neutral this is simply to recognize that a principal component of their effect is political-political especially in the sense that virtual diasporas affect the politics of their home nations, as well as participating in the politics of host nation' (2005: 135). Thus virtual diasporas help make national politics transnational, complicating the politics of both the homeland and host land. Interestingly though Laguerre does not venture deep into explaining these complications, is it clear that through the new political issues

emerging and the immediacy they create the Tamil diasporan political scene has been considerably complicated.

LTTE claim now drops to 10,000

15 July 2007

News

The LTTE media claim of the numbers attending the demonstration in Trafalgar Square in London is rapidly declining. Original claim of 50,000 saw a sharp decline to 20,000 within few hours in the LTTE website nitharsanam.com. The sister website pathivu.com of nitharsanam is now claiming only 10,000 attended the demonstration.

Pathivu.com publishing the news about the demonstration in Tamil has displayed many more pictures of the event.

Using the photographs published so far, efforts have been made to reveal in our website the best head count of the people attended the demonstration.

Figure 45 Tamilaffairs.com countering LTTE web information

Despite the pressures from large section of the Tamil community and the police authorities, the LTTE activists held their celebrations this year in London on 24 July 2007. Few activists gathered outside London Boroughs of Watford, Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Morden and Walthamstow in a determined way to show that they are still live and kicking.

WATFORD COUNCIL: 22 people mainly family members including the baby brigade of four children participated in the demonstration.



Figure 46 Tamilaffairs.com questions LTTE's credibility

The above two figures (45⁶² & 46⁶³) are from an anti LTTE website Tamilaffairs.com, countering a key strength of the LTTE in the diaspora. This ability to expose and magnify using images of the failure of the pro-LTTE fronts to mobilize carries a significant political edge for the dissidents. The dissidents although in the minority in the diaspora political realm are finding ways of balancing their own physical limitations in

⁶² <http://Tamilaffairs.com/node/384> (accessed 27 November 2007)

⁶³ <http://Tamilaffairs.com/node/464> (accessed 27 November 2007)

terms of public demonstration by using web operations while attributing the same weaknesses to the LTTE. The article on the failed protest at Watford Council carries a further punch by stating that the 22 protestors mainly came from a few families including 'the baby brigade of 4'. The term 'baby-brigade' alludes to the controversial child soldiers and children-only fighting units which make up many of the rank and file in the LTTE. Many dissidents and even pro-LTTE members told me that mass emailing and targeted emailing strategies some times worked better than demonstrations and protest campaigns.

This kind of adoption of new strategies shifting from mass demonstrations to mass emailing, is interesting in the political mobilization of diasporans. Cyberspace strategies are taking place, where the demonstration strategy is exhausted. A decade or two ago, solidarity movements or liberation movements protesting in spaces such as Trafalgar Square had a political impact or were a symbol of political strength in mobilizing crowds. Cyberspace has become equally important site for political mobilization and its symbolic political position is sometimes preferred over the traditional rationale of street. The mass emailing campaigns are one such effort of mobilization and making both the LTTE's and the dissident's voice heard.

Both Jeyadevan and Kumar, coming from totally opposite positions on the political spectrum, had interesting views on the notion of mass emailing. Jeyadevan pointed out more than mass rallies, emails forwarded to officials in UN, members of EU and other related organizations seem to have had a better impact on political actions and in terms of challenging the LTTE. Kumar elaborating on his day to day activities told me, 'we are able to hit multiple targets and carry out multiple hits'. Kumar was highlighting the strength of email as a tool for lobbying and its ability to target a desired group. Kumar stressed it was important to design email campaigns to target an important audience and by such precision email campaigns he stressed it was much more likely to achieve the desired effect for the sender. Bringing out an example of how his organization prepares email campaigns, Kumar revealed the emailing campaigns of his organization are sent to 1412 members in their emailing list. Each member has his or her own list of fifty more members across Europe. This forwarding from the original 1412 members to their own 50 greatly multiplies the targets. This method of coordination has made their

mobilization tactics successful. Passive emailing strategies are based on educating their targets rather than actively pushing for mobilization, a classic example are the emails sent by the SLDF to its members.

In Kumar's words active emailing 'enables us to make natural linkages'. He brought out a set of examples which he saw were related to his understanding of the political impact of web strategies. He claimed that 'Emailing strategy, has significantly altered our political mobilization strategies, and campaigns. In particular, we used them for lobbying to establish the P-TOMS mechanisms.' The P-TOMS or 'Post Tsunami Operational Management Structure' (also known as Joint Mechanism / North and East Relief Board) was a structure which was introduced after the Tsunami for the government and the LTTE to find a workable framework in which to share aid provided for post-Tsunami reconstruction and development. The operational apparatus of the P-TOMS was a committee or series of committees with a very limited mandate.

Sri Lankan society was highly divided on the proposition of the structure as it was felt that the State was recognizing the LTTE as a de facto and legitimate system of government. There was tremendous international pressure on the government to establish the mechanism. Kumar claimed that such pressure was exerted on Sri Lanka with their email strategy of contacting the right person and organizations which could influence the Sri Lankan state.

Kumar's point was, as he described in his own words, 'emailing has made us develop new strategies and tactical responses to address the international community and lobbying individuals are very important in our operations, and we need to get to the right person'. The emailing strategies of Kumar's organization have been developed precision targets and have achieved on the ability to reach across time zones and especially a facility to respond to queries.

It is interesting to see the evolution of the e-mail and its political impact, from its mere inception as a mere innovation made by a software engineer installed a communication protocol for sharing information across the internet's predecessor Arpanet (Jordan 2004).

In analyzing the discussion about emailing as a political strategy and the developments of it, I am exploring the use of email as a technology and as an active and passive political utility. The reason that I am breaking it down into active and passive forms, is that the active emailing strategy is planned and targeted and it is packaged in a way that is dissimilar to be used as a communication or propaganda tool. The active emailing campaigns involve a political will and a political execution to achieve political goals.

‘We now email all members of the human rights commission, and NGOs which have consultative status within the UN human rights commission’. Kumar further said referring to the most recent and successful campaign to pressurize the Sri Lankan president when he toured United States in September last year. As Kumar revealed ‘For example in the recent visit of President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Washington we were able to lobby human rights and related organizations and Senators⁶⁴, even before he was in USA, we had the groups mobilized.’ The Sri Lankan President was actually confronted with these issues and he had to respond and make certain changes in the government’s real world operations as well. These campaigns targeted Senators and important members in human rights monitoring sub committees in the Congress as well as in the senate. These included targeted email campaigns to Senators such as Barbara Boxer, Patrick Leahy, Thad Cochran and the current President Barack Obama. They also targeted top officials working for Senator Hillary Clinton and former President Bill Clinton. The Sri Lankan office of the President had to manage these issues on his first visit to Washington after being elected president and thus the President had to speak of his plans for a political solution and to elaborate on the safeguards applied for protecting the right of the Tamil people⁶⁵.

As a prelude to concluding this section it will be interesting to revisit a problem posed by Castells, does the internet play a purely instrumental role in expressing social protests and political conflicts? Or is there a transformation of the rules of the socio political game in cyberspace that ultimately affects the game itself – namely the forms of movements and political actors (2001: 137)? My research responses from the activists point out, especially in the diasporic political sphere, that there are significant changes in

⁶⁴ Letter to Senator Barbara Boxer
http://www.congress.org/congressorg/bio/userletter/?letter_id=1619014621

⁶⁵ Sources from the President office of Sri Lanka

the game and in the spatial architecture of political action. These changes in the form of doing politics and the need for strategic shifts in political processes are influenced based upon the need to politicize cyberspace and to dominate it to achieve political objectives. It also demonstrates that cyberspace is not just influenced by developments in actual political theatres but have the capacity to influence political activities outside of it, including the physical political activities and processes.

The political engagements that are discussed here demonstrate that there are a number of new political issues generated because of web politics among the Tamil diasporans. The number of issues, political exchanges and political stakeholders are further analysed in the context of the conflict later in the next chapter. The final section of the chapter engages with case study of Zapatista politics and its use of the internet for political mobilization and the similarities and differences with the Tamil diaspora political engagement online.

7.5 Revisiting Zapatista effect

I look briefly at the use of internet by the Zapatista movement as it is the most researched and published event alluding to the potential of cyberspace. I try to establish the similarities and differences from the Tamil diasporan web engagement by comparing Zapatista's use of online politics. Manuel Castells, defines the Zapatista as 'the first informational guerrilla movement' (Castells 2004: 82). They have been the darlings of the hacker communities, internet activists and on inspiration to millions who supported the anti globalization movement and the protests in Seattle against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999, which is also itself another case study for many analysts of the online mobilization strategies of political and social movements.

The origins of the Zapatista movement lie in Fuerzas de Liberacion National (FLN), which has created as a Marxist Maoist movement responding to a massacre of students in Tlatelolco in 1968 (McDonald 2006: 114). The organization takes its name from Emiliano Zapata, the revolutionary leader of the peasant army of the 1910 Mexican Revolution (Belausteguigoitia 2006: 98). The Mexican conflict between the indigenous

people and the Mexico state points towards deep historical roots, dating back to the Spanish conquest in the 16th century and the principle source of tension cited by researcher's (McDonald 2006; Olsen 2005) concerns the struggle over the distribution and possession of land. The event that globalized the focus on Mexico and the Zapatista was its new year's uprising in 1994. This took place within the context of the Mexican government issuing a decree abolishing the land use rights of the Indians in the Lacandon region in Mexico.

The movement has been identified as the model for modern social movements and a first instance of net warfare (Ronfeldt et al 1997). Clever (1998), a key intellectual ally of the Zapatistas and a researcher on modern social movements and the internet, identifies the key effect of the Zapatista's online activity to be the popularization of the movement illuminated the ability of a grassroots movement to trigger international discussion, while linking such struggles to a global audience, by passing the restrictions of the nation state with ease. Schultz (1998) identifies the strength of the Zapatista 'social networking capacity' being how it made them less dependent on their military structure for challenging the Mexican state.

The Zapatista insurgency triggered a transnational social movement emerging in the global order to counter globally defined threats and the shrinking of national political action spaces (Garrido and Halavais 2004: 171). This demonstrated the Zapatista's ability to challenge structures of limitation, the spirit of resistance. The impact of this uprising, according to Routledge, is that first it de-centres analytical focus away from an exclusivist concern with the machinations of the state. Second, it enables us to investigate how different types of social movements challenge state centered notions of hegemony, consent and power and contest the colonization of the 'political' by the state (1997: 241).

The Zapatista effect, in this context, has had consequences including in the broadening of the political geography to encompass of more radical understanding of the political; and understanding of how place is central to particular terrains of resistance and the

creation and articulation of alternative forms of knowledge. It has demonstrated the ability to identify and resist state hegemony and to effectively challenge it.

There is significant hype about the role of internet in the Zapatista uprising, with some researchers claiming that there was a misleading myth built around this use of the internet (May 2002: 86). The use of information communication technologies by the Zapatista is an interesting case study in itself in terms of political mobilization and analyzing strategies concerning new social and political movements. The Zapatista, with the aid of their international allies, used the internet to highlight their cause for the establishment of a democratic state for the indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico. Positioning themselves as championing democracy, freedom and justice, they emerge as the facilitating force for indigenous autonomy and self-determination in Mexico. They have successfully deployed online politics as a transnational leverage tool to influence the Mexican government. Castells discusses their ability to build a network of international solidarity groups that 'literally encircled the Mexican government' (Castells 1997: 83) using computer networks, the La Neta developed in 1993 with the aid of the Catholic Church. Olsen (2005) locates their use of the internet as a transnational positioning tool and traces the development of an informational infrastructure network. Clever named it 'the Zapatista effect' (Clever 1998). The Zapatista internet strategy, relying on its international alliances, was to boost grassroots political activism and to incorporate technological functions using computer technologies within the internet's networked environment for mass action political participation. Jordan and Taylor (2004) identify some of the purely net based strategies used by Zapatista and later on the anti globalization movement as 'Hacktivisms'.

My research points to new dimensions of cyber politics and online political mobilization; I will contrast some general themes which emerged in my research with existing observations on Zapatista web politics. The Chiapas rebel online networks were built as an operations unit to gain transnational solidarity and participation. Thus their online network was used more as propaganda and an informational tool. The Sri Lankan Tamil diasporan network is different in certain aspects to that of the Zapatista web operations. It is working to unite Sri Lankan Tamils spread out in the globe, to establish solidarity networks and to develop political strategies in the name of a homeland. Pro-LTTE web operations focused on

countering state propaganda, organizing diaspora events throughout the globe in support of the LTTE, influencing power states and stake holders in the UN and European Union. The dissident operations meanwhile mobilized support networks across the world and began exposing the LTTE operations and challenging LTTE domination. The LTTE made sure the web enabled the diaspora community to increasingly become an interactive stake holder in the conflict. With the conflict evolving, the LTTE viewed the web presence as a symbol of domination over rival organizations and in their struggle the LTTE identified cyberspace as a space or political location that needs to be controlled, as is demonstrated by Sutha in his responses. This dominative approach led to the LTTE using web sites to target and attack political activists, thus converting web operations into offensive roles attacking rival political activists. Thus the political engagements of the Tamil diaspora online were diverse and had multiple objectives and levels of operations which made it different to those of the Zapatista.

The Zapatista are not relying heavily on mobilizing their own people through online mobilization. They are mainly relying on external participation. The Tamil diaspora political space in the websphere, on the other hand, is active with mobilizing and engaging with Tamils both in the diaspora and in Sri Lanka, serving as a lobby space whilst wooing sympathizers. This is a critical difference of the LTTE as the Zapatistas engineered a strategic intervention of a number of different communities, a kind of mobilization of external actors. The Zapatistas were not using cyberspace as a political location for political activities. There is virtually no literature concerning internal political mobilization of the Zapatista. Instead the internet is used simply as a passage linking the relevant external audiences.

The Zapatista uprising was a virtual attack on the state and their limited military uprising was more of an attempt to highlight grievances than an active military campaign. In contrast the LTTE attacks on the state are unleashed as a strategic maneuver in a struggle against the state with a clear political objective of carving out an actual homeland in Sri Lanka. The Zapatista military campaign has virtually died down since its uprising on 1

January 1994; the LTTE from 1994 has improved its military campaign thus the effect of the shaping of web politics is based on this factor of the conflict in Sri Lanka

Chadwick points out that the main aspect of the Zapatista uprising and consequent internet dialogues and cyber campaigns crystallizes the changing nature of political action in an increasingly internet-mediated, transnational environment (2006: 126). The rise of a marginalized minority movement and its transformation into a political force and access to the internet is a key revelation of the Zapatista case study. The significance of Tamil diasporan politics online is its expansion of the capillary existence of sites of politics and multiple sites for resistance of hegemonies, as was revealed in the dissidents' effort at countering LTTE web operations. Rather than focusing just on the diasporan networks, but also by interviewing significant political activists, I could expose the impact cyber political initiatives had on individuals and their adaptations for politics and their own political behaviour. My research, while revisiting the strengths of online networking, shows that cyber campaigns expose the nature of differences within political relationships and opportunities in cyber politics. It also examines an aspect which many cyber political researches on Zapatista and other social movements have missed out. The key focus is on the ability to resist dominant hegemonic interests through cyberspace and e-mobilizations which are dissimilar to the Zapatista initiatives. I bring out examples of the use of cyberspace by hegemonic interests to break such resistance through the unleashing of cyber violence that can penetrate any physical barrier. My research also exposes the ability to incite fear in the personal spaces of political activists and the counter cyber violence that derives from such tactics. My research points to these new occurrences in the realm of cyber politics.

7.6 Conclusion

The chapter examined the impact of the internet in political mobilization of the Tamil diaspora political activists based on my fieldwork data. I introduced two themes of political processes which broadly explored political developments in diaspora politics in relation to the use of cyberspace for political activism. The two themes of 'political opportunities' and 'political strategies' investigated the diverse responses of my respondents concerning the political use and impact of cyberspace in their experience. I

examined both these themes through comparing and contrasting the views of the pro-LTTE lobby and the dissidents separately and summing up each theme so as to identify the dynamic features of diaspora politics that emanate from the struggle between the two groups.

The respondents highlighted the importance of the internet for political activities. These included the increase of political opportunities, the speed of cyber political processes, and the need to adapt to the new conditions and challenges that cyberspace offers. The chapter discussed the manner in which these new configurations in cyberspace translate into actual political practices. It also highlighted how the respondents have personally adapted to challenging demands offered within the realm of cyber politics and the utilizing of its potentials for achieving political goals. The dissidents elaborated extensively on its use to challenge the political practices of the LTTE, while the pro-LTTE respondents demonstrated how interested they were in developments in cyberspace, and what tactical and strategic changes they have adopted both personally as political activists and as a political movement to enhance their political potential and to achieve their political goals. These political dynamics and the shape of Tamil diaspora political engagements are contrasted with a mini case-study of the Zapatista movement and the existing knowledge of online politics.

The chapter also explored the diverse range of political strategies deployed in the Tamil diaspora through the use of the internet for politics. Tamil diaspora politics was traditionally attached to the politics of the homeland and its dominant political discourse has not changed even though it is a spatially dispersed phenomenon. This is expressed in terms of a 'diaspora homeland nexus' and 'diaspora circulation' in academic literature. In exploring further the notion of the opening of spaces of politics and the struggle for politicising and controlling political spaces in cyberspace, I observe the diaspora dealing with new types of political objectives and political goals which are not necessarily based on attachment to the politics of the homeland. This is mainly because of the expansion of the political spaces in which diasporans could locate themselves, and the increased opportunities for political participation that could not be contained, especially for the dissidents by the LTTE, as highlighted in Chapter Five.

What came out of the study was that with the spaces of politics becoming diversified, political mobilization and the strategies of Tamil diasporan activists have significantly altered. There were clear signs that the political field or space, as examined in the earlier chapter has diversified and single political messages or domination have to be changed. Although the LTTE still has significant control, they have been unable to prevent rival political forces from extensively using internet as a staging ground. This is the manner in which the LTTE has responded to the use of cyberspace for politics by innovatively adapting its political strategies online to counter the dissidents and the Sri Lankan state. The interviews revealed that political issues pertaining to diasporans transform into immediate political priorities that both dissidents and the LTTE had to address due to the political activists positioning themselves in cyberspace and actively engaging in political processes that genuinely impossible without the internet. Thus cyberspace and the notion of political engagements within it should be investigated further in order to explore the new dimensions that political practices online facilitate. These responses affect the way we understand the overall impact of cyberspace on political activism. My argument is not that cyberspace has totally changed the trajectory of the politics in the Tamil diaspora, which still mirrors developments in Sri Lanka, but it has significantly altered the political agenda being drafted, so that it is not totally relying on homeland politics. The internet, with its inherent dynamic of creating multiple spaces for political engagements and making political activists aware of issues raised in cyberspace, has made it imperative to respond to web generated issues. These will be further explored in the next chapter where changes into political strategies and new types of political violence unleashed in cyberspace and its impact on diasporans will be discussed.

Chapter 8: Patterns of cyber conflict in Tamil diasporan politics

8.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at attributes of the conflict taking shape in cyberspace and its capacity to create fear and intimidation, in turn generating impacts on political activists and their action. The chapter deals with the effects of these new types of cyber violence and their impact on the Tamil diaspora political sphere. The chapter also discusses these new forms of violence and conflict unleashed in cyberspace, comparing and contrasting with existing research on concepts such as cyber terrorism and cyber conflict. The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, especially with the significant diaspora population and the use of cyberspace for political purposes, has seen the occurrence of cyber-conflict and cyber-terrorism within it. In my interviews with political activists what emerged was a new dimension to the understanding of cyber conflict and cyber terrorism that is different from current theories on the subject. The previous chapter outlines some changes in the politics and political processes among the Tamil diaspora political activists with the use of cyberspace for political purposes.

Current literature has analysed the cyber conflict and terrorism dimension according to definitions of cyber-terrorism, mainly developed to determine levels of threats and based around aspects of global scale terrorism and the mobilization of terrorist organizations. The current definitions of all forms of cyber conflicts are still based on the notion of the 'internet as communication medium, or conduit' (Gray 1999; Ronfeldt and Arquila 2001; Hoskins and Loughlin 2009; Vatis 2001), not on dynamics emerging from the relationships it develops or identifying it as source or staging ground for political action. This literature focuses on hack attacks⁶⁶, web defacements or propaganda warfare, which in a way is looking at the technological advancement of conflict tools used in cyberspace and its utility in political movements. My research identifies the forms of these conflict

⁶⁶ The term 'hack/hacker' was coined in 1960's at MIT. The meaning has evolved according to Taylor, from the highly skilled but playful activity of academic computer programmers searching for the most elegant programming solution to being increasingly associated with its present day connotation of illicit computer intrusion (Taylor 1999: 13–14). Today it is used in the context of cyber security and even in cyber warfare terms.

tools in the Tamil diaspora web sphere, and also identifies insidious and more violent uses of cyberspace for the purpose of attacks on individuals, rather than the political movements they represent, to deter them from their political actions. My research shows that cyberspace can be used to subjugate minority resistance movements. I present both the use of cyberspace for resistance and domination in this chapter, which looks at minority resistance and the counter attacks launched by dominant groups to single out and intimidate organizations and agents who challenge them. I argue that my research findings outline the existence of 'micro frameworks' of cyber terrorism that have not been explored or captured in the existing literature on the subject and which I feel should be an integral component of analysis into the use of cyberspace for political struggles, given the impact that it has on the lives of political activists.

This chapter traces the significant changes of political engagements in cyberspace in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict as the pattern of the cyber conflict has undergone a transformation. These changes are tracked through the introduction of two phases in the cyber conflict. Before proceeding with the analysis of the phases and changes in the patterns of conflict produced in cyberspace, I will look briefly at the notion of cyber conflict. At the end of my own analysis based on my fieldwork findings, I discuss what can be added to the notion of cyber conflict.

8.2 Cyber conflict and Cyber terrorism: A short analysis

The concepts of 'Cyber conflict' and 'cyber war' mainly came out of security studies literature on information warfare and the use of communication technology in battle theatres. In 1999, through the work *Countering the New Terrorism*, Lesser, Hoffman, Arquilla, Ronfeldt, Zanini and Jenkins introduced the concept of Cyberterrorism. They were focusing on the networked nature of the internet and its role in the rise of network based warriors. Developing this concept, Arquilla and Ronfeldt pointed out: 'These protagonists are likely to consist of dispersed small groups who communicate, coordinate and conduct their campaigns in an internetted manner, without a precise central command' (2001: 45). Researchers uncovered the rapid rise of the use of cyber warfare, mainly against state targets, as cyberattacks were escalating in volume, sophistication and they were becoming highly coordinated (Vatis 2001). The Estonian case stands as a

robust example for states using the techniques of cyberspace to launch attacks against hostile states. The attacks on the Estonian government in May 2007 on its banking, media, and police sites were triggered as a protest against the Estonian government's removal of a Soviet-era memorial located in the center of the country's capital. The Estonians sought the help of NATO experts in cyber security to cope with the extreme level of attacks allegedly emanating from Russia under the Kremlin's directions⁶⁷.

Gardner (2009) points out that the attacks on Estonia are an example of the power of cyber warfare as it can destabilize a country's economy and its vital assets. In fact, he calls this attack as the first real cyber war. Karatzogiani (2009) claims: the reason the 'Estonian case has been coined the "first cyberconflict or cyberwar" is because a nation's infrastructure was targeted in its entirety, in an orchestrated, unprecedented and sustained manner' (2009: 6). This clearly parallels one of the most recent definitions of cyber war in the context of political science made by Karatzogiani (2004; 2006) who defines cyber conflict as referring to conflicts of the real world spilling over in cyberspace.

Typical of cyberattacks is the use by opposing parties of either Information Technology as such or IT as a weapon – for example, worms, Distributed Denial of Service attacks (DDoS), Domain Name Service attacks (DNS) or unauthorized intrusions - to attack the other side. (Karatzogiani 2006: 94)

This politics of conflict in cyberspace is based on the political importance of identifying threats to information communication bases where, in cyber security jargon, such threats are identified mainly as threats to 'critical infrastructure'⁶⁸. In a recent analysis of cyber conflict Karatzogiani goes beyond the technological determinants of cyber conflict. She identified two categories important in the analysis of cyber conflicts. The first category according to Karatzogiani is identified as the 'socio political' dimension, where activists on global issues like the green movement and the anti-globalization movement use

⁶⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/may/17/topstories3.russia>

⁶⁸ United States initiated the efforts of Critical infrastructure protection, this builds on the recommendations of the President's Commission on Critical Infrastructure Protection. In October 1997 the Commission issued its report, calling for a national effort to assure the security of the United States' increasingly vulnerable and interconnected infrastructures, such as telecommunications, banking and finance, energy, transportation, and essential government services. (<http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/cybercrime/facts.htm>)

cyberspace to pressurise international organizations. Her second dimension is struggles between two ethnic or religious groups that fight it out in cyberspace (2004: 46). She also acknowledged there is a blurring between the two categories. The main drawback in her work is that the threats assessed, and conflicts observed, are focused on technological utility. This is important as far as understanding the impact of technology on cyber conflict dynamics is concerned, but her observations lacked an analysis of the micro impacts of such conflict on political actors. She focused at larger stakeholders such as states, international organizations and national militaries and so her analysis does not tend to engage with actual political activists and their experiences in contexts such as diaspora politics.

The focus on concepts such as 'cyber terror' and 'cyber conflict' in my thesis came out mainly because of the use of these terms by my respondents to describe their experiences and reveal the dimensions of cyber politics in the Tamil diaspora political sphere. The dissident political activists in particular were constantly referring to the use of the internet by the LTTE to terrorise them. Jeyadevan, Nallu, Keeran, Jeyabalan, Rengan all used terms such as 'cyber terror', 'cyber terrorist', 'cyber war' in explaining the use of cyberspace for political purposes by the LTTE and its effect on their political actions and their personal lives. My research captures the effects of cyber politics and the use of conflict tools on political activists and their practices. This enabled me to capture a wider picture concerning the effect of cyberspace on political activists and their use of cyberspace for political purposes.

There are also multiple uses of the web for terrorism, from cyber planning to email bombs, as the evidence that terrorists used the Internet to plan their operations for 9/11 suggests. When NATO forces recovered computers from al-Qaeda suspects in Afghanistan there were detailed plans of terror attacks and evidence that the suspects were using encrypted messages through the internet for communication with their cells in USA and UK. These incidents indicate that the Internet is being used as a 'cyberplanning' tool for terrorists (Thomas 2003). Thus cyberplanning is considered a more important internet tool by some cyber strategists than the much feared cyber-terrorism option-attacks against information systems resulting in violence against non combatant targets.

Cyber engagements in the Sri Lankan context started off in the mid 1990s and the most significant portal which opened up was the launch of pro-LTTE or pro Tamil nationalist Tamilnet.com in 1997. Cyber engagements through diaspora political activists were mostly limited to the pro-LTTE operations network, which was established prior to the cyber networks. Cyber engagements started parallel to the third stage of the Eelam War, which was also significant in terms of the technological advancement of the warfare; the third Eelam war phase was the most technologically advanced campaigns for both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. The LTTE knew it could thrive on the net as it could be used anonymously or as a shell game to hide identities. Moreover, online encryption services offered encryption keys that were very difficult to break.

8.3 New dimensions of Cyber terrorism

The constant reshaping of the political space, both by traditional Tamil activists and new agents looking for an enabling political space to enter, have resulted in significant changes to the Tamil diasporic political sphere online. This space is now evolving through a multiplicity of political actors. The ground conditions in Sri Lanka are still playing a major role in deciding the political terms of cyber activity but the cyber politics itself are creating conditions which affect changes within the Tamil diaspora community because of online engagements between the pro-LTTE diaspora activist and the dissidents. These findings in my research question and reiterate the need to rethink previous literature and notions of network power in cyberspace, online political mobilization and cyber terrorism.

According to Dorothy Denning, a leading academic and researcher, cyber terrorism is:

Generally understood to refer to highly damaging computer-based attacks or threats of attack by non-state actors against information systems when conducted to intimidate or coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are political or social. It is the convergence of terrorism with cyberspace, where cyberspace becomes the means of conducting the terrorist act. Rather than committing acts of violence against persons or physical property, the cyber-terrorist commits acts of destruction and disruption against digital property (2007: 124).

This definition is more technological based and is still aligned with the macro thinking of protecting critical infrastructure, which is the main focus of all cyber terrorism studies. The notion of cyber terrorism in the current context is mostly about identifying potential threats to a set of identified targets which are linked to massive information systems hardware.

Denning further goes on to identify the qualities of such a terrorist act: ‘To fall in the domain of cyber-terror, a cyber attack should be sufficiently destructive or disruptive to generate fear comparable to that from physical acts of terrorism, and it must be conducted for political and social reasons.’ (2007: 125) In this context the ongoing engagements on cyberspace which will be discussed later in the chapter points to the need to rethink and recast the definition of cyber terrorism and its application in micro political engagements. The theories on cyber security and cyber terrorism are overtly focused on threats to information systems and seem to have missed out the damage and threats it poses to individuals at very personal levels. Still it is perceived primarily as a terrorist weapon targeting technology facilities, as Erbschloe point out:

Remarkably, terrorists are being bred and trained to be technologically savvy and to attack, disrupt, damage and perhaps even destroy technology infrastructures and computer-based economic activities. They are the biggest threat to the information infrastructure and the new digital economy

(Erbschloe 2001: 37).

I claim that in my research what I reveal are the micro versions of cyber conflicts and the use of cyber terror. Recent theories and analyses on information warfare and concepts such as ‘future of conflict’ are based on the theories of Heidi and Alvin Toffler (1980). These theories emerge from the demise of the importance attached to concepts like territory and population as denominators in the shaping of the social. These concepts are replaced by the idea that human capital and the possession of information are important factors in the constitution of the society. Based on this assertion the theorists believe that information will become the key source of wealth and power in the near future. The key objective of information warfare is to acquire control over information as it is seen as a key source of wealth and power (Shapiro 1999: 119).

Even in the backdrop of the 9/11 attacks, the newly formed US Department of Homeland Security was aware of importance of cyber terrorism as the department ran a huge cyber terror simulation in November 2003 to improve its readiness. Still the focus was on attacks on computer, banking and utilities and it simulated physical and computer attacks on banks, power companies and the oil and gas industry (Karatzogiani 2006: 100). Cyber terrorism and cyber attack theorists and practitioners are looking at macro level battle, like Mulveron who observes various scenarios in the People's Liberation Army in the Information Age to assess the capabilities of the US and China in information battles (Mulveron and Yang 1999: 182). The literature which engages with political activism still focuses on the state centric discourse and a terrorism targeting state interest. Jerry Everard (2000), in his work *Virtual States*, looks at the threat posed by underdeveloped states and non state actors using cyber attacks on Western or developed states. Based on the findings from my fieldwork as presented in the next section, I argue that the existing theoretical frameworks of cyber security and information warfare under the aegis of cyber politics fail to capture the micro political engagements in cyberspace and the effects of such engagements when terrorism is unleashed on those spheres. The cyber conflict I exposed through the analysis of Tamil diasporan political engagements is also a power struggle based on political objectives. These engagements reveal cyber conflict is not purely about attacking an adversary's computer, but is also about attacking the personal space of political activists, their identity or and even the 'will for activism'.

8.4 Virtual conflict zone

In analysing my research conducted prior to the doctoral research, and in the fieldwork for the doctoral research, there emerged an interesting pattern of cyber political engagements among the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. The combined research revealed that the cyber conflict developments could be understood in two phases. To understand the distinct rupture in the paradigm of political engagements in cyberspace from 1994–2006, one should analyse the spatial context of the engagements. Tamilnet.com was launched in 1995 and re-launched in 1997 with the LTTE dominating web engagements and the main contestation between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state run web sites. In 2002, the dissident website Thenee.com was launched and from 2002 onwards the web conflict became more complicated as it involved political engagement between the pro-LTTE elements, the dissidents and the Sri Lankan state. This two phased approach helps

to illuminate the transformation of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora online engagements and the effect it has had on Tamil diasporan politics in general. In analyzing the two phases between 1994 – 2001 and 2001 – 2006, I try to bring out the reasons why my respondents identified these strategies as terror tactics and contrast them with existing literature on cyber conflict and cyber terrorism.

The entrance into cyber engagements, by political activists from the diaspora, was limited mostly to the pro-LTTE operations network, which was established prior to the cyber networks. The LTTE unveiled two military tactics heralding the use of advanced technology in warfare. To begin with, they used Soviet-made, shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles to down aircraft belonging to the Sri Lankan Air Force. Secondly, Tigers used modified speed boats, designed parallel to the F 117 stealth fighter⁶⁹ in body architecture, to ram Naval gunboats and approach them evading radar (because of its unique design the boat was able to achieve speed similar to a wave piercer and stealth) (Davis 2001).

The mid 1990s saw the Sri Lankan government spend millions of dollars on obtaining heavy weapons such as, main battle tanks (MBTs), armoured personnel carriers (APCs), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), supersonic fighter aircrafts, advanced helicopter gunships, Super Dvora gunboats and electronic surveillance equipment (Kelegama 1999: 75). All these signified a technological leap in the context of the war. These developments were coinciding with the emergence of political engagements in cyberspace parallel to the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ The F-117A Nighthawk is operating with the United States Air Force, is the world's first operational aircraft designed to exploit low-observable stealth technology. The unique design of the single-seat F-117A provides exceptional combat capabilities. In 1999 The Jane's Defence Review unveiled the LTTE in experimenting with a new speed boat, which it claims evades radar and is used to ram into Sri Lankan Naval vessels by suicide cadres of the Black sea tiger wing. (http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jir/jir010307_2_n.shtml)

⁷⁰ <http://www.army.lk/operations01.php?take=22>

8.4.1 Phase I 1994 – 2001

This phase parallels the conflict in Sri Lanka where the LTTE objective was domination over place and the acquisition of geographic mass from the control of the Sri Lankan state. This battle to dominate and control geographic spaces for political and military gains shaped and influenced politics in cyberspace. The Sri Lankan state became involved in the massive militarization of places where the LTTE threat was large, while the LTTE strategically made assaults on military positions and garrisons, converting the captured land masses under the reign of the Eelam and marking the territorial borders of these captured areas as a de facto Tamil state. The same conflict and political engagements parallel to the ground condition transferred to cyberspace. In this context, the key feature from 1994–2001 in cyber engagements were that both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state were competing for control of the web sphere. In the coordinated and controlled websites (tamilet.com, eelam.com, eelamweb.com, tamilnation.org) of both the LTTE and the state, one can see that the tussle in these web engagements was mainly to represent the achievements of the Eelam nation or the continuity of a sovereign state. The LTTE wanted to maintain its fundamental ideology that it had as an organization. Their simple theory was to dominate and control any structure, institution, ideology. They used the same strategy of speed and shock and awe effects in taking over political spaces in cyberspace as well. In response, the state had one primary objective: to maintain its presence and champion its discourse of a unitary, undivided Sri Lanka forced to eradicate terrorism.

The LTTE cyber attacks were mostly carried out from multiple international locations by groups from the mainstream Tamil diaspora who were directly involved and others who were sympathetic to the cause. The actions of the sympathy groups can be analysed as propaganda warfare. The attacks were mainly directed against government sites that were of strategic importance to the LTTE and the capability to launch such attacks was a psychological advantage the LTTE gained over the government and the Sri Lankan military. According to Erbschloe, because of the ease of access to multiple computer terminals, terrorists groups developed the ability to outflank a defender using the internet (2001: 174).

One incident was the launch of the Sri Lanka Army website on January 1st 2001 followed by a pro-LTTE website Eelamnation.com, which on the very next day launched a home page text, ‘In an attempt to vie with Tamil websites all over the world depicting the local warring scene, Sri Lankan Army personnel are in the process of launching an army website to provide updated news from the battlefield, but not with much success though, admitted their commander-in-chief’⁷¹. On the same day the army website suffered several blackouts, which officials said was a server initiation error. However my pre-doctoral research revealed that Sri Lankan army officials traced it to a coordinated attack by hackers in the Tamil diaspora aligned to the LTTE. In 2002 the army website home page was hacked into and a skull replaced the normal interface.

In the 1990s, the Sri Lankan army website (www.slarmy.org, later www.army.lk), was not the prime target of hackers. Instead it was the website www.realityinsrilanka.com. (Figure 47) This site was manned by the Psyops (Psychological Operations Unit) division of the Sri Lanka army.⁷² The army never admits that the website is hosted by them, nor claimed any responsibility to its contents. From the year of hosting in 1997, simultaneous to the launch of Tamilnet.com, the website has been subject several times to hack attacks, e-mail bombs⁷³ and sometimes the virtual shut down of the server. Nevertheless, the website survived for a few years and was made an important link in many other websites hosted by the Sinhala diaspora globally.

⁷¹ This was first hand information gathered in an interview with the pioneer of Web operations in the Sri Lankan military, Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne in 2003.

⁷² The psychological operation was uncovered through series of discussions with senior army officials of the Sri Lanka Army. In military terms “Psychological Operations are: Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behaviour of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviour favorable to the originator's objectives” (<http://www.iwar.org.uk/psyops/>)

⁷³ e-mail bombing is a practice when massive number of emails are send to an email address or email server causing it to shut down unable to handle the email traffic

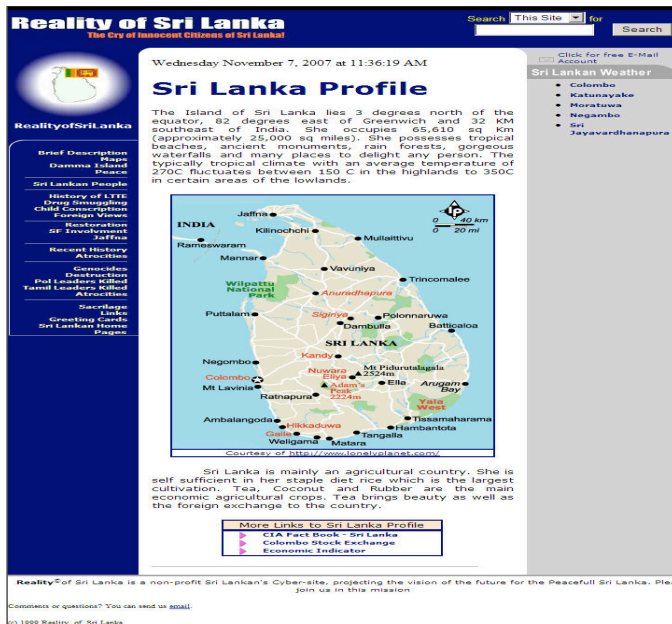


Figure 47 Homepage of www.realityofsri lanka.com.

PRIU, The Policy Research and Information Unit website, the official website of the Sri Lankan government, which was hosted purely for government information services, had also been targeted in 2004. The hack attack was considered to be of non lethal effect. However the point of concern for the government was the ability of the attackers to penetrate state of the art counter measures that were online.⁷⁴ PRIU was one (at that time) of the few websites in Sri Lanka that were very concerned about security and constantly upgraded with the help of professionals. The site also has experienced constant mail bombings in the form of hate mails directed towards the President of Sri Lanka. The PRIU officials said that they are now not taking chances and are gearing up to face cyber terrorist threats by installing state of the art security measures.

In a quite separate initiative, the Sri Lankan government has waged an underground cyber warfare campaign against prominent LTTE websites, including LTTE fronts and websites sympathetic to the LTTE. The Sinhala diaspora has also waged a similar campaign. In the late 1990s the Sri Lankan policy makers on military and defense affairs saw Tamilnet.com as a hostile site which had global reach and was a mouthpiece of the LTTE. However it was identified quite late, as cyber attacks were not perceived as

⁷⁴ The attacks on the PRIU were revealed through research on the operations of the PRIU and in depth interviews with PRIU web masters and senior officials in June 2003.

considerable threats by the military or defense officials. The effect this web site had on the conflict and the changes it brought about in the web are discussed below.

Serious cyber engagements started off in the mid 1990s and the most significant portal was the launch of the pro-LTTE or pro Tamil nationalist Tamilnet.com in 1997. The website Tamilnet.com pioneered the use of the web in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict and one of its key audiences was the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. Tamilnet to date is an influential web site and key information portal for many who are interested in day-to-day developments in the conflict zone. Tamilnet's importance is not merely its role in functioning as an information portal. According to Whitaker (2007), Tamilnet.com primarily started to counter the organization University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna) [UTHR(J)]' which emerged as a group to monitor human rights abuses during the earlier years of the conflict. UTHR accused the LTTE of playing a significant role in these abuses as well as the government. The LTTE's first response to them was assassination of one of the founders of UTHR(J), Dr. Rajini Thiranagama in 1989. The assassination of Dr. Thiranagama made the group go underground and flee Sri Lanka. They still managed, with the aid of their local contacts to keep on churning out reports of the situation in Jaffna and elsewhere for the diaspora community and the LTTE was not happy with the international coverage UTHR received. Whitaker claims that 'TamilNet was originally created to provide an alternative English- language voice to counter the popularity of the UTHR(J) among the Western press' (2007: 121). The UTHR(J) currently operates a website but this came much later than Tamilnet.com.

Tamilnet.com became a priority target on the Sri Lankan government's hit list within a few years of its operation. Because the government lacked expertise to carry out a hack attack on the site, it sent a covert team to the United States to hire hackers to attack Tamilnet.com. Though initially this was a success, Tamilnet.com recovered and through the advanced security measures provided by the web host it was secured. The late Sivaram Darmeratnam, alias Taraki, who was the chief editor of Tamilnet.com, told me about the use of hackers to disrupt its services in an interview prior to the research for my doctoral thesis. He traced the two-pronged strategy of the state to contain the operations of Tamilnet and using technological expertise to wage cyber warfare. The first strategy was physical intimidation of the staff operating in Sri Lanka. The military

made several raids on Taraki's house. They began monitoring his telephone calls and blocking his dial up connection making it impossible for Taraki to work. Secondly, Taraki revealed an interesting plot where the military was advising government security officials on hiring hackers from USA to attack the website. Taraki claimed that his email accounts were hijacked and, through phone line tapping, email intercepts were carried out by the DMI (Directorate of Military Intelligence) Sri Lanka. In April 2005 the chief editor of the website Sivaram Darmeratnam was abducted and killed and his murder trial has never been concluded.

In early June 2007, Tamilnet.com became totally inaccessible in Sri Lanka, and speculation was rife that Sri Lankan military intelligence was behind the blocking of the servers. On 20 June 2007, in a weekly government press conference, government defence spokesperson Minister Keheliya Rambukwella was questioned by a journalist on the alleged state involvement in denying access to Tamilnet. The minister denied the allegation, but went on to say on record 'I would love to hire hackers to disable Tamilnet'.⁷⁵ What the minister didn't know was that what he wished was actually put into practice by previous governments in anticipation of the future threat from Tamilnet to the Sri Lankan state. It appears the Minister was not aware of earlier attempts to take out Tamilnet.

Tamilnet.com itself has been the focus of much research. Whitaker subtly brings out the intentions of the creators of Tamilnet. According to him:

Their cyber-insurgency worked by sneaking their own perspective –through what stories they chose to report – into considerations of geopolitical and Sri Lankan elite, and thus shifting how the war was reported in the western press and debated by the various governments involved in the struggle between Sri Lankans dueling nationalist hegemonies (2006: 266).

The significance of Whitaker's analysis is his interpretation of Tamilnet as part of the larger process of the Tamil insurgency. He looks at the informational dynamic of Tamilnet.com, the role Tamilnet.com played and its influence on Tamil political

⁷⁵<http://www.smh.com.au/news/Technology/Sri-Lanka-under-fire-over-Internet-censorship/2007/06/22/1182019301819.html>

activists. Whitaker highlights the importance of Tamilnet.com in the context of the conflict and the shaping of political processes parallel to the opening up of the web space and its use for political purposes. Tamilnet.com was not just a pioneer Sri Lankan Tamil news service provider, it also triggered the process of the Tamil diasporic space being mapped in cyberspace.

At first cyber attacks, or the use of cyberspace as a military tool, were mainly limited to attacks on Sri Lankan Government websites and for propaganda battles and counter propaganda efforts. It was also a psychological battle tactic especially by the LTTE to target the Sri Lankan armed forces. The next phase explores the evolution of the cyber conflict and new political objectives behind such moves and I argue that some of these objectives are different from the ones that were adopted in phase I.

8.4.2 Phase II 2001 – 2007

This section looks at the shaping of cyber conflict as a consequence of changing strategies deployed by Tamil diasporan activists and the Sri Lankan state in cyberspace, and how the changing nature of cyberspace affected these changes. My analysis of this phase is based on my interviews with Tamil diasporan political activists. This phase also has distinct characteristics against the earlier phase analysed above. I trace the rupture in the strategy of holding and controlling cyber political spaces, both by the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE, as practised and contested in the mid 1990s. This paradigm change demonstrated the dislocation of the central axis connecting the political terrain in the Tamil diaspora to the conflict zone. It also changed the potential of a single organization or ideology to dominate cyberspace in a political engagement. The struggle in cyberspace in Phase One was an exercise in dominating each and every web site and portal relating to the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. LTTE web operations attempted to increase the number of websites active in an attempt to overwhelm the state and challenge the use of web space by the Sri Lankan state. The LTTE operations invested in new servers to increase the storage space to handle extensive web traffic. The LTTE approach to web politics was driven by the state-making objectives of the organization. In Phase Two I bring out the changes that took place in the Tamil diaspora political field,

with the rise of dissident Tamil activists and where the LTTE had to respond and adapt to the challenges posed by these new groups. The emergence of dissident web operations has significantly altered the conflict zone, which had moved cyber attacks between the state and the LTTE. It has led to the constant reshaping of the political space, both by the involvement of traditional Tamil activists, and also by attracting new political agents seeking an enabling political space.

The end of the millennium saw the Phase One cyber war reaching its peak and it was the beginning of the end, with this phase coinciding with certain key developments in the political realm. These included the rifts emerging within the LTTE, which culminated in a split in 2004, and the emerging of a powerful dissident Tamil political activism among the diaspora. These new political activists identify themselves as the dissidents or dissenting voice of the Tamil people, purely because they oppose the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people. The LTTE never compromised on its role of being the single representative of the Tamil people and it used any means possible to maintain this, even resorting to extreme violence by eliminating its own people or any other party that challenged it. The dissidents have managed to break through this well-fortified political space and to challenge the LTTE hegemony. Also the rise of the dissident movement has seen the adaptation of strategies by the LTTE especially in cyberspace. This implosion in the Tamil political space, which emerged from the Tamil diasporic political space, has taken the cyber conflict away from the traditional Sri Lankan state vs. LTTE struggle, adding a whole new dimension to it and radically altering the spatial configuration of political engagements in cyberspace.

Nallu made an interesting observation about the cyber political engagement, which many other respondents highlighted in all my discussions. The discussion emerged in the context of her involvement and observation of the role of the internet in Tamil diasporic politics. She said, 'it is important, no questions about it, people are hooked to it, and there is a pattern among every political activist with their use of the internet.' She continued, 'for example, as dissenting political activists we are very concerned about the publications on LTTE websites, such as Nitharsanam, if our names are mentioned in the website that means we know that the next few months we need to be careful.'

As this was a very interesting and a very new development in the cyber engagement dimension, I probed her response deeper, 'What do you mean by 'careful'?' and her response was, 'we need to be watchful, always look one over the shoulder, and fix alarm on the house I will fix a gate if I don't have one and I don't have an alarm, I am going to do it soon.' And I asked her 'so does that mean this is a serious threat?'

Yes, it is an obvious power that the net has created, it can control our thinking and it is influencing the thinking and they are using cyber terrorism on us. This is cyber terrorism, as internet is used by many of us for our organization and networking purposes. The LTTE is striking terror in this sphere, they are trying to get us off our politics. It is scaring many activists as the LTTE are not just targeting them but their families and suddenly seeing your self targeted on cyberspace is scary as we have become so linked with it.

This response from Nallu was shocking, as the threat and fear factor, far from being virtual, seemed very real for these political activists. In the new literature on theories of cyber terrorism, Thomas introduces the notion of 'cyber fear'. According to him:

The Internet produces an atmosphere of virtual fear or virtual life. People are afraid of things that are invisible and things they don't understand. The virtual threat of computer attacks appears to be one of those things. Cyberfear is generated by the fact that what a computer attack could do (bring down airliners, ruin critical infrastructure, destroy the stock market, reveal Pentagon planning secrets, etc.) is too often associated with what will happen. News reports would lead one to believe that hundreds or thousands of people are still active in the al Qaeda network on a daily basis just because al Qaeda says so. It is clear that the Internet empowers small groups and makes them appear much more capable than they might actually be, even turning bluster into a type of virtual fear (Thomas 2003).

The existing notion of cyber fear as brought out in the above definition does not sufficiently capture the fears of individuals mediated through cyber engagements or effects cyber space has on lives of individuals. In this chapter I attempt to locate this micro analysis of cyber fear emerging in the context of violence on Tamil diasporic web space and the individual reactions and responses to such violence. Gabriel Weimann, an expert on terrorism studies and researcher on cyber terrorism, points out in a report titled *WWW.terror.net: How Modern Terrorism Uses the Internet* (2004) that there are eight different ways in which terrorists currently use the Internet. These are psychological

warfare, publicity and propaganda, data mining, fundraising, recruitment and mobilization, networking, information sharing, and planning and coordination. First, these eight points concerning the use of cyberspace for terrorist activities are made on the assertion that cyberspace is a communication medium. The importance of cyberspace in this context is the ability for it to be deployed as a weapon because of the large spectrum of targets that can be reached using cyberspace. Secondly the frameworks or structures of analysis that Weimann (2004) introduces are looking at global trends of terrorism and not micro power struggles or political violence. What I mean by micro struggles are cases where individuals are subjected to intimidation and personalized forms of attacks made through cyber space, which are effective in psychologically threatening them to change their lifestyles. I argue such forms of online violence are not captured in theoretical framings of Weinmann (2004) or Denning (2001) introduced to explain cyberterrorism. In my analysis of the use of cyber space both as a medium of instigating violence and a weapon of violence, I look specifically at diasporan politics and political actors and their comprehension of the effect of cyberspace on their political life and practices. These are the people who feel the actual impact, and even without academic knowledge of the earlier meaning of the term 'cyber terrorism' they used it to express this impact on them. Cyber conflict in the context of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora reveals that, while cyberspace provides democratic political spaces, it simultaneously produces the rise of new forms of terrorism in cyberspace as a reaction to such openings. This is all part of the hegemonic and counter hegemonic power struggle, with cyberspace suddenly becoming the site of the struggle as well as the medium through which the violence is unleashed.

Keeran, who has experienced and observed cyber engagements, revealed he has witnessed many incidents where cyber attacks were used. The most recent according to him was 'Tamil Nadu-based Tamil paper Thinamalar' was attacked and this is cyber terrorism (5 may 2007)" And he said, 'the cyber war has being raging for some time and people do not notice it. Wwww.yarl.com a pro-LTTE paper was attacked. Such attacks are becoming more frequent. Cyber terrorist attacks are also targeting individuals not just papers or organizations in the Tamil diaspora and this is very scary.'

Rengan also commented on the increased personalized attacks on political activists and how this has had a tremendous effect on political mobilization. He also lamenting the fact that there was no possible way to curtail attacks directed against him and on democratic politicians such as ‘Anandasangaree’. The personalized attacks included doctored pictures and videos of individuals which Rengan said have had a tremendous effect, ‘because the internet now gives the facility to self broadcast the use of images, video has increased and with LTTE sympathisers using such images and videos it has become a kind of power over their rival. This power has become critical in political engagements and we have to respond’.

Rengan also brought out an example of the effects of such targeted online attacks on a fellow dissident political activist. ‘These direct threats and the warnings published in the Tiger websites were alarming. Bazeer was a Sri Lankan Muslim political activist constantly attacked by the LTTE websites. He was introduced in chapter Four as many dissident activist mentioned him as being a victim of online campaigns launched by the LTTE. The campaign against Sayed Bazeer unleashed by the pro-LTTE websites targets him personally and also brands him as a Jihadist, an instigator and propagator of Islamic fundamentalism in Sri Lanka (see Figure 28). These campaigns have had serious consequence in Bazeer’s life and for his daily movements.



Figure 48 Neruppu.org attacking Bazeer

Figure 48⁷⁶ is one example of the attacks on Bazeer; the caption from the Neruppu.org website has images of Hizbollah fighters and Osama Bin Laden and Bazeer's image in the middle. Many pro-LTTE websites identify Bazeer as a 'fundamentalist', 'Jihadist', 'Islamic fundamentalist' and claim he is linked to fundamentalist movements. This was pointed not only by Rengan, but also by Jeyadevan and Jeyabalan as well, when they were trying to show me what they meant by cyber terrorism and its relation to the use of web by the LTTE.

Rengan said 'I have information of how the LTTE use computer viruses and other cyber attacks on dissident websites disrupting the services of these websites. Another cyber attack tactic of the pro-Tiger groups is using methods of disrupting the anti-LTTE web operations by duplicating dissident websites. The LTTE made duplicates of all major dissident websites such the Thenee.com, Vizhippu.org and Neruppu.com.' The LTTE has resorted to duplicate websites of dissidents, this was a major tactic to deter visitors to dissident web sites. One such example is the dissident website www.neruppu.com and the LTTE duplicated www.neruppu.org. One can be deceived by these duplicate sites especially when searching for them on a search engine such as Yahoo or Google. Some of these duplicated sites included Thenee.com and Asiantribue.com .

Jeyabalan, pointed out why personalized attacks were becoming a popular strategy: 'The LTTE relied more on their web operations for targeting individuals as websites are difficult to take to court, even Tamilnet.com has its front operation in USA but the server is in Norway so they are safe from any legal challenges. LTTE websites operate mainly from Norway, Switzerland, London and Australia'. Thus his argument is that state centric legal structures are not always capable of adapting to the multiple spatial changes cyberspace takes. Thus regulating internet has been a significant issue.

Jeyadevan is responsible for the dissident web counter-attacks on many pro-LTTE operations; the mini case study on him in Chapter Four clearly brought this out. I will

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http://www.neruppu.org/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1204577301&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1 & (accessed 5 June 2007)

engage with his political strategies in coping with these attacks in this chapter. My online research analysis pointed out that Jeyadevan is the single most targeted person in the Tamil diaspora by the Tiger cyber attacks. In the interview with Jeyadevan, he provided a very informative outline of his operations as well as the attacks made against him, 'The LTTE campaign is spearheaded by Nitharsanam, run by Sethupuram. What the LTTE was doing, was targeting people and this is what I call web terrorism, and in fact I wrote about cyber terrorists working for Tigers'. The name Nitharsanam came out in all discussions I had with political activists from the dissident group. In an informal interview a senior Tamil journalist attached to a leading British news service said, 'even I have suffered from Nitharsanam.com and I am scared about it'. Nitharsanam, literally meaning 'Reality in Truth', emerged in LTTE controlled Sri Lanka as a specialised unit of media men and women in the Tiger ranks, who were sent to the front lines as cameramen and women. The website Nitharsanam.com, allegedly functioning under the direct control of the LTTE intelligence wing from its inception, seems now to be responding more to political issues in the diaspora by targeting dissident diasporans and responding to counter moves by the dissidents. The Tigers or LTTE front organizations in UK are known and political activists are quite aware of their capabilities. Some dissident activists fear Nitharsanam.com more than confronting LTTE activists in the open. They seem to be terrified of being attacked by Nitharsanam.com.

Jeyadevan pointed out why the LTTE had to resort to tactics of 'web terrorism' as the dissident politicians came out against them,

The cyber network had the ability to influence the Tamil community and it has had a huge effect. The problems cyber networks create for the LTTE is, because they are able to expose the LTTE activities done in in secrecy. The LTTE also ruthlessly controlled diaspora as their own territory but with the political space being opened up through cyber mobilization resulted in the LTTE's secret regime came under constant attacks from dissidents. They now fear their greatest weakness is being exposed. The dissident web sites have been able to help the Tamil diaspora community to realize the LTTE lies and people are questioning them. The HRW report on diaspora funding of the conflict exposed the LTTE. Many dissidents who were interviewed in the HRW report were introduced to HRW through emails as many were afraid to come out but cyberspace enabled all these things.

The LTTE international networks and operations are under attack from dissident activists locating themselves in cyberspace and in loose partnerships or alliances with other dissidents. The Human Rights Watch report which Jeyadevan was referring to was titled 'Funding the Final War' and was released on 14 March 2006. This report was compiled of research carried out of exposing LTTE and pro-LTTE operation within Tamil diaspora centres. The report mainly exposed the manner in which the above groups forced Tamil diaspora members to give money to the LTTE and the consequences people faced when they failed to provide the money. This detailed report had a wide ranging impact on the LTTE international operations from media exposures to the arrests of several key LTTE figures in many Western countries.

What cyberspace is providing is not just a tool for networking but a type of political site that can be used to resist the LTTE. Jeyadevan points out 'There is a shift from terrorizing to doing other political campaigns by the LTTE websites, as there is no one in control of websites'. There is no centre in this web space, thus it is an ideal setting for what Deleuze (2004) calls 'nomadic resistance'. This is how the dissidents are fighting back the LTTE domination and terror tactics.

"போகாதே, போகாதே என் உண்டியல் காதலா! பொல்லாத சொப்பணம் நான் கண்டேன் என்று தடுக்கத் தடுக்கவும் பாய்ந்து விட்டார்": 'ஈழபதிஸ்வர் உண்டியல் காங்கரஸ் மகளிர் அணித்தலைவி' சாந்தா ஜெயதேவன்

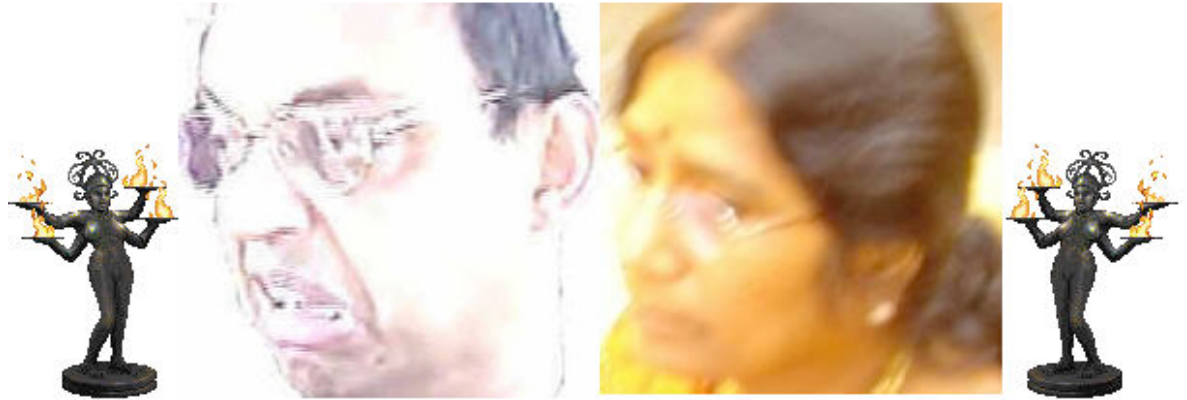


Figure 49 Jeyadevan accused of illicit affair

Figure 49⁷⁷ is from a www.neruppu.org and pro-LTTE website which is accusing dissident political activist Jeyadevan of having an illicit affair. These measures adopted by the LTTE to counter dissidents are having significant effects on the lives of political activists.

Cyber enthusiasts, mainly using Deleuze's notion of de-territorialization, attempt to position cyberspace as a liberating space away from state control or state ideology. As Wray argues, 'resistant forces on the Internet, those engaged in resistant Internet use like the electronic civil disobedience acts described above, are operating within the remaining uncolonized, deterritorialized, smooth spaces that still exist in cyberspace' (1998). My argument is that cyberspace has created complexities in the way political control and conflict is situated, it is not the mere simple proximities and parameters of conflict zones that have changed.

Enthusiasts such as Wray (1998) speak of the ability of cyberspace to be used by resistance or minoritarian organizations. Their fundamental argument for treating cyberspace as an important tool for resistance movements is based on the de-territorialized nature of cyberspace and its inherent architecture of creating multiple spaces, making it difficult for one organization to dominate politically. The opportunities in cyberspace are multiple and the ability to shift locations is easier. The arguments concerning the ability of minority movements or grassroots movements to resist hegemonic powers in cyberspace are not totally flawed, as the Zapatista case points. However, the focus on cyber space as a space for resistance movements needs to be backed up by more empirical evidence. My own research points to the opportunities dominant organizations have harnessed using cyberspace to crush or counter these resistance movements. For example, the dissidents who are targeted by pro-LTTE web operations using personalised web attacks, and the fear they generate, point out that this de-territorialized cyberspace is not as liberating as enthusiasts maintain.

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http://www.neruppu.org/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1203807806&archive=&start_from=&ucat=1 & (accessed 5 June 2007)

The attacks on Tamil dissidents over cyberspace do demonstrate that organized hegemonic interests could also use it to resist counter hegemonic movements. Jeyadevan told me,

LTTE threatened me with numerous emails, and one email included a threat from the feared Intelligence wing leader of the LTTE, 'Pottu Amman', whose cadres have pursued dissenting Tamils across the world and carried out assassinations. Lots of websites had pictures of me, my family, my house and it was a call for harm to me. My house was firebombed. This campaign is spearheaded by Nitharsanam.com, the website run by Sethu from Norway and is guided by the LTTE intelligence wing. Web sites run under the pro-LTTE operations then carried the publications from Nitharsanam. They are Nerrupu.org and villipu.com.

For example Tamileditors.com published photos of Jeyadevan and actor Ross Kemp and said that Kemp was an assassin who Jeyadevan used to kill a Tamil activist. 'Tamileditors.com a website funded by pro-LTTE fronts, had pictures of me with Ross Kemp, I was involved with him to help him in making a documentary on gang violence. The website put pictures of me with him and said I conspired to kill a Tamil political activist implying Ross Kemp as the hit man', (Figure 50⁷⁸) Jeyadevan revealed. The threats on him had increased significantly recently, 'I had cyber threats, I had to change email addresses, change email service provider under instruction of the police from NTL to BT.' Jeyadevan revealed. He also said, 'The strength of the LTTE web operations was that they had infiltrated web providers like Godaddy where most of their sites are registered.' Jeyadevan pointed out many of the LTTE and pro-LTTE websites were hosted by a web hosting company called Godaddy, and he personally wrote to the company explaining the motives of the LTTE websites but the company did not respond. He claims that the LTTE has cultivated good ties with Godaddy to maintain uninterrupted web services.

⁷⁸ www.tamileditors.com (accessed 5 June 2007)

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No justice for Kandiah Thangarajah

Tuesday, 03 July 2007



Rajasingham Jayadevan is still a free man

A month after the daylight murder of Kandiah Thangarajah British police is still shy of formally charging anyone for the gruesome crime.

At the time, members of the victim's family as well as the wider Tamil community accused Dr Rajasingham Jayadevan of being behind what was described as a 'contract killing'.

According to allegations that floated in the Tamil media, Dr Jayadevan, a private businessman who has amassed a fortune from the running of a Hindu temple, had ordered the murder of Kandiah Thangarajah.



Dr Jayadevan with friend in Wembley.

The victim's wife of twenty years, Shanthamalar is widely believed to be the latest lover of Dr Jayadevan who is known in the Tamil community to lead a playboy lifestyle.

British police dismissed the allegations against Dr Jayadevan saying that the person who killed Thangarajah was a 'white male'.

Figure 50 Jeyadevan with Presenter Ross Kemp.

Jeyadevan and other dissident politicians and political activists have resorted to what they call a counter attack on these websites and on the cyber political space the LTTE dominates. This triggered a cyber conflict with its facets contributing to redefining notions of cyber conflict and cyber terrorism. Jeyadevan has embarked on a campaign to take on Nitharsanam.com and other LTTE websites and used the same personalized attack the LTTE launched on him against pro-LTTE political activists. Jeyadevan is involved in setting up websites and contributing to anti LTTE websites. He said, 'as they lose the edge of take over and control, we are able to challenge their authority'.

Jeyadevan has pursued cyber attacks on individuals who are part of the LTTE front organizations and has made every effort to curb LTTE websites by taking legal challenges to websites based in Norway and by informing diplomatic sources. Jeyadevan

said some of the LTTE websites were hosted mainly by companies like Godaddy but most of the servers of these companies are based in the Norway. The Norwegian cyber laws were not strict enough, Jeyadevan claimed, and this enabled the LTTE web operations to flourish. This prompted him to contact Norwegian officials in an effort to curtail LTTE web activities. He has pursued Nitharsanam.com, and even contacted Australian authorities, as the Nitharsanam.com and another tiger website villipu.com had a registration linked to Australia. Jeyadevan said ‘we will give a good attack any time we find them. Like a declaration of war he said, ‘we will do it anytime to nail down the LTTE cyber terrorists like Sethus, Seevaratnam. We have silenced quite a few LTTE guys’ (Figure 51). In these attacks he told me, ‘LTTE television networks were hit, pro-LTTE Councillors were targeted, where they couldn’t sustain the attacks and now being sidelined or self exiled.’ The dissident web attacks have been capable of isolating LTTE activists, ‘LTTE is marginalized and it is finding it very hard to come back’ He further said.



Figure 51 Sethupuram and Thamilchelvan

Figure 51⁷⁹ shows the counter attack on LTTE activists that Jeyadevan was talking about. The picture is of the webmaster of Nitharsanam.com Sethupuram on the left and the late LTTE political leader S.P. Thamilchelvan on the right. These pictures are used by sites such as Tamilaffairs.com to counter claims by Sethupuram that he is an independent journalist and not part of the LTTE.

Pro-LTTE activist Kumar also pointed out that ‘The impact of the “fear factor” in web operations has a far reaching impact on the families of political activities.’ The LTTE fronts were also aware of the impact of this evolving conflict and the effects it had on their activists. Cyber-terrorism literature looks at the use of computer based attacks on states or organizations and the key purpose of the attackers. These are to force or

⁷⁹ <http://www.Tamilaffairs.com/news/one-time-guardians-karuna-are-now-digging-grave-him> (accessed 16 June 2007)

intimidate their victims to give into political, social, ideological or religious goals the attackers believe in (Denning 2001). These attacks are mostly intended to hit critical infrastructures such as electricity grids, aviation controls, waste management centres or nuclear power plants belonging to states or large scale organizations. The important point I am raising in this chapter is the existence of forms of cyber attacks lower in scale compared to the attacks on critical infrastructures. These lower scale attacks are personalised and take place in the context of day to day political activities. The attacks on critical infrastructures are mostly anticipated forms of attacks but the forms of personalized attacks are more real and have taken place though few have been reported, as highlighted in this chapter. The impact of these attacks as shown in this chapter can be devastating to some individuals, which effect changes in lifestyles and political activism of political agents. The exposure of these micro layers of online violence is important to understanding the changes taking place in the politics of Tamil diaspora activism and it also has important ramifications for future analysis of concepts such as cyber-terrorism and cyber conflict.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter raised questions about the working of cyber conflict and cyber terrorism in the context of Tamil diaspora online politics. The key point of focus was the constant use of terms such as cyber terrorism and cyber fear by many respondents from the Tamil dissidents. I look at the reasons leading political activists use of such terms in the context of cyber politics and political strategies online in the Tamil diaspora. I try to argue that the existing frameworks and literature miss out the effects of online violence on political agents as their key emphasis is on macro effects, such as on communication networks and the infrastructures of societies that are vulnerable to be targeted through cyber attacks.

The chapter is linked to the previous two chapters, where I revealed that political strategies and political processes within the Tamil diaspora are changing to a certain, extent with activists using cyberspace as a site for politics as well as a technological utility for politics. This chapter looked at a key dimension of the manifestation of conflict and struggle in such cyber environments and the shift of violence to cyberspace.

Violence and subjugation is a hallmark of the LTTE's political practices in Tamil diasporan political sphere. In this chapter I examined such trends of violence rearticulating in cyberspace and the effect that this violence generated in cyberspace has on the lives and political decision making of the activists in diaspora politics. These findings question and reiterate the need to rethink previous literature and notions of network power in cyberspace, online political mobilization and cyber terrorism. I argue that 'micro frameworks' of cyber terrorism can be identified from my research and need to be integrated into the study of cyber terror and cyber conflict in cyber politics.

Apart from the theoretical analysis of cyberspace and its political possibilities and providing a framework to understand political engagements in cyberspace, the interviews provided insight into notions of political mobilization and mobilization strategies. Another important contribution is to the existing knowledge on cyber security and cyber terrorism, dominated by the military strategies of the United States and the threats it see arising from the wide integration of the world through internet and communication technologies.

In the context of the Tamil diaspora politics online I traced the pattern of the changing nature of the use of cyberspace. The initial role of the internet was purely functioning as an information medium concerning the developments in Sri Lanka for the benefit of the diaspora community. I investigated the changes of this initial role of the internet from 2000s onward into a more interactive political site and a dynamic space for Tamil diaspora politics, capable of generating significant changes in political priorities and issues within the Tamil diaspora. The violence unleashed on the dissidents by the LTTE using cyberspace had the ability to violate many spaces the dissidents thought were safe. These threats and intimidations against the Tamil dissidents, unleashed in and through cyberspace, proved that the political dimension of cyberspace is not a clear force multiplier for one key group but is rather a complicated political tool. I make this claim because the political strategies adopted by both pro-LTTE and dissident groups to counter each other were facilitated through the internet. Thus cyberspace has not provided a clear advantage for one type of group. This was also revealed in my online research into changes of web sites and web based strategies in Chapters Four and Five. Findings introduced in this chapter significantly contribute not just to understanding the

changes in Tamil diaspora politics and the spatiality of political engagements. It points out that concepts such as cyber conflict and cyber terrorism that are discussed mainly in macro political and security frameworks are in fact more complicated than the simplified normative breakdowns offered from such theories. As the Head of *Mi2g*, a pioneer organization in global risk management, D.K. Matai has pointed out Cyber-conflicts can act as a 'barometer' of real life conflicts and can reveal the nature and the conflicts of the participating groups (Karatzogiani 196: 2004). In my argument, I show that they are not mere barometers, but that they have the dynamic capability to shift certain trajectories of place and state based conflicts.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the use of cyberspace by Tamil diaspora political activists, based on their personal experiences of using the internet for political purposes and the impact cyberspace had on their political processes. I sought to explore the experiences of the Tamil political activists who form the leadership and decision making units within the Tamil diasporan political sphere. These political activists' experiences explain the reasons why cyberspace has become an integral part of their political lives and political strategies as they form the vanguard of political activism in the Tamil diaspora.

I presented the process of research carried out to explore and evaluate the impact of cyberspace in the lives of political activists. This thesis contains the details of fieldwork I undertook in London where I interviewed Tamil diaspora political activists from both dissident and pro-LTTE perspectives. It was an important period for research which saw rapid changes in the context of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict and its effect on the political shaping of diaspora politics.

The research is also unique in the context of Tamil diaspora politics as I have focused much attention on Tamil dissident activism. The reasons this focus on the dissidents and the rapid political changes which featured my research period were explained in the introduction as well as at different stages of my thesis. In most past research on Tamil diaspora from Fuglerud (2001) and McDowell (1996) to Gunaratne (1999), and from the disciplines of anthropology to security studies, the politics of the Tamil diaspora have been dominated by a focus on LTTE operations and LTTE led fronts in the Tamil diaspora. Investigation into the forms of dissident politics that challenge the LTTE from within the Tamil community introduces a different dimension to the existing political arena. Moreover, the intensity of activism and the expansion of the types of actors within the last few years has made the Tamil diaspora political field a very active and vibrant area for research.

The findings in the research bring out thematic arguments, varying from theoretical issues such as 'power' and 'space', to political practices of online political strategies and

the shaping and framing of politics online. This thesis was structured in a manner to respond to three key questions I raised at the beginning. The first question was: ‘how can I research the impact of cyberspace on the politics of Tamil diaspora?’ This was addressed in Section One where I introduced a comprehensive research framework designed for data collection and analysis of my fieldwork interviews and research conducted online. The online research component was important in driving my research project and the analysis in my thesis. Section Two of the thesis contains the online research components and it is linked to Section Three where I present the offline interviews with my respondents. The offline and online data are fused to analyse individual thematic issues generated in each separate section whilst maintaining the key arguments of power, space and politics that run throughout. In Section One, to cope with the challenge of designing a research framework for analysing online content, I used Web Sphere Analysis as the preferred methodology.

Web Sphere Analysis was used as an effective research framework to understand and study online action. By studying web objects it is possible to partially, or to a certain extent, discover reasons for online action. These web objects include texts, web links, and web site structures as these represent the motives of web producers as well as the importance of the political project behind it. Web Sphere Analysis is an immensely important tool for social researchers on online political action as it incorporates a wide range of stake holders from web producers, web hosts and users. Research frameworks need to have the capacity to capture all these parties in action to understand the forms of action that takes place

Section Two of my thesis attempts to respond to the question: ‘what significance does the internet have in the political strategies of Tamil diaspora activists and the LTTE as an organization and to what extent does it define their political actions?’ In my research, Web Sphere Analysis enabled the capturing and organizing of web sites and also framed dynamics in the Tamil diaspora web sites. As introduced in my analysis, there has not been sufficient research into the web dynamics of the Tamil diaspora politics, apart from research into popular web sites such as Tamilnet.com or a limited number of pro-LTTE web sites (Ranganathan 2002, Wayland 2004, Whitaker 2007). Thanks to the dynamic boundary setting framework of the Web Sphere Analysis, all sites that clustered around

Tamil diasporan political engagements were able to be captured and analysed as an aggregate to closely examine the role each web site was playing in the political field. These helped develop my analysis and my arguments both conceptually and politically as presented in sections two and three in the thesis.

Web Sphere Analysis captured the deployment of key and dominant web sites like Tamilnet.com, tamilcanadian.com, pathivu.com, and puthinam.com. These web sites used their reach to make sure the ceaseless control of the diaspora rests with the LTTE, while Nitharsanam.com targeted dissidents and anti LTTE elements, with tamilnation.org providing the knowledge structure to justify the existence of Tamil Eelam. It also featured the ability to analyse inter website and cross actor connections in web politics with the classic example highlighted in Chapter Five where the hack attack on pro-LTTE Eelamnation.com website was quickly broadcasted via sangam.org as a damage control exercise. These websites were functioning as nodes of a hegemonic project, and these dynamics were clearly analysed as the web sphere framework had the capacity to include the linking process of web politics and the ability to look at multiple web sites linked to the same context.

This research framework was introduced to provide a two dimensional view to my research, combining the point of view of political activists and the web content to which that they were referring. It situates my arguments in coherent form as the structure of the arguments depended on analysing diverse sets of data from interviews and different web content. Section Three includes three key chapters based on my fieldwork research findings and this section responds to the third question I raised in the Introduction to the thesis. The question was, 'what are the political consequences of using the internet in diaspora activism and why is it politically different?'. Section Three is made out of chapters that are based on the interview data from my fieldwork. The interviews generated three key themes which looked at the political consequences of cyber space in diaspora politics and what difference it made to the political strategies of activists. The split within the LTTE in 2004 produced a new set of opportunities for political activists in the Tamil Diaspora. There was a surge of Diaspora political activity spearheaded by the dissidents and this translated as online political processes during this time. My thesis captures the tensions between pro LTTE and dissidents where changes in the political

sphere were reflected in online political activities. It also shows how certain online political rivalries and engagements contributed to changing offline conditions and forms of politics. These were discussed in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. The working of power and the importance of spaces for politics formed one theme that was discussed in Chapter Six. The changes in the political strategies of Tamil diaspora activists are the second theme and it was discussed in Chapter Seven. Finally the notion of cyber terrorism and its political implications on diaspora politics were discussed in Chapter Eight.

A key discussion in Chapter Six is the shaping and functioning of power and its effects in comprehending of the notion of space and its political implications. The central argument which comes out of my thesis is based on the tensions and struggles between the pro-LTTE / LTTE political activists and the dissident Tamil diaspora activists to dominate political spaces of Tamil diaspora politics. These spaces include the struggle to reach out to the diaspora community, lobby activities, publication and propaganda work and the mobilizing of activists to get the views out in the public of the two different groups. In other words, this thesis unfolds the tensions between hegemonic and counter hegemonic movements in the context of Tamil diaspora politics. Based on this central conflict, it exposes the different approaches and understandings of cyberspace and its political significance. Thus I argue throughout that these tensions create diverse approaches to politics of cyberspace and preferred practices in internet politics, which are reflected in the themes that I have engaged in Section Two of the thesis.

My argument is not simply focused on the workings of this struggle in cyberspace, it exposes the complicated nature of cyberspace and its real life effects through both the eyes of diasporan activists and the context of web content. In particular, it demonstrates the diversity generated when political struggle takes place in cyberspace with rival factions approaching cyberspace based on contradictory interpretations of its purpose in politics. The outcome of such complicated political struggles, as my thesis proves, has a direct impact on shaping political priorities within the struggle and on the lives of the political actors and political agencies involved. These political priorities were introduced by the respondents through ideas such as ‘presence is important’, ‘no politics if you are not in cyberspace’ and ‘no political group can do politics without the internet’. So, we

see that it spawned political issues that do not have relevance to the ethnic conflict on the ground and, also, that it intensifies the internal struggle between the pro-LTTE and the dissident activists. The cases of Jeyadevan, the attacks on Bazeer and the targeting of activists' families show that home grown conflicts (in England) are of importance, as well as the Tamil liberation struggle that dominated traditional diaspora political mobilization. In particular, the LTTE was under pressure to maintain the conflict connected to the diaspora and simultaneously they were forced to respond to dissident challenges. I captured such events in my Web Sphere Analysis. We have seen that even at critical times, such as the EU ban on the LTTE and Tiger air attacks in Colombo, the pro-LTTE web sites attacked dissidents while attempting to maintain the momentum of the LTTE's successes in Sri Lanka.

These tensions brought out new dimensions to diaspora political activism and highlighted the contradictions, antagonisms and, at the same time, the yearnings of political activists such as the dissidents who were looking for political spaces to operate. For some political activists, mainly belonging to the dissidents, cyberspace represented 'a space', 'democratic and safe' to be involved in politics. The LTTE countering the web operations of the dissidents, marked the switching of strategies in online politics from merely being a propaganda political priority to an activist priority. This change of strategy is discussed in Chapters Four, Seven and Eight, where I bring out examples of websites both from pro-LTTE and dissident sides, having discussions, debates and images of political activists and even challenging them on their political positions. Nitharsanam.com picked on many dissident political activists both in the diaspora and in Sri Lanka. The dissident website Tamilaffairs.com challenged many pro-LTTE political activists. This is an important observation made in my research on the implications of online politics on Tamil diaspora political activism.

These tensions have paved way for, as my thesis claims, new political priorities among diaspora politicians that may have not been possible or even important political issues were not for the use of cyberspace for political purposes. They manifest in political struggles that do not necessarily reflect the traditional Tamil diaspora politics based on the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. In this way 'power' became a central core concept in analysing the data based on the interviews. The theme of power is a central conceptual

issue as the realization and conceptualization of power is at the heart of the contradiction between the two Tamil diaspora political groups involved in my thesis. For the LTTE, cyberspace is yet another space to control and dominate, while the dissidents view it as more than an information space, but a space enabling them to challenge, resist and even dominate the LTTE. This tension, and its transition into a struggle, make cyberspace a site or playing field of antagonisms, where conflict between two contradictory forces has contributed to new political priorities within the Tamil diaspora sphere.

The pro-LTTE activists insisted on the need to be 'present' in cyberspace and on the need to 'shape or set the field' in cyberspace. They were simply speaking the code of dominating cyberspace, practices which the LTTE ardently believe keeps hegemonic discourse about national struggle and nationhood intact. In my Web Sphere Analysis, based on the web storm around the EU ban, the LTTE websites consistently projected one message, which was the image of unprecedented support from the Tamil diaspora globally for the LTTE and its objectives. The websites managed to project domination by pulling together events throughout the globe supporting the LTTE on the face of a single web page. By doing this they expected to achieve a seamless control on the diaspora. This was constructing the hegemonic truth, as Foucault pointed out, 'relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse' (1980:93).

Lukes's radical view on power, and his concept of insidious power, is relevant to some observations made by respondents based on their experiences of the way power functions in cyberspace. The respondents highlighted the capability of the web to change people's lifestyles and modes of political practice. This was highlighted by Keeran, Nallu, Jeyadevan and Jeyabalan, which is why I related such 'insidious' use of the internet technologies to Lukes' analysis of the third dimension of power. I used the Foucauldian conception of power to analyse discursive constructions such as the LTTE's hegemonic notion of Eelam.

For the dissident the internet offers opportunities for breaking down political hierarchies, such as the LTTE discourse of Eelam and its claim to be the sole

representative of Tamil people in Sri Lanka. If the LTTE ideology worked by constructing the notion of Tamil Eelam and embedding it in their struggle, the dissidents are utilizing cyber space to challenge and resist this discourse and attempting to de-link the struggle for Tamil rights from the LTTE's own struggle. Thus dissidents are resisting the LTTE's claims to being the sole power broker in the Tamil diaspora political sphere. The dissidents use cyberspace to challenge the institutional establishments which reflect the material conditions of the LTTE's Tamil nationalist discourse such as LTTE-front offices, LTTE agents and LTTE propaganda operations.

Activists such as Nallu and Jeyabalan pointed out that the internet enabled them to challenge the authority of the LTTE. They claimed cyberspace was used as a mobilization space which could not be controlled by the LTTE. Jeyabalan used terms such as 'resistance' and 'indirect power' to describe his success as a dissident journalist in bringing up the alternative voice of the dissidents. Keeran's claim in Chapter Six of cyberspace as a 'decentralized power zone' points to the importance it has in political processes of the dissidents to challenge the centralized political authority of the LTTE in the diaspora communities. Keeran's reference to the role of the dissident website Thenee.com introduced in both Chapters Four and Six is an example of the challenges made to the LTTE. The achievements made by Thenee.com is clear in the graph present in Chapter Five which visualizes the linkages Thenee.com has developed with other important websites that include international media and civil society organizations.

My thesis is not merely about the LTTE's hegemony and its construction and preservation of this hegemonic discourse online. I explore what drove the dissidents into extensive use of the web. The analysis into both the pro-LTTE and the dissident use of the web illuminated the double sense in which cyberspace was experienced by these activists, projecting it as a medium to politicise and a space/site to be politically active in. Pro-LTTE activist Sutha pointed out the importance of being present and setting the field in cyberspace, dissident activist Keeran pointed out if one has to be in politics, he has to be present in cyberspace. Though these two activists represent two rival groups both of them see cyberspace not merely as a medium of communication but as a political space that by needs to be occupied and dominated. This is why I argue cyberspace is not

only perceived but experienced by diaspora activists as an important political space, thus motivating them to politicise this space using their own political ideologies in order to dominate it.

The claim that cyberspace is a political site or space made by dissident political activists calls for a unique way of looking at cyberspace in the context of politics. Cyber enthusiasts have made earlier claims of cyberspace as being a 'place', but the strength of this thesis is that the claim is based on the actual experiences of political activists. A cross generation of Tamil activists were represented, from people who were Tamil activists more than a decade before the inception of cyberspace to those whose political careers have coincided with the growth of cyberspace and its use for political mobilization.

From a theoretical perspective, cyberspace has become a site for activists endowing them with political agency for political mobilization and political organization. These new opportunities included launching political campaigns which, if not for the existence of cyberspace, would have been virtually impossible. This can be a controversial argument to make but it is supported by the fieldwork. Some of the respondents referred to the distinct configuration of these spaces, claiming they were 'safe' and 'democratic'. As Amin, et al argue 'we have to recognize that politics consist of multiple spaces in which need, desire and corresponding disagreement are registered' (2005: 811). My thesis illuminates the dual notions of political space and spaces for politics. Spaces for politics were highlighted through the responses of the political activists, who elaborated on the political opportunities that cyberspace opened up where political mobilization, communication and organization were made easy. While the idea of political space was important, in some interviews it denoted a qualitatively different political terrain, where unique political strategies were required for political engagements and a political space could generate political effects.

Though the thesis is not championing the outright claim that qualitatively different political spaces are created and maintained in cyberspace, I argue that at certain moments of political engagements, cyberspace can be used and embraced as a 'political

space' or a location that enables political action. I claim that these political engagements have the generative power to create real world political impacts, as proven by both the dissidents' successful challenges to the LTTE, and also by the LTTE using the internet as an ambush point to target dissidents who perceive themselves to be safe in London in a liberal political environment. Furthermore the fact that LTTE fronts have increasingly started to respond to attacks on their hegemonic discourse about the Tamil homeland and the military conflict made through online challenges is a sign of taking the internet very seriously and trying to deal with it differently. The LTTE fronts not only responded, but they have attempted to expand the Tamil diasporan web sphere with a large number of web sites supporting the Eelam cause. This thesis also uncovered that the responses made by the pro-LTTE activists to challenges made to them online are not limited to challenging the counter discourse but to challenging the individuals behind the dissident web challenges. The classic example is the unprecedented number of web attacks carried out against R. Jeyadevan where the LTTE has gone to the extremes of registering websites in the name of Jeyadevan and publishing anti Jeyadevan material as methods of intimidation.

This is why in the central argument of this thesis I claim that the tensions between the pro-LTTE and the dissident groups shape the different approaches to their web politics. The LTTE approaches the web as a space that can be controlled and which needs to be contained, while the dissidents use cyberspace as a place to be located in, and also as a space for political opportunities once restricted in the physical realm because of the LTTE dominance. I also argue such tensions possess the inherent capability to generate new political issues. These political challenges and counter challenges between the LTTE and the dissidents have made both groups view cyberspace as an important site of power struggle as it has introduced new challenges for political strategies – in particular 'time' and 'speed' have become important in political action.

These two themes, of the working of 'power' and the perception of 'space' in relation to cyberspace, and the contrasting approaches to cyber politics based on these themes thus took my thesis to explore the dimension of the political within diasporan politics. 'Power' and 'space' were critical notions which defined the actions of political activists and made them embrace certain forms of cyber politics. This made it important to

investigate the cumulative impact of cyberspace and the processes of cyber politics on their political actions. These included the definitions of political priorities and the adoption of political strategies.

For some political activists the experience of being located in cyberspace is similar to being in a physical location important for political action; this is shown in the analysis of interview data. The struggle to secure political advantages both strategically and tactically through the use of cyberspace and to deploy in cyberspace has also intensified web rivalry among the two groups. This rivalry is central to understanding the dynamics of changing political strategies within Tamil diaspora politics as uncovered in Chapter Seven. My analysis of this theme grapples with political processes in the Tamil diaspora political sphere and the effects of cyberspace and online technologies in shaping and constructing political strategies. I argue that this theme plays a definitive role in the lives of political activists in shaping their activism online, which was discussed in Section Three.

Chapter Seven brought out the second theme that emerged within the broader topic of the political use of cyberspace for Tamil diaspora politics and I introduced it under the broader analysis of the politics of cyberspace in a two dimensional approach. The first dimension was identified as ‘political opportunities’, which considered the dimensions of cyber politics through the eyes of Tamil diaspora political activists. The second dimension was the notion ‘political strategies’, which went beyond the question of what political opportunities cyberspace opened. It was concerned with the new political strategies the activists have had to adopt to suit political engagements online and what effects the internet has generated in the sphere of Tamil diaspora politics.

The two dimensions in which political use of cyberspace is discussed provide an integrated view of the effects of cyberspace and internet on the political strategies of Tamil diaspora political activists. The attributes of resistance, or the ability to resist dominant networks, are identified, while contrary to some theories of minority resistance to hegemonic networks, I uncover the manner in which such dominant networks attempt

to rearticulate their dominance in cyberspace. This brings out the complicated nature of cyber dynamics which is not as simple and straightforwardly libertarian as people such as Clever (1998), and Levy (2001) claim. From the point of view of the LTTE, I also look at the problems of envisaging dominant structures in cyberspace. Their strategies of active email campaigns, hyper linking large numbers of web sites and delivering a single political message are attempts to impose mechanisms of surveillance in cyberspace and suggest a reshaping of strategies to match the fluidity of the cyber environment. This demonstrated that a hegemonic project has to re-think political strategies in cyberspace because existing political structures that are visible in diaspora politics could not be superimposed directly onto online politics. The research looked at the politicisation of the online sphere in the Tamil political struggle for control, coupled with new uses of technologies for political ends.

The re-articulation of new political strategies online and the constant struggle between the rival political groups in designing strategies for online politics has opened up a more sinister dimension to the politics of cyberspace. I argue that political struggles between the activists played out in cyberspace had profound real life effect on their lives. This was the third theme of my thesis and a surprising revelation which came out through my fieldwork and online research.

Cyberspace and politics of cyberspace in this context, with the images of power and images of terror I have engaged in both Chapters Five and Eight, highlight the importance of political symbols as well as individual agents. This is not a new thing. As Latour claims, revisiting Thomas Hobbes' instruction to the engraver who created the front piece of the Leviathan 'a simple look at them clearly proves that the "body – politik" is not only made of people! They are thick with things...' (2005:16). Through my research I argue that the embedded images in Tamil websites of weapons, military assets, night clubs, vehicles, houses, businesses, pornographic material, animated images of weapons depicting threats have become part of the new cyber political dimension. These images prior to the use of cyberspace were not used extensively and did not reach such a massive audience. However, they have become the forefront of a political struggle to maintain and assert control, and are political tools wielded for counter hegemonic campaigns. This makes the point that even the computer screen space has political

implications and is more complicated than just rhetoric in politics. The images lumped together in these sites have narrowed down the battlefield into the personal spaces of political activists, their children, husbands and wives. Diasporan political activists are thrown into a situation where terror and fear have become so close and so personal so as to make them feel unsafe even in the safest place, that's 'home'. I argue these terror tactics are important because they make the existing arguments on cyber terror obsolete and challenge its dependence on macro spheres such as state initiatives, the protection of critical infrastructure and gearing for transnational terrorism through online initiatives. My findings bring out the need to change the analytical lenses in studying concepts such as cyber conflict and cyber terrorism.

I started to uncover a shift in the web politics in Tamil diaspora when I contrasted my findings, both from the fieldwork and online research, with my pre-PhD research into Tamil diaspora politics online. In my earlier research on web politics in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict, my respondents spoke about information sharing and web propaganda but I saw a marked difference in my interviews for the PhD. Many political activists I interviewed used terms such as 'need to be present', 'need to be aware of speed' and 'need to be part of web'. There is an interesting paradigm of political engagement in the Tamil diaspora that parallels increased interactivity in the web. The web has become more than a medium. While its use as a medium of information was stressed simultaneously activists were referring to it as a site or place for political action.

The web platforms used for online engagements have undergone marked advances since mid 2002 and these advances have made the web more interactive, with more political websites being hosted on platforms such as blogs. Structurally, the ability to interact, and the level of interaction, has increased remarkably compared to web use in 1995 – 2002 in the Sri Lankan context. This is the background on which I carried out my web research. Many sites I analysed such as Nitharsanam.com, Tamilaffairs.com, vizhippu.net and Thenee.com were based on the blog platforms. These platforms enabled not just readership but a massive interaction between the site producers, readers and political actors and issues featured in these blogs. This is a key reason why the websites began to generate considerable influence on the issues that were discussed and the actors who were in the centre of them. This is a fundamental reason why the post 2005 period

saw a surge in web activity and related offline responses to web generated political issues.

Moreover, the ability to explore both the online research components in each section and its successful integration with offline research is an important hallmark of having clear units of analysis generated through Web Sphere Analysis. The importance of Web Sphere Analysis in this research is its ability to be used in comparative analysis. Thus the web sphere or web storms I brought out can, in future research, be compared to future web storms to derive greater insight into the working of cyberspace in political engagements and political activism. Also the micro facets of the sites that are captured in a web sphere such as web links, shape, text content, images, and technological upgrades can be used for comparison with the future web spheres if they are well archived.

Finally my thesis brought out the complicated nature of cyber politics and the effects of the use of the internet for politics on Tamil diasporan politics, where the effects were felt on individuals, their families, their friends and their colleagues. The internet's generative power in some instances could take the attention of political activists away from the political issues they were fighting for, whilst turning personal political confrontations with public affairs. Such was the case of Jeyadevan, which is important because the personal political rivalries involved in the case forced the LTTE to enter a type of politics they deemed as not suitable for an organization such as themselves involved in a liberation struggle. The research pointed to the political importance of cyberspace where political activists, unlike in the context of the anti globalization movement, the Zapatistas, or the anti war movement, were more interactive. This interactivity led Tamil diaspora political activists to believe that the internet was more than a medium of communication or networking facility but a site or place where political action can be staged with the capability of making change or resulting in real world effects. I discuss the role of concepts of power, space and political strategy in the context of political engagements online in micro political struggles. My thesis opens up the wider debates of spatial importance of cyberspace, and implications it has on democracy, security and power. The thesis points out the importance of 'presence' in cyberspace and its link with cyber political engagements, which advances the theoretical frameworks of cyber politics currently focusing explicitly on the importance of being a medium of

informational politics, technological utility and networking capability. The thesis contributes to the study of cyber conflict and terrorism, exposing the impact cyber politics can have on lives of individual agents which is an area not explored in the current discourse of cyber conflict. Finally my research looks at the political implications cyberspace had on Tamil diaspora political activism by tracing the shifting political strategies and use of cyber politics to change the political landscape of Tamils dispersed across the globe.

Glossary of Terms

Blog / Web Log: A type of web page with minimal external editing used to provide online commentary and enabling people to interact on the web page with feedback on content.

Browser: Any software that is used to explore various types of Internet resources.

Countermeasure: Action or device that reduces vulnerability to attack of a computer system.

Cracking: the process of trying to overcome a internet or computer security measure

Cyberspace: The electronic space created by computers connected together in networks to form the Internet.

Domain: A domain name is the unique name that identifies an Internet site

Download: is the method by which users access and save software or other files to their own computers from a remote computer.

Denial of service (DoS): an internet borne attack targeting a system to be unable to fulfil its intended function.

Email bomb: An email containing active data sent purposely to cause damage to the recipient's computer.

Encryption: A way of coding the information in a file or e-mail message which is unreadable in the event of interception.

Fire Wall: Combination of hardware and software separating a Network into two or more parts for security purposes.

Hit: A single request from a web *browser* for a single item from a web server.

Hacker: A person who breaks into computer systems for the purpose of stealing or destroying data.

Hacking: The process of bypassing the security systems on a computer system or network.

Home Page: The starting point of a Web presentation offering direct links to the different sections of the site.

Host: A host is any computer directly connected to a network that acts as a repository for services available for other computers

Information security: A system of procedures and policies designed to protect and control information and information infrastructures.

Network: A system of computers interconnected in order to share information.

Real Time: Events simulated by a computer at the same speed that they would occur in real life.

Search Engine: A web based system for searching information available on the Web.

Server: is a computer that handles requests for data, e-mail, file transfers, and other network services from other computers.

Upload: Transferring data from a one computer to another computer or to a server.

Virus: A computer program designed to make copies of it and spread itself from one computer to another and disrupting or destroying the operating system.

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