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To cite this article: Yasmin Ibrahim, Vy Rajapillai & Sasha Scott (2021): Consuming conflict as Tamil consciousness: the case of second-generation British Sri Lankan Tamils, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940890](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940890)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1940890>



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Published online: 21 Jun 2021.



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Consuming conflict as Tamil consciousness: the case of second-generation British Sri Lankan Tamils

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ABSTRACT

A long-running conflict is wounding for generations, not only by sustaining an affective sense-making between different geolocations but also by binding diasporic communities through the conflict's temporality of pain, violence and loss as enduring legacies. Long-running conflicts leave wounds, binding generations through an allotropic process in which the trauma is experienced second-hand and consumed through the circulation of the conflict in a myriad of cultural forms. This paper reveals the findings of a study conducted among second-generation British Sri Lankan youths to understand conflict as a site of constant consumption and domestication, yielding an affective sphere of sense making. In particular, the paper traces how the consumption of conflict is reified and temporally enlarged through the interactions between first and second generations, transnational networks and peers as well as media technologies in mediating Tamil identity and consciousness. This affective sphere induced through second-hand trauma is continuously sustained, renewed and negotiated in lending to the process of identity construction and the moral imagination of a homeland.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 4 November 2020

Accepted 7 June 2021

Introduction

The civil war between the Sri Lankan state and the ethnic minorities of the Tamil Eelam as an internecine conflict lasting almost three decades and covered extensively by media globally is an event imprinted in the psyche of the nation as a deep-seated wound. This long-running armed conflict evidencing the loss and displacement of over tens of thousands civilians in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka and branded an unmitigated humanitarian disaster (Nair 2012, 121), would come to occupy a central role in imagining the homeland for Sri Lankan Tamil within it and beyond. Conflicts produce a sensorium of trauma, drawing on the visual and non-visual, the material and intangible filtered through the visceral and primal, suspending the afflicted within an affective sphere which can transcend generations, and elongating the temporality of conflict through the imagination of the 'homeland'. Conflict as an atavistic event can be sustained through this affective sphere in which conflict can be actively re-enacted as a cultural form beyond the event and its aftermath.

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Nayar (2009, 19), in promulgating the representations of conflict as an allotropic genre, premises the existence of same elements in different forms that must be read in conjunction with each other to emphasise the shared visual cultures of atrocities retained through dominant tropes which are intelligible and meaningful to a consuming community. Within such a problem is the pre-eminence of the modes in which consumption of conflict sustains an affective sphere of sense-making which mediate identity, belonging and notions of loss of the 'home' for diasporic communities (Cheran 2003; Thiranagama 2011). As such, a conflict, though delimited in time and space, becomes unbound to be elongated and enlarged through consuming communities that reenact and circulate conflict within an affective sphere, forging visceral associations, ambiguities and fragmentations (hence allotropic) for the second generation.

Despite the passage of time, Sri Lanka is still possessed by the haunting legacies or 'phantasms' of the atavistic violence of the civil war, with the most recent example being the church bombings in and around Colombo during Easter 2019 (Ethirajan 2019). This bombing, despite being framed as a terrorist attack by Islamic extremists, re-ignites the decades of ethnic tensions and turbulence, foregrounding trauma as inscribed through its recurring qualities. Pieris (2017, 1001) notes with reference to the civil war that the sheer scale of human displacement, dislocation and dispossession radically transformed Sri Lanka's minority communities. Uprooting, mobilising and reshaping their geo-cultural composition, and unmooring the meaning of dwelling.

The notion of the homeland is inscribed intimately in the psyche and language of imagining it in relation to one's boundedness, intimacy with everyday security and proximity. The denial of this intimacy is then about the indelible wounding for the individual and an imagined collectivity. Perera (2020) illuminates this through the concept of *viidu* ('home' in Tamil) pointing out that the word is often paired with another term *vaasal* ('doorstep'). The alliterative phrase *viidu-vaasal*, evoking the household, is located through its tangible and affective qualities of materiality and belonging. Conflicts induce a shared precarity of lives. They are also boundary leapers, transcending the temporal and spatial, while remaking spaces hyper-visible through their turbulence. Conflicts can marry disparate geographies while dispelling them with force. Hence *viidu-vasal* as an intimate womb of residence for collective imagining of the home and its denial is about the imposed violence on those who are exiled and subject to forced migration.

Between 1983 and 2009, figures reveal that some 146,098 Sri Lankans were registered as refugees in 64 countries (IDC 2014). For a transnational diasporic community, the long-running civil war and its aftermath is sustained through the domestic spheres, the local and transnational communities as well as ethnic television channels and cultural artefacts. The conflict enacted and consumed in its myriad forms induces an affective bind as well as a moral imagination of the conflict as a vital part of one's subjectivity, mediating the notions of belonging for younger generations through a process of sense-making against the sensorium of collective trauma and loss as a recurring and dominant cultural memory.

This paper interrogates how long-running conflicts merge temporalities of past and present, ingraining the future with the brutality of collective trauma. It argues that shared trauma and violence of conflicts suture disparate spaces to produce a welded geography of collective memory, binding generations beyond the duration of the conflict. Hence the paper is structured through a binding question of what does it

mean to consume a long-running conflict for a second-generation through second-hand witnessing? What moral imagination binds them to the sense of this distant sacred *viidu* and its desecrated *vasaal*? Conflicts are wounding, leaving deep-seated scars which can be transmuted from one generation to another which in turn mediate identity and subjectivity.

This paper proceeds by contextualising the civil war and its violent legacy in Sri Lanka. Drawing from this brutal history and context of turbulence, the paper considers the conceptual considerations in examining the consumption of violence as an affective sphere for diasporic younger generations in ingraining coherence and fragmentation as part of the Tamil consciousness. This is then followed by the findings from the case study of second-generation Tamil youths in the UK in illuminating the modes in which conflict is domesticated yet bound with the transnational as a symbolic event of consumption and circulation.

The civil war in Sri Lanka and the emergence of the diasporic communities abroad

Spanning over a quarter of a century between 1983 and 2009, and accounting for more than 100,000 war casualties and one million refugees, the civil war in Sri Lanka was one of the most violent and intractable conflicts in modern history (Shastri 2009). The agitation by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to form an independent state to be called Tamil Eelam not only entailed ethno-nationalism but also the shift of power from the centre to the periphery (Shastri 2009). With the Sinhalese forming the majority (82%) against the Tamil minority¹ (9.4%) this ethnic division is further deepened through religious dichotomies, with the Sinhalese embracing the teachings of Buddha, while the Tamils are largely Hindus. The ethnic nature of the profile as well issue of consolidation of identity and belonging enacted through Tamil self-autonomy foregrounded this struggle. Referring to the regions in the North and East of the Island and equally conflated with the autonomy of LTTE, Tamil Eelam signified a political conflict and an affective realm of 'place making' for Tamils in Sri Lanka, alluding to the overlay of physical spaces with the symbolic, in elucidating how people's spatial practices are related to circulating images and representations of belonging. Place-making unbound from the physical comes to reside in the affective spheres of communion and loss for communities embroiled in conflict.

Sri Lanka's gaining of independence from British colonial rule in 1948 was inevitably marked by racial and ethnic violence in a postcolonial space in which the quest for identity, recognition and belonging resurged with ferocity in the process of configuring an independent nation state. The demand for autonomy for the northern and eastern regions of the country but within a federal framework became the focus for Tamil political leaders after 1956. The refusal to accommodate demands for Tamil autonomy coupled with the sense of being sidelined in wake of the 1972 political constitution which replaced the one created by the British and recognised Buddhism as the state religion and affirmed the primacy of the Sinhalese language led to calls for the creation of a separate Tamil state called Eelam (Wayland 2004, 412).

The conflict, the product of long-standing tensions between Sri Lanka's majority Sinhalese and minority Tamils over the latter's rights and place, had begun in the mid-1980s

and ebbed and flowed for some 25 years before coming to a bloody end in 2009 with tens of thousands dead (Ratner 2012, 795; Salgado 2007). Many elements contributed to the civil war in 1983² ensuing from the period of independence leading to Tamils feeling discriminated against and alienated by the Sinhalese majority in terms of citizenship status, distribution of agricultural lands, admission into institutions of higher education, language and employment (Shastri 2009, 78–79). The demand for a separate autonomous Tamil state within Sri Lanka emerged through this context, transforming ethnic consciousness into a full-fledged secessionist movement. The Tamil Students' Federation, by 1975 renaming itself as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), resurrected itself into a guerrilla organisation at the forefront of the struggle for an independent Tamil homeland (Wayland 2004, 413). The Tamil Tigers would through time come to occupy a contested identity backed by the funding from a wealthy Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and using violent tactics such as the use of the Black Tigers, a group of suicide bombers implicated most notably in the assassinations of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 and of Sri Lankan President Premadasa in 1993, and in the bombings of civilian targets and Buddhist shrines (Jayawickreme, Jayawickreme, and Miller 2010, 208; Wayland 2004, 414). The sustained Tamil insurgency against the government and the existence of an LTTE-administered region in the north around Jaffna for five years provided the social capital and premise for framing a unified Tamil identity rooted in ethno-nationalism, and this in time would be sustained and ignited through a transnational diasporic network (Cheran 2009).

Turbulence ensued through the 1970s and 1980s with the instigation of ethnic riots against the Tamils by the Sri Lankan military and in tandem the radicalisation of Tamil youths by Tamil fundamentalists. The ensuing Black July³ riots, an anti-Tamil pogrom, marked the deaths of hundreds of Tamils and led to the emigration of thousands thereafter with the escalation of the civil war. The onset of the civil war unleashed a flow of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka to neighbouring India, South East Asia (particularly Malaysia), and European nations (such as the UK, Germany and France) as well as Canada.⁴ The growth of a Tamil diaspora over time would become an important aspect of drawing attention to the Sri Lankan's government's policies (Shastri 2009, 79).

In 2009, LTTE founder and leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and other key figures were killed in a gunfight with the Sri Lankan military which leads to the official end of the war. It had claimed the lives of at least 100,000 Sri Lankan civilians and displaced a further 800,000, making it one of the longest and most brutal civil wars. It is within this political and socio-cultural context that we locate the consumption of conflict as cataclysmic limit event which becomes temporally and spatially unbound for the Tamil diaspora mediating their sense of Tamil identity and consciousness. Long conflicts such as civil wars inscribe a meandering path of suffering which can be personalised and re-enacted through the domestic sphere and its intersubjective relationship with a transnational diaspora in joining personal loss to traumatic events which exist beyond human understanding.

Conflict as an entangled affective sphere

The UN report on the civil war published in 2012⁵ cited several instances of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Sri Lankan government, including the killing of civilians through indiscriminate shelling, attacks on safe zones, murder,

mutilation, rape and failing to treat the wounded and sick among other gross violations, leading to the conflict being labelled as a humanitarian crisis (Nair 2012, 128). Violence and civil war are not only material formations but positioned within an intangible/tangible nexus which can leave deep scars on humanity, shaping subjectivity, recovery, sense of alienation and belonging. In his treatise on scar cultures, Nayar (2009, 148) premises a visceral economy in which representations of war and conflicts can emerge and entail an affective encoding through the emotional 'dominant' in a war or conflict situation. This 'emotional dominant' can bind communities through this social/common knowledge. Nayar's scar culture then alludes to the multi-modal representations of suffering we experience and respond to and can implicate media representations in the transmutation of trauma. Hence trauma is mediated and circulates in forms of testimony and other cultural representations in literature, film, art and the media without foreclosing the gap between lived experiences of trauma and their representations.

This equally entails a moral imagination or a new geopolitics, and in the case of diasporic communities, a welded geography of shared wounding and precarity of lives. Long-running events such as a civil war can enter into the realm in which the event is 'always in process', inserted into a realm of 'common knowledge' (Dalby 2008, 435), and not located through any spatial or temporal limits with an ability to collapse past, present and future. Thus, for Nayar, variants of narratives and representations constitute an 'allotropic genre' located on a continuum and producing a relationality between individual, personal, collective and familial dimensions of the suffering birthed through the conflict (Nayar 2011/2009, 152). For a transnational diasporic community, the transmission of trauma beyond the embodied victim to active consuming communities enlarges suffering manifest in their diasporic condition, drawing on the rootedness to the home through this wound. Accounts and coverage of suffering, trauma and the conflict of its aftermath constantly redraft the conflict, transmuting it as a psychological and cultural device even after its occurrence as a lived encounter. As such, the cultural construction of conflict becomes temporally displaced, but evolves through conscious (and the sub-conscious as suppressed memory or post-traumatic stress disorder) and material re-enactments whether these be narratives, accounting through official grey literature, or ignited through symbolic forms.

Bhattacharya (2017) invokes Latour's notion of the 'immutable mobile' with reference to representations of the Holocaust. These refer to facts or data which do not decay and neither are these amenable to distortion or corruption in their transmission, being combinable with other formats. Hence these can be aggregated into a body of knowledge producing a language in which it is rendered mobile to be transmitted as a recognisable and reproducible category of experience which is understood by those not directly affected by it. Long-running conflicts, in contrast, take on a meandering deposition of facts and narratives which absorb the trajectory of violence and are less about veracity but the bundling of composite representations to be meaningful to diasporic communities which are geographically displaced but bound to the trauma and suffering of the homeland. Hence this 'mutable mobile' redrafts the affective sphere of diasporic immersions as continually reworked and remade while instilling the collective trauma as immutable.

Valančiūnas (2021, 5), in discussing the haunting and turbulent history of ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, frames it as 'prosthetic trauma', drawing from Alison Landsberg's (2004) idea of 'prosthetic memory' to illuminate the kind of trauma that is inherited and

experienced by a person who did not live out the trauma-related events in reality. Similarly, Marianne Hirsch (2008) references this as postmemory in which generations imbibe the cultural trauma of those who have lived and experienced it preceding them. It then transmutes a cultural in-betweenness as a double consciousness of the diasporic subject. Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012, 13) uses the term 'Phantomic' to describe how the ghostly presence of non-human materialities in post-war environments invokes past histories of violence long after the human victims have fled. As such it produces a peculiar kind of haunting through the voids, inducing an affective transmission and delineating an 'affective geography'.

The telling and re-telling of trauma narratives transmute the collective pain from one generation to another, retaining historic conflicts as an active site of consumption and reworking. The enactment of conflict within a diasporic public sphere and its domestication in homes as an unfolding everyday reality is materialised through the rise of electronic media in conjunction with migration, giving rise to 'diasporic public spheres' (Appadurai 2000) igniting and sustaining an affective sphere of engagement that is intimately appropriated, personalised and retained through networks of affectivity beyond bounded geography. The conflict as a form of cultural reproduction and consumption then mediates identity. Consciousness of belonging invokes conflict as mobile through its circulation in this affective public sphere while retaining the collective trauma as an immutable element within this ecology. Appadurai (2000) in contending that nationalist sentiments can never be contained within territorial boundaries of the state invokes nationalist sentiments and their re-abstraction into diasporic consciousness as a remediation of nationalist conflict both in a temporal and spatial sense in defiance of territorial superiority. In tandem, geographical conflicts become re-abstracted as limit events that can transcend geography, temporality and generations.

Second-generation Tamil identity construction

Over 450,000 Sri Lanka Tamils sought asylum in Western Europe and North America between 1983 and 1998, prompting former Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene to refer to expatriate Tamils living in Western states as 'the world's most powerful minority' (Wayland 2004, 415). This overall tempo of emigration gathered pace in line with the escalating civil war throughout the 1980s and 1990s, resulting in size-able Tamil enclaves in several Western states. The first wave of Tamil immigrants to the West were predominantly highly educated professionals from wealthy families (Cheran 2000). A mass exodus of the Tamil population was experienced in the 1980s with the UK as the most important site of the LTTE's overseas political activity (Wayland 2004, 419). Until the passing of an anti-terrorism legislation bill in the UK in 2001 banning the organisation, the LTTE's international secretariat had been located in London.

Valentine Daniel and Thangarajah (1995, 241) outline the Tamil migration to the UK in three phases. The first being from upper or upper-middle class backgrounds with an education in elite high schools and with a cultivated ease in Western ways and tastes. Though very few had any intention to stay permanently, they extended their stay indefinitely when Sinhala was introduced as the only official language in Sri Lanka in 1956. The second phase encompassed migrants from a wider spectrum of class and caste who had come to further their education which was no longer available to them in Sri Lanka and

many had to work to finance their studies. The third phase, constituting of refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the war, reflected a diverse economic and social demographic. The Tamil diaspora comprised refugees and exiles forced to leave their home country because of conflict rather than economic need or the wish to forge a new home are united through the ethno-nationalist conflict and persecution in their homeland and, as such, even those migrants, and especially their children, who desire integration into the receiving societies, may be active players in the conflicts left behind (Wayland 2004, 408). According to a 2004 report, for the second and third generation diaspora in contrast to the first, their notion of return is often on a time-limited basis (Zunzer 2004, 13–14).

Cheran (2009) points out that it was not until the 1980s that Sri Lanka experienced a mass exodus of its Tamil population. In the late 1960s and early 1970s migration to the UK rose with increased discrimination against Tamils in Sri Lanka, with a strong and active community developing in Greater London. The 1977 riots in Sri Lanka again ignited migration to Britain with the flow mediated by policies in Sri Lanka that restricted the movements of professionally qualified Tamils, and by Britain's tighter immigration laws that had just come into force (David 2012, 377). The settled migrants in London boroughs such as Newham, in the east of the city, or Brent in north-west London prompted a large number of Tamils seeking asylum, searching for employment and for places of refuge. Out of nearly 5000 asylum seekers arriving in 2002 in Britain, the majority of them came from Sri Lanka and it is estimated that nearly one-quarter of the British Tamil population were asylum seekers (David 2012, 377).

Alice Block's sociological study of different refugee group in London found that nearly all Tamil respondents gave their reason for coming to Newham as kinship or friendship ties, or due to the presence of other refugees there and the presence of places of worship (2002, 144). From this paradigm the sense of place-making is multi-layered. Despite the British government's decision in June 2003 to add Sri Lanka to its 'White List' of countries now presumed to be safe, and despite protests from the Refugee Council and Amnesty International, migration patterns revealed a new decline in asylum migration, but an increase in the regrouping and relocating of family groups, particularly of Tamils from Europe to Britain. This secondary migration appears to have been pushed forward by desires for the younger generations to gain an English education, and by the obvious support of a well-established, significant British-based Tamil community (David 2012, 738).

The study on second-generation British Tamils sought to examine how the conflict and its aftermath is consumed as an ongoing event for this generation. Within this introspection, it reviewed the relative roles played by parents, peers and media against the history of the civil war in Sri Lanka in sustaining an affective sphere within which the conflict is centred and re-enacted. Conflict and civil wars as modes of violence through second-hand witnessing from narratives and representations through the media, peers and familial networks construct social reality through intimacy and immediacy as well through modes of domestication in terms of its everydayness and the private habitat. The conflict is domesticated through the interior realm of the household and it is also part of a diasporic public sphere (Appadurai 2000) in mediating Tamil consciousness, belonging and a moral imagination illuminating this affective sphere as shaped through its wounding and violence as well as a means for recovery. This in turn shapes cultural memory, self-identity and notions of loss and belonging for the second

generation, geo-physically removed from the conflict but affectively bound through its pathos.

Orjuela (2008, 436) observes armed conflicts as increasingly waged in an international arena denoted through its nationalist mobilisation, hostilities and polarisation enacted through various actors. The involvement of the diaspora in propaganda work, advocacy and fundraising for armed actors has received much attention, particularly in the context of the global 'war against terrorism' (Shain 2002). Equally, there have been attempts to buttress the negative image of the diaspora by framing its members as potential peace-builders who can reconcile difference from a distance, lobby for non-violent conflict resolution and fund the reconstruction of war-torn societies (Orjuela 2008, 436; Zunzer 2004). The role of the Tamil diaspora in maintaining Tamil nationalism during the two decades of civil war in Sri Lanka as well as funding the LTTE meant that the diaspora is actively engaged in 'homeland politics' in a multitude of ways without reducing the reductionist stereotypes of 'warriors' or 'peace workers' in relation to their homeland conflicts (Cheran 2009; Orjuela 2008, 436; Thurairajah 2017, 115) hence mediating identity construction as a nuanced process. The combination of different communicative practices including long-distance telecommunication, migrant Tamils returning as tourists, and their involvement as development actors or political activists has enabled the establishment of different modes of proximity as well as an array of negotiations contributing to the affirmation of boundaries between those identifying themselves as locals and outsiders at a more general level of everyday life (Gerharz 2010, 149).

Data and demographics of the study

The data for this study were collected in two stages between 2014 and 2015. The first stage involved a survey and the second entailed focus groups in which a set of semi-structured questions were posed to respondents who self-identified as Sri Lankan Tamil. The data from the study accrued from a survey of 109 responses and focus groups of people in the 19-to-25 age group of Sri Lankan parentage. A total of five focus groups were conducted with each group comprising between three to five participants, with all participants identifying themselves as British Sri Lankan Tamil. The data from the survey yielded 62% responses from youths who identified themselves as Sri Lankan Tamil, with 94% of the 109 participants identifying their mothers as being born in Sri Lanka, with 88.6% identifying their mother's identity as being Tamil. Within this same respondent group, 95.5% identified their father as born in Sri Lanka, with 89.8% identifying their father's ethnicity as Tamil.⁶

The survey as a first-level mapping exercise revealed that 28% of the respondents speak Tamil to their parents and 47% speak Tamil to their grandparents but only 5% speak Tamil to their siblings. Tamil as a lingua franca provided a mode of communication and connection with the older generation, forging a sense of Tamil identity. The notion of being ethnically Tamil was not only realised through the speaking of Tamil but also partaking in traditional cultural activities or customs (61%) or in attending Sri Lankan cultural (Tamil/Sinhala) and social events (41%). The survey respondents were well aware of the conflict with 41% agreeing that they know quite a lot about the background to the conflict, and 29% accepting they had a good knowledge of it. According to the survey, the respondents knew about the conflict and the situation in Sri Lanka

from a number of sources: English-language news media (59%), cultural events (44%), parents (87%), ethnic-language television and radio stations (63%), peers (68.5%), online chat environments (29%), local communities (31.5%), relatives in other countries (48%) and relatives from Sri Lanka (63%).

The civil war as framed through oral narratives of parents, relatives, community, and peers through a diasporic environment against the backdrop of news reports is an integral dimension of identity formation for the respondents. The combination of ways in which the narratives of loss, trauma and turmoil becomes a context in which identity is constantly negotiated. The qualitative interviews revealed both a sense of distance and extreme proximity to the conflict and equally framed it through the experiences of previous generations (i.e. parents and grandparents). Tamil identity for the Tamil diaspora is sustained through the Tamil language, with respondents learning the language through classes arranged by the community. Some respondents asserted that they will also send their children to Tamil classes in the future and retain Tamil as a language that links and binds their community within this diaspora and back home. The notion of British Sri Lankan Tamil identity was both an identity marker and equally a term which produced tensions over the question of whether it constitutes an ethnicity or a nationality. Others noted that the term was a historical marker that accrues from the discourse of their parents. The shifting emphasis of the term illuminated its dilemmatic proposition for the second generation. As David (2012) observes, the experience of forced migration and displacement has shaped the making of cultural and ethnic identities for the British Sri Lankan community and in specific terms of the mediation and politics of selfhood.

Civil war and conflict in terms of second-hand witnessing leave a psychological imprint on younger generations. The ongoing turbulence in Sri Lanka even after 2009 becomes an immersive environment in which Tamil identity is realised for the second generation. When the Sri Lankan government began its final offensive in September 2008 it asked the UN and other international organisations and NGOs to leave the region of LTTE control known as Vanni. International media access was extremely difficult and outside monitoring in the last part of the war was limited with the full scope of the violence not entirely known to the public. Videos and photographs smuggled to Tamil exiles groups in the West were not authenticated and were deemed by the government to be fabrications (Ratner 2012, 796). While suffering was an 'immobile mobile' aspect of the body politic of Tamils, information and narratives remained a mutable element with leaked videos and the subsequent labelling of the LTTE as terrorists, adding a further affective dimension to the conflict through the connotation of these taboo or clandestine elements. Tamil satellite channels have played an important role in not only reporting the civil war but in perpetuating the conflict as a centric-dimension of Sri Lankan Tamil identity. Sankaran and Pillai (2011, 280–281) note that 'displaced Sri Lankan Tamils who have spread across the world are active participants in the production, promotion and distribution of transnational Tamil television shows of various kinds'. In tandem, the LTTE pursued an active media strategy encompassing the use of the internet, community-based Tamil radio stations and subscription satellite TV. Satellite television enabled LTTE to effectively inform the large diaspora. The Tamil Television Network (TTN), a subscription satellite TV channel, provides Tamil entertainment to the diaspora infused with LTTE undertones. Subscription satellite TV

channels enabled a medium for propaganda whilst generating income through subscriptions and advertising from Tamil businesses operating in Europe (Jayasekara 2007). During the final stages of the war, when journalists were prevented from coverage of incidents, these satellite platforms challenged the government monopoly on information and sparked an international uproar over the perceived human rights violations (Hargreaves et al. 2013).

Conflict as background and foreground: findings from the study

The findings reveal how the trauma of the conflict recurs as a constant backdrop in the domestic sphere despite the distance from it, producing a proximity and with parental narratives being validated or questioned through the praxis of the transnational community. The Tamil Eelam occupied a mythopoeic space amenable to multiple iterations but bound with the conflict, violence and identity. Similarly, the associations with the LTTE enters through familial ties and is constantly reviewed through a duality of seeking to understand the conflict objectively despite it being bound with parents' narratives and its intimate domestication at home. The following section discusses the main themes that emerged in the semi-structured interviews, assembled through a discourse analysis of conflict (Wodak 2009), violence, and the mediation of subjectivities bound with this. Critical analysis in acknowledging the collective subjectivities involved also reconciles the inconsistencies, contradictions and fragmentations (Wodak 2009) hence allowing for the ability to code personal phenomenological experiences within the mundane yet co-locating them within a wider politics of conflict, enabling an interpretive approach and the assumption of multiple identities and positionality.

The domestication of the conflict as a pervasive part of the Tamil identity was resonant in the qualitative interview, with one respondent acknowledging 'hearing about the conflict since their childhood and growing up with stories of conflict'. The media, particularly the ethnic media, played a large role in shaping this reality and brought the violence into homes of diasporic communities as a background element in the household with 'Tamil news as something that is on all the time'. Ethnic satellite stations as well as regional channels play an important role with television inducing a visual consciousness about the conflict in enacting it as real. Parents watching Tamil news as a pervasive activity produce this welded cartography through for the second-generation of the Tamil diaspora:

- A: I don't watch the Tamil news. I hear bits of it, as I walk into the living room ... hearing my parents discussing it around the house.
- B: First time I heard about it was when I was a kid probably, like really tiny. Like we had like, the videos, the calendar, the flags! (Laughter). That was the decor in the house. So er, yeah. I grew up with it.
- C: I don't follow the news, or like the Tamil news at all. Like my parents, or like my Dad does, a lot.

Parents' reaction to events and loss solidify the cultural memory of the conflict for participants. Conversely, parents' versions of events, the construction of victimhood and polemic constructions of 'us' and 'them' become issues of contestation, prompting the second generation to do their own research about the conflict. Their parents' intense emotional involvement is seen as potentially biased:

- D: '... up until the age of about fifteen, sixteen, I was completely under the impression that the Tamils were the good guys and the Sinhalese were the bad guys because that was simply the only side I ever got of the story ... we were the victims, they were the bad guys..., they had attacked us first, that's what I was told. I was told that they had been really unfair to us, and that they didn't give us the same rights as they did for the Sinhalese people ... that we were just fighting for our rights.
- E: '... Tamils are the good guys. To be honest you just go with it, because, we're young ... you listen to your parents, and once ... you get older and you think, ok, I'm gonna start to research this, find out a bit more about it.'
- F: 'My Dad's always going on about it but I don't listen to him that much because again, it's going to be biased.'
- G: 'I don't really speak to my Dad about it, because he's very LTTE.'

The turbulence of spasmodic violence against civilians and its impact on the respondents was evident in the interviews. It revealed that long conflicts become a meandering journey of human trauma igniting touchpoints of renewed suffering for the recipients, making distant suffering proximate and real, and getting people involved in some form of political participation such as protests:

- D: One day when um, I remember it was in 2006, I found my Mum crying, and ... then I found out, that they bombed an orphanage in Sri Lanka, thinking it was a camp, and but there was no proof that it was and they just bombed it. So, and that's when it just hit me the most, because then I just realized there's a lot of innocent people in this. And obviously dying, like the girls were, like, my age, and they were studying for a future, and they had it worse because they were obviously in an orphanage and all that, and then, their lives just got taken away. That's when it hit me a lot, and that's when I started to learn lots more about it, and ask my parents as well, a lot more about it, and even started going to, like, even some of the protests as well.

The conflict is also re-enacted through phone calls from relatives in Sri Lanka asking for help and in effect providing another direct source of news. For university students living away from home, the parents tend to update them of events in the homeland.

The United States and the European Union had both designated the LTTE as a terrorist organisation (in 1997 and 2006, respectively) but their doing so did not prevent either significant transfers of money and arms to the LTTE by elements within the diaspora (Ratner 2012, 795). The intense family involvement with the separatist struggle and the constructions of LTTE through heroism, and family members joining the fight as part of the narration was a recurring part of the interviews, forming both a means of connection as well as disassociation.⁷ In ethnic conflicts violence accrues between a non-state actor claiming to represent an ethnic minority and the state side often belonging to an ethnic majority. Issues related to the representation and rights of the ethnic minority often underlie such inter-ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, a large degree of violence can be directed at their own ethnic groups. Jayawickreme et al. (2010, 211) concluded that rebels target co-ethnics to establish territorial control via social control of their constituents and dominance over their competitors who challenge their monopoly of control over the ethnic minority. The pull is between the polemic idealisation of the LTTE as heroic, on the one hand, and the repudiation of violence, on the other. Identification with the LTTE is a conflicted dimension of Tamil identity and consciousness for the younger generation:

- H: 'LTTE is very, very, er, probably more personal to most ... Tamils because my family has been directly involved in the organization. I've heard about it when I was very, very young. I remember being even four or five years old, and my parents saying to me, yeah your cousin's fighting for us right now, stuff like that.'
- I: I sort of had a reality check and realized that even in our generation the vast majority of Tamils are still all woo hoo LTTE, so yeah. Like a lot of my cousins, for some reason don't want to believe that Prabhakaran is dead they're all kidding themselves that he's just hidden and he's gonna come out and attack them again or something. Even though that approach is all wrong, they still think violence is the answer, which is just so, so very stupid.

The pervasiveness of speaking about conflict back home is also countered in parts by silence and avoidance, with one respondent revealing that 'we don't really talk because it sad' or another framing it with 'I never really connect with me being Tamil, with the war and that it's only remembered when someone brings it up', opting to avoid it instead. Even in avoiding it, the civil war becomes a temporal marker of 'before and after' with one respondent asserting that they try to remember the pre-war stories his father had told him. The discourses reflect deep association through family ties but also an ethical stance about the long conflict offering an insight into the dilemmatic aspect of this moral imagination. The analogy of children fighting over a cookie and the notion of land as an unedifying visceral construct for the younger generation was also evident in the interviews. Inevitably they reviewed the conflict through their own somewhat more stable identities from their new homes in different parts of Europe and West:

- J: 'As a child I thought about it in a very simplistic way, and I just thought they want land. What do they want land for, they live out here? Obviously, everyone I knew lived out here, so I just thought why can't they can't just move to France⁸ like my parents did? What's the difference? That land, this land, it's just land, live somewhere, be happy, whatever. And so for me, both sides were immature. So it made me distance myself from it.'
- K: 'Yeah but people can be very childish. Like, in my mind I am literally imagining two kids, who've been fighting over this cookie or something, and they've just been fighting for so long for this cookie when one of them finally says fine, I don't want it you can have it, if they say that suddenly the other side will just be like, well you're just saying that because we've been arguing over it. Now we don't want it either. Like you know, that's how I see it'.

The last phases of the civil war were characterised by an intensification of violence, with the government deploying a large military offensive against LTTE-controlled areas by land, sea and air from September 2008 through May 2009 (Ratner 2012, 795). More than 280,000 civilians who had survived the final months of fighting between the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE were detained between May and December 2009. Detainee camps were closed to independent inspection. Tamil civilians could not leave the camps and were provided with insufficient nutrition, medical supplies and sanitation facilities (Amnesty International 2009/2009). The impact of these attacks was borne primarily by civilians, resulting in thousands of deaths, injuries, displacement from home and internment in government camps. Nearly the whole LTTE leadership was killed in the offensive. International organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and

foreign media were denied access to the conflict with the government taking credit internationally for defeating a terrorist movement, leading to a huge majority in the next election (Ratner 2012, 795). The internment camps, in addition to their visual blight on the landscape as a by-product of the conflict, were intimately associated with the army's locus of control over people and their mobility. The prevalence of the camps marks the country as entrapped in spasmodic violence with the sense it may never end:

- L: I think that now in the northern regions there's like camps everywhere, there's like army camps and people walking around, like army walking around, just checking. But I think, personally I think the war's not over. I think it will start again.

As with the prevalence of camps, the lack of normality is also captured in experiences of one respondent going to Jaffna and being subjected to numerous checkpoints during their trips. The trips to Sri Lanka by respondents and their families bring home the welded geographies of diasporic communities. Allegedly motivated by ethnic profiling, a large number of Tamil civilians were incarcerated following the end of the war without regard to international opinion (Amnesty International 20092009; Human Rights Watch 20102010-02). In addition, Tamils were subjected to frequent profiling at checkpoints by Sri Lankan security forces. These experiences of subjugation were resonant in the respondents' discourses. These journeys into situations of trauma (or post-trauma) signify equally a sense of guilt for the second generation in which they recount the guilt of having found a more stable place in the West to call 'home':

- M: I went through a phase when I was about thirteen when I felt like I was a terrible person because I realized if it wasn't for the war, my parents never would have gone abroad, and I would have lived in Sri Lanka, and I was grateful that I wasn't being brought up in Sri Lanka. So I realized I'm grateful for a war. And I just felt like a terrible person ... in a way I have benefitted from it.

The guilt of having found a more stable home in the West and having in some ways gained from the civil war were countered with notions of erasure and loss of the homeland as recurrent tropes:

- N: Like whenever we go back to Sri Lanka we have to go back to my Dad's village, because my Mum's village doesn't exist anymore, it was bombed, it's just gravel. So she has lost her land, her house ...
- P: My Mum's Dad was actually held ransom by the Sri Lankan army for money. My parents struggling to get the money to free him. And the Sri Lankan army also took over my Grandparents' house. They had a big land and a big house, and they took, completely took over so they had to leave. And my Dad's mother had to leave as well because of the riots. And she has dementia, and that is all she remembers. Like she just remembers the riots and having to leave.

The idea of the conflict as demarcating identity in imposing and intimidating ways was also brought to the fore in the interviews. Experiences of their homeland during holidays or internships entailed direct confrontation with the visceral ethno-nationalistic politics in which identification and declaration of ethnicity become a mode of violence in itself. While parents' narratives were not always received as objective, experiencing ethnic tensions first-hand enabled respondents to validate their parents' experiences:

Q: During my gap year, I was teaching in a government school. And it was majority Sinhalese, because it was in the capital. On this particular day I was teaching English to one of the Sinhalese classes, and one of the kids came up to me and was like, what are you? Are you Tamil or Sinhalese? And this was like literally a four-year-old kid. I was literally like intimidated by this four-year-old kid. Is she gonna go home and tell her Mum. So it was really intimidating, really awkward. I have been in Sri Lanka, I have been discriminated against. I've had kind of a first-hand experience, so, I can sort of validate my parents' experience.

With the escalation of violence in Sri Lanka in 2008, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora staged several protests around the world to bring attention to the civil war and the Tamil genocide (Thuraiajah 2010, 1). These protests called for an end to the hostilities in Sri Lanka as well as recognition of the legitimacy of Tamil Eelam, a proposed separate nation state for Tamils in Sri Lanka (Ashutosh 2013, 197). This transnational diasporic activism sought to lobby foreign governments to lend support in seeking to de-emphasise the attention given to LTTE as a terrorist organisation (Thuraiajah 2010, 1). These protest events provided the younger generation with a means to show their agency and enact their Tamil identity and consciousness, mobilising diasporic networks through social media:

R: I took part in a lot of charity work back then, with friends ... everybody just got out (unclear). And people flew over, as well. You know, a big protest, like a hundred and ten thousand people, or something.

S: They would like, invite you on Facebook, or social media, text messages, er, chain letters and you would just forward it on.

Wars in present times cannot be clearly demarcated through earlier typologies or binary dualities of just and unjust wars or in the delineation of victims and perpetrators. In response to the United Nations' calls to investigate the events of the civil war, Rajapaksa in May 2010 created a 'Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission' (LLRC) as the government's official inquiry into the conflict in response to pressure from the UN (Ratner 2012, 797). While the diaspora can replicate the polarisation between ethnic groups, the younger generation also challenged the logic of the war. They condemned atrocities on all sides and yearned for peace even though they feared it would be elusive, viewing the conflict as an unrelenting event:

T: I just want the peace, you know. I just don't want innocent people dying, I just think that's ridiculous. I just think I hate that.

Findings and discussion

The findings of the study showed that second-hand trauma and wounding produced an iterative relationality between individual sense-making, collective consciousness and a transnational diaspora. This affective realm was always in the process of generativity in invoking collective consciousness, engagement and at times silence to adduce a distance from the trauma produced by the conflict. The contribution of the study is ingrained in the role of the affective sphere as a means to not just foreground historical events but to renew them through the moral imagination of the homeland. The affective

sphere hence is not a static proposition but one that is constantly re-worked to assemble modes of mobilisation, means to sensitise Tamil identity, and to position the subjectivity of the diaspora within the moral imagination of the homeland. The affective sphere is a dilemmatic sphere that emerged through a scar culture but also one which is constantly negotiated in which the memory of the conflict is both centric and equally a resistance to its centric positionality of subsuming identity creation. As such this affective sphere of sense-making temporally displaces and enlarges the cultural construction of conflict through conscious and suppressed memory or postmemory (Hirsch 2008). This affective sphere is also aggregated through a body of cultural knowledge (i.e. Latour's 'immutable mobile') which is intrinsically perceptible to the transnational diasporic community as a reproducible category of experience which is understood by those not directly affected by it and is meaningful to the community in sustaining this affective sphere as continually reworked and remade while instilling the collective trauma as immutable, equally in a adducing a sense of guilt of not having experienced this first hand. Hence this 'prosthetic trauma' (Valančiūnas 2021, 5) perpetuates and adduces a 'prosthetic memory' (Landsberg 2004) inherited and experienced by a community which did not live out the trauma, creating a double consciousness of the diasporic subject. The circulation and retention of trauma through a prosthetic memory of the violence of the past is a specific form of haunting through the voids, inducing an affective transmission and delineating an 'affective geography'.

The trauma of the conflict retains the community within an affective sphere in which both cohesion and fragmentation are produced. The yearnings for peace, the metaphor of the camp as dispossession and the need to think about the conflict without the bias of family narratives highlight the diasporic condition as always given over to the turbulence of the conflict, producing both vulnerability and the search for agency and resistance. While participation in cultural events and learning to speak Tamil enact Tamil consciousness for the young diaspora, the political protests become acts of solidarity with the wider transnational diaspora. Ashutosh (2013, 198) draws on Isin's (2008) notion of 'acts of citizenship' to suggest that such protests represent transnational acts of citizenship and, as such, entail a search for new forms of belonging in the Tamil diaspora. Such acts also resist the limits of political membership and (un-)belonging that foreground citizenship, invoking a transnational imagination not contained through the nationalistic geography of the homeland. For Ashutosh (2013, 198), these acts constitute new practices of belonging in the diaspora. Equally, these encompass the complex process of negotiating identities through the dynamics of family and kinship and their intersubjective connections to the homeland and the turbulence produced through conflict. The civil war as a long-running event lapses into a cultural and socio-political context in its aftermath, its domestication illuminated in the far-flung geographies of the West. As Rosochacki (2010) notes, 'the privilege of survival, escape, independence or extraterritoriality is in turn paid for by carrying the responsibility of speaking for those who endured and witnessed the event'. The younger generation bears a burden of being released from the civil war yet foisted with its lesions of suffering such that their lapse into a moral imagination to ground the war, illuminating both a yearning for peace and in enacting acts of transnational citizenship, is less about a return while premising the conflict to foster new modes of belonging. As Nayar (2011/2009) points out in *Scar Culture*, the conflict becomes the 'emotional dominant' for the Tamil Sri Lankan community, encompassing

its psychological lesions as evident in the consciousness of the second generation. The re-enactment of the conflict through the domestic spaces of the home inserts the conflict into the interior and intimate realms of the diasporic subject. Familial narratives and the role of ethnic television in retaining the focus on the civil war and its aftermath contemporise the conflict as a pervasive aspect of the Sri Lankan Tamil consciousness.

Conclusion

For a transnational community such as the Sri Lankan Tamils, the conflict constitutes both a collective consciousness and the sustenance of an affective sphere in which the 'anchoredness' to the home is renewed over time, temporally centring the conflict. The notion of collective traumacaptures the affective dispossession of the diasporic condition induced through conflicts and states of violence rendering even those who have escaped as wounded and vulnerable reinstating the civil war as a centrifugal force which pulls in the diasporic imagination into an affected and affective sphere of lived and prosthetic trauma. This shared sense of banishment, becomes an igniting point for a collective identity premised on the common experiences of loss and trauma. The study reveals that the circulation of trauma (i.e. between generations within a transnational sphere) then temporally enlarges the conflict such that it is culturally and affectively transacted within the everyday, in the domestic realms, coalescing with childhood memories and familial relationships as well as through a transnational imagination enacted through activism and engagement with homeland politics. In countering this notion of return, Amitav Ghosh (1989) argues that people from South Asia and living outside of it may be more interested in recreating their cultures in their new homes as opposed to the notion of return but nevertheless are committed to remaking new spaces through their cultural orientations and rituals. The enactment of a shared identity through trauma illuminates the conflict as an allotropic genre resonant across cultural narratives and memory and equally as part of a transnational communities social imaginary of cultural reserve and solidarity without foreclosing encounters of fragmentation and ruptures it can induce. While the second-generation may contest some of the narratives as mutable, trauma as an immutable form binds through its dispossession and shared sense of scarring and loss.

Notes

1. The Tamils are divided between the Sri Lanka Tamils, those from the northeast, who see themselves as indigenous to the island and the Indian Tamils, who arrived as indentured labourers the nineteenth century.
2. Violence did not reach civil war levels until 1983 in a war pitting the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) against the state that was precipitated by an ambush of an army patrol in the north that left thirteen Sinhalese soldiers dead (Fearon and Laitin 2011: 202).
3. 'Black July' is also referred to as the pogrom of Colombo in 1983 a tragic event when thousands of Tamils were slaughtered.
4. It needs to be pointed out that the history of Tamil migration to the West historically predates this event.
5. The UN report on the civil war that was published in November 2012, was titled the Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Accountability in Sri Lanka (Nair 2012: 128).

6. Categorised as ‘sensitive research’ by the Universities ethics committee, the interviews were not structured to be probing of individual context and specific references to places in Sri Lanka or Europe were omitted in line with the ethics protocol to protect respondents.
7. During the final days of the Sri Lankan Army’s assault in early 2009, the Tigers shot Tamil civilians, who were trapped as human shields, if they attempted to flee (International Crisis Group, 2010).
8. Some of the respondent’s families had initially arrived in different European Countries before becoming citizens in the UK.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by Seedcorn funding from Queen Mary University of London and University of Brighton.

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