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Ethnonationalist networks and transnational opportunities: the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

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Abstract. This article presents an empirical case study of a type of nonstate actor largely overlooked in the IR literature on transnationalism: the diaspora or transnational ethnic actor. Building upon findings from contentious politics or social movements scholarship, I highlight the nexus of domestic and transnational politics by demonstrating how actors form ethnic networks and utilise transnational opportunities to pursue political goals in various states. Specifically, I argue that the formation of ethnic networks in the Tamil diaspora has enabled the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or 'Tigers' to engage in protracted insurgency against the Sri Lankan government army. Whereas traditional contentious politics scholarship is unable to explain the longevity and intensity of that conflict, a consideration of the transnational dimension provides new insight into how ethnic conflicts may be sustained. The combination of greater political freedom, community organising and access to advanced communications and financial resources in receiving states has allowed Tamil separatists in the diaspora to maintain 'transnational ethnic networks' which are in turn used to mobilise funds that have prolonged the secessionist campaign in Sri Lanka.

The globalisation debate in International Relations (IR) has generated a burgeoning literature that heralds the rise of nonstate actors, the expansion of political arenas, and the interconnectedness of international and domestic politics. In this literature, some scholars argue that, in response to the globalisation 'from above' practised by multilateral intergovernmental institutions and transnational corporations, new nonstate political actors are generating a global civil society 'from below' that challenges the authority of states and the power of capitalist institutions.[1] Others believe that transnational activists can seize opportunities created by globalisation to inject new ideas and norms into the international arena.[2]

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[1] Richard Falk, 'Resisting "Globalization-from-above" through "Globalization-from-below"', *New Political Economy*, 2 (1997), pp. 17–24; Robert O'Brien, Marc Williams, Anne Marie Goetz, and Jan Aart Scholte, *Contesting Global Governance: Multilateral Economic Institutions and Global Social Movements* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ronnie Lipshutz, 'Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 21 (1992), pp. 389–420; M.J. Peterson, 'Transnational Activity, International Society and World Politics', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 21 (1992), pp. 371–88.

[2] Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Thomas Risse, Stephen C. Ropp, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *The Power of Human Rights: International Norms and Domestic Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

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This article presents an empirical case study of a specific type of nonstate actor that has largely been overlooked in this literature, that of the diaspora or transnational ethnic actor. Building upon the emerging dialogue between IR and 'contentious politics', or social movements, scholarship,[3] I highlight the nexus of domestic and transnational politics by demonstrating how actors form ethnic networks and utilise transnational opportunities to pursue political goals in various states.[4] Specifically, I argue that the formation of ethnic networks in the Tamil diaspora has enabled the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or 'Tigers' to engage in protracted insurgency against the Sri Lankan government army. Whereas traditional contentious politics scholarship is unable to explain the longevity and intensity of that conflict, a consideration of the transnational dimension provides new insight into how ethnic conflicts may be sustained. This research also contributes to the literature on transnational civil society by adding to the range of nonstate actors working to bring about specific policy changes.

I begin building my case by presenting differing usages of the term 'transnationalism'. Political science literature on transnationalism employs the term around a limited range of nonstate actors. In other disciplines, 'transnationalism' refers to individual and community identities that span the borders of nation-states, including diasporas. I then show how both conceptions of transnationalism are present in the case of transnational ethnic networks. Next, I present an overview of ethnic identity and the rise of Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, illustrating how traditional conceptions of collective action are insufficient explanatory variables in this conflict. In particular, I discuss how our understanding of 'political opportunity structure' should be extended to include the role of transnational actors operating from liberal democratic states. This is followed by a case study of expatriate Sri Lankan Tamils and their involvement in homeland politics. Finally, I will draw some conclusions about this particular case and articulate some potential areas of future research on transnational networks and opportunity structures.

[3] A social movement is defined as 'collective challenges by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities', Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 3–4. For an exhortation to IR scholars to pay more attention to social movements approaches, see Sidney Tarrow, 'Transnational Politics: Contention and Institutions in International Politics', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (2001), pp. 1–20. For a concerted effort to bridge the two literatures, see Sanjeev Khagram, James V. Riker, and Kathryn Sikkink (eds.), *Restructuring World Politics: Transnational Social Movements, Networks, and Norms* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), especially Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink, 'From Santiago to Seattle: Transnational Advocacy Groups Restructuring World Politics', pp. 3–23.

[4] I use the term 'network' to refer to an informal and fluid relationship characterised by 'voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange' (Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, p. 8). Indeed, contemporary migration theory highlights the importance of kinship and interpersonal networks for the migration experience itself, including whether one migrates and where one settles. Networks provide financial and other types of assistance for migration and settlement, and the act of migration then reproduces and expands existing networks. For a discussion of this phenomenon in American history, see Charles Tilly, 'Transplanted Networks', in Virginia Yans-McLaughlin (ed.), *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 79–95. For a brief overview of the literature on migrant networks, see Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 2nd edn. (New York: Guildford, 1998), pp. 25–27.

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Transnational networks as substate relations

When the term 'transnationalism' was originally introduced in IR in the early 1970s, it drew attention to the role of nonstate actors whose importance had been neglected by the dominant Realist paradigm.[5] Though transnationalism referred to the 'international activities of nongovernmental actors',[6] the term became associated with economic relations, especially the role of transnational corporations in international affairs. In response to the proliferation of transnational nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) throughout the 1970s and 1980s, scholars began to examine transnational organising around humanitarian and political issues as well as economics.[7] Risse-Kappen attempted to 'bring transnational relations back in' in 1995 with his edited volume that included chapters on economic, security, environmental, and human rights issues.[8] Most studies contributed to, and profited from, the inclusion of 'constructivism' in IR theory and the increasing attention paid to the role of norms and ideas in structuring international debates. Among other findings, research in this area indicated that states sometimes voluntarily signed international agreements that constrained their own behaviour and that norms could facilitate the construction of new transnational identities that could become the basis of 'transnational advocacy networks' (TANs).[9] United by shared values, the use of a common discourse and the 'dense exchange of information and services', TANs seek to influence national and international policy debates.[10]

The emphasis on norms constricted the focus of IR research on transnationalism to Western-based NGOs that espouse progressive causes such as protecting the environment and ensuring human rights. Though this research has been important in highlighting the role of nonstate actors in international affairs, it has by and large excluded other types of nonstate actors that lack 'principled' agendas, such as banks, religious movements, think-tanks, criminal organisations, and terrorist groups.[11] The events of 11 September 2001 provide ample evidence of the power of more sinister types of transnational networks.

[5] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye (eds.), *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). For a more detailed analysis of the evolution of transnationalism in IR, see Sidney Tarrow, 'Transnational Politics', pp. 3–10.

[6] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, 'Transgovernmental Relations and International Organizations', *World Politics*, 27, p. 41.

[7] For information on the growth of international NGOs as well as a discussion of shortcomings of the data, see Kathryn Sikkink and Jackie Smith, 'Infrastructures for Change: Transnational Organizations, 1953–93' in Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, *Restructuring World Politics,* pp. 24–44. Overviews of transnational relations can be found in Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders*; and Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco (eds.), *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics: Solidarity beyond the State* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

[8] Thomas Risse-Kappen (ed.), *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures, and International Institutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[9] On norms influencing state behaviour, see Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: The Struggle against Apartheid* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995) and Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). On norms constructing identity, see Keck and Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders.*

[10] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, pp. 2–3.

[11] For a more critical perspective on nonstate actors, see Fred Halliday, 'The Romance of the Nonstate Actor', in Josselin and Wallace, *Non-State Actors in World Politics*, pp. 21–37.

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Transnationalism as identity

The authors of a recent volume on transnational mobilisation argue that transnational movements arise out of the creation and enforcement of international norms because 'few examples exist of truly transnational collective identities'.[12] These authors (as well as other IR scholars) overlook a growing literature on precisely that phenomenon: transnational identities and diaspora politics. In this literature, 'transnational' refers to identities and intra-ethnic relations that transcend state borders. This research focuses on persons, mostly migrants, whose lives subsume two or more languages and cultures, and who have frequent contact with ethnic kindred ('co-ethnics') in other locations.[13] A diaspora is a type of transnational community that has been dispersed from its homeland, whose members permanently reside in one or more 'host' countries and possess a collective, sometimes idealised, myth of the homeland and will to return.[14] Diasporas such as the Tamil one exist largely because of ethnonationalist conflicts and persecution in the homeland.[15] The Tamil diaspora is comprised of refugees and exiles who were forced to leave their home country because of conflict rather than because of economic need or the wish to forge a new life abroad. 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.

Political scientists have sporadically been interested in diasporas.[16] Indeed, Gabriel Sheffer argued in 1986 that diaspora politics, as embodied in a triad of 'ethnic diaspora – host country – homeland', were becoming an integral and permanent

[12] Khagram, Riker and Sikkink, 'From Santiago to Seattle', p. 13. In *Activists Beyond Borders*, Keck and Sikkink (p. 30) considered only three categories of transnational networks, grouped according to their motivation: those with instrumental goals, relying on economic resources; scientific or epistemic communities united by shared causal ideas, relying on shared technological expertise; and TANs with shared principled ideas or values, relying on strategic use of information to garner political support.

[13] For seminal discussions of this conception of transnationalism, see Alejandro Portes, Luis E. Guarnizo and Patricia Landolt, 'The Study of Transnationalism: Pitfalls and Promise of an Emergent Research Field', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22:2 (1999), pp. 217–37, and Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998).

[14] There is considerable debate as to what exactly constitutes a diaspora, but the more limited definition – drawn from the prototype of the ancient Jews – focuses on a forced or involuntary dispersal from the homeland. Influential analyses of the diaspora can be found in William Safran, 'Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return', *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1:1 (1991), pp. 83–99; Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas* (London: UCL Press, 1997); Eva Østergaard-Nielson, 'Diasporas in World Politics', in Daphne Josselin and William Wallace (eds.), *Non-State Actors in World Politics* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 218–34; and Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[15] Ethnonationalist conflicts are characterised by disputes between groups that have claims to a particular territory within an existing state or straddling several states. In this article, I also use the broader terms 'ethnic conflict' and 'ethnopolitical conflict' interchangably. The use of these terms is not meant to imply that ethnicity itself is the source of the conflict. Rather, ethnic differences often correspond with social, economic, and political cleavages, thereby facilitating mobilisation along ethnic lines. See Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace, 1993).

[16] See, for example, John Armstrong, 'Mobilized and Proletarian Diasporas', *American Political Science Review*, 70:2 (1976), pp. 393–408; John F. Stack, Jr. (ed.), *Ethnic Identities in a Transnational World* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1981); Yossi Shain, *The Frontier of Loyalty: Political Exiles in the Age of the Nation-State* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan, 1989); Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, 'Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia', *International Security*, 24:3 (1999/2000), pp. 108–38.

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feature of domestic and international politics.[17] Yet political scientists have by and large overlooked the transnational role of migration-based networks, perhaps because diaspora politics falls somewhere between Comparative Politics, which has looked at politics within states, and IR, which focuses on political action between states.[18] Diaspora politics has been considered primarily in terms of its impact on American foreign policy and in the conflict literature on the internationalisation of civil strife.[19]

Outside political science, scholars working on issues of culture, ethnicity and identity have gravitated to the concepts of diasporas and transnationalism in the context of globalisation, arguing that economic factors and social networks of migrant communities are transforming the nation-state. In an oft-quoted passage from the inaugural issue of the journal *Diaspora*, the editor hailed diasporas as 'the exemplary communities of the transnational moment'.[20] One variant of this research is the postnationalist approach, which posits the decline of sovereignty and the belief that the nation-state is an outmoded political formation. Arjun Appadurai, an influential writer in this genre, argues that the nation-state is in 'terminal crisis' and that the rise of electronic media in conjunction with migration will give rise to 'diasporic public spheres' which will be the 'crucibles of postnational political order'.[21] According to Appadurai:

> One major fact that accounts for the strain in the union of nation and state is that the nationalist genie, never perfectly contained in the territorial state, is now itself diasporic [and] is increasingly unrestrained by ideas of spatial boundary and territorial sovereignty.[22]

Nations are thus 'unbound', operating with fewer constraints in a globalised world.[23] Other scholars in this vein even criticise the term 'diaspora' as an extension

[17] Gabriel Sheffer, 'A New Field of Study: Modern Diasporas in International Politics', in Gabriel Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in World Politics* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 1–15.

[18] Fiona B. Adamson, 'Mobilizing for the Transformation of Home: Politicized Identities and Transnational Practices', in Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (eds.), *New Approaches to Migration? Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 155–6. Gabriel Sheffer laments the paucity of quality studies of diasporas in his *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 4–5.

[19] Work on diasporas and American foreign policy include Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diasporas in the US and their Homelands* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge, 1999); Robert W. Tucker, Charles B. Keely, and Linda Wrigley (eds.), *Immigration and US Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990); and Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Erosion of American National Interests', *Foreign Affairs*, 76:5 (1997), pp. 28–49. On the role of diasporas in the internationalisation of ethnic conflicts, see Stephen Ryan, *Ethnic Conflict and International Relations*, 2nd edn. (Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1995), as well as various chapters in Manus I. Midlarsky (ed.), *The Internationalization of Communical Strife* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), and in K.M. de Silva and R.J. May (eds.), *The Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict* (London: Pinter, 1991).

[20] Kachig Tölöyan, 'The Nation-State and its Others: In Lieu of a Preface,' *Diaspora*, 1 (1991), p. 5. For a critique of 'celebratory' or 'emancipatory' approaches to transnationalism, see Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith, 'The Locations of Transnationalism'. in Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998), pp. 3–6.

[21] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 21–2. For an attempt to bring anthropological understandings to IR debates, see Peter Mandaville, 'Reading the State from Elsewhere: Towards an Anthropology of the Postnational', *Review of International Studies*, 28:1 (2002), pp. 199–207.

[22] Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, pp. 160–1.

[23] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Blanc-Szanton, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Amsterdam and Longhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

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of an outmoded nation-state model that assumes congruence between territory, culture and identity.[24] In brief, postnationalist approaches emphasise the power of diasporas at the expense of states.

Most scholarship on transnationalism, however, acknowledges the ongoing importance of nation-states. Drawing on research from political science, sociology, anthropology, geography and other disciplines, a growing literature situates diaspora politics and transnational communities within states and localities.[25] This literature considers how sending and receiving states, regions, and localities promote or hinder the creation and maintenance of transnational social networks. Its treatment of the political emphasises the impact of grassroots activities in the context of national-level policies. To illustrate, a recent article on 'diplomacy,' a subject that usually examines relations at the state level, instead considers how substate actors can affect international relations. The author argues that migrants and other transnational actors such as tourists act as 'diplomats' in various ways, including through the spread of Western culture.[26]

This genre of research focuses on the interplay between nonstate and state actors, and how diasporas become international political actors through a variety of types of interaction with states: when diasporas engage directly or indirectly in homeland politics; when actors in the homeland – government officials, opposition groups, co-ethnics — actively seek their support; when actors in the homeland provide diasporas with economic or political support; when actors in the homeland deny or discredit the legitimacy of the diaspora; and when the diaspora forges ties with sympathetic third parties such as other ethnic groups, nongovernmental organisations, political parties, or international organisations.[27]

Transnational ethnic networks

Transnational ethnic actors are transnational in both senses of the word outlined above: (1) they form political networks that work across state borders to influence policies, thereby engaging in substate relations, and (2) its members have a common identity that spans state borders. Like TANs, transnational ethnic networks can be important actors on the world stage. Transnational ethnic networks are similar to TANs in that both types of networks participate simultaneously in domestic and international politics, both consist of shifting and informal structures that may contain specific social movements, and both rely on a variety of resources mustered strategically.

[24] Yasemin N. Soysal, 'Citizenship and Identity: Living in Diaspora in Post-war Europe?' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23:1 (2000), pp. 1–15.

[25] Michael Peter Smith and Luis Eduardo Guarnizo (eds.), *Transnationalism from Below* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998); Steve Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism* (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 1999). For a critique of the state-centric focus found in some of these works, see the review essay by Caroline Nagel, 'Nations unbound? Migration, culture, and the limits of the transnational-diaspora narrative', *Political Geography* 20 (2001), pp. 247–56.

[26] Sarah J. Mahler, 'Constructing International Relations: The Role of Transnational Migrants and other Non-State Actors,' *Identities*, 7:2 (2000), pp. 197–232.

[27] For further elaboration, see Eva Østergaard-Nielson, 'Trans-state Loyalties and Politics of Turks and Kurds in Western Europe', *SAIS Review*, 20:1 (2000), pp. 23–38; Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany* (London: Routledge, 2002), Østergaard-Nielsen, 'Diasporas in World Politics'; Adamson, 'Mobilizing for the Transformation of Home'.

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However, whereas advocacy networks are bound together by shared values, ethnic networks build upon a pre-existing common ethnonational identity.[28] Rather than being constituted by principled actors, transnational ethnic networks unite around instrumental as well as symbolic identity-related goals. These networks operate aterritorially, but their targets are existing political institutions, and the ultimate goal of most ethnonationalist elites is autonomy over their own territory.[29] Ethnic networks highlight the contradictory nature of political activity in a globalised world: ethnic activists may use new forms of transnational organisation, but their political goals are rooted in nationalism.

Transnational ethnic networks are formed between co-ethnics dispersed among several states as well as between diaspora communities and co-ethnics in the homeland. Ethnic elites employ these transnational ethnic networks to engage simultaneously in a variety of political activities in different states. The pattern is similar to the 'boomerang effect' employed by TANs, in which domestic organisations unable to influence their home state may find and enlist international allies to bring external pressure on that state.[30] As will be shown below, ethnic actors may also bypass their home states to seek support internationally. In this case, however, the international allies are ethnic kindred living in the diaspora. Moreover, persons in the diaspora may act without being directly solicited by actors in the home state. Taking advantage of more favourable opportunity structures that exist in the diaspora, transnational ethnic actors can pursue a two-pronged approach to influencing politics in the homeland. They may engage directly in homeland politics while at the same time lobby their 'host' governments regarding foreign policy toward the homeland. In so doing, transnational ethnic networks extend and lend support to ethnic networks in the homeland.

In order to see how a consideration of transnational ethnic actors is crucial to understanding the civil conflict in Sri Lanka, some background to the conflict is necessary. The following section provides an overview of ethnicity and conflict in Sri Lanka. The subsequent section will draw from this overview to show how the traditional variables considered by scholars of contentious politics cannot adequately account for the perpetuation of the Tamil struggle for autonomy in that country.

Overview of ethnicity and conflict in Sri Lanka

The 18 million people who inhabit Sri Lanka are divided into four ethno-religious groups.[31] The Sinhalese comprise 74 per cent of the population and control the

[28] Diasporas are of course not monolithic groups. However, a common identity that emerges under conditions of repression or marginalisation may push intra-group differences based on class, ideology, gender, and religious affiliation beneath the surface.

[29] Østergaard-Nielson, 'Diasporas in World Politics', p. 218.

[30] Keck and Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders*, pp. 12–13.

[31] For more detailed treatment of ethnic identity and political developments in Sri Lanka, see A. Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000); Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger (eds.), *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994); and Sumantra Bose, 'State Crises and Nationalities Conflict in Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia', *Comparative Political Studies* 28:1 (1995), pp. 87–116. For personal, anthropological accounts, see E. Valentine Daniel, *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropology of Violence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996) and S.J. Tambiah, *Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

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government. They are primarily Theravada Buddhist, speak the Sinhala language, and populate the central and southern parts of Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan Tamils make up 11 per cent of the population. They are mostly Hindus, and most of them settled in the northern part of the island around the city of Jaffna. Because the north is poor in natural resources, Tamils placed a premium on education and gravitated to civil service positions. These Tamils originally migrated from southern India prior to the tenth century. Another 7 per cent of Sri Lanka's population consists of 'up-country' Tamils, the lower caste offspring of tea estate workers imported by the British from India in the late nineteenth century. Because of their more recent origins in Sri Lanka as well as their lower caste status, Sri Lankan Tamils do not share a sense of co-ethnicity with up-country Tamils. Lastly, there are the Sri Lankan Moors, 7 per cent, who are Muslims.

A Tamil identity that embraced Hindus living in southern India and northern Sri Lanka is centuries old, but the formation of a distinctive Sri Lankan Tamil identity is more recent. It can be traced to the origins of the conflict with the majority Sinhalese population in Sri Lanka. During the periods of Portuguese (1505–1658), Dutch (1658–1796) and then British colonisation (1796–1948), Tamils and Sinhalese peoples lived in relative harmony, particularly those urban elites who were British-educated and constituted the backbone of the civil service. As the island – named Ceylon until 1972 – moved towards independence, there was much debate in the colony about the potential status of minority ethnic groups, languages, and religions. Because Sinhalese Buddhists constituted the vast majority of the population, there was a fear among Tamils and Muslims that their rights would not be protected in the soon to be independent democracy. But the transition to independence was uneventful, leaving a parliamentary democracy in which Tamils and Sinhalese both enjoyed positions of authority.

Tamil fears that a less tolerant government might come to power were realised only eight years later when a Buddhist-backed coalition called the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP), favoring Sinhala as 'sole official language of government affairs', was elected in 1956. The SLFP was largely elected by the non-Westernised Sinhalese Buddhist majority who no longer wished to be controlled by an English-speaking elite, many of whom happened to be Tamils. Sinhala Buddhism became a unifier of the mass of urban poor and uprooted migrants. Encouraged by Buddhist monks, the new political leaders espoused the values of traditional culture and religion that had been abandoned by the British-educated elites. Tamils became the scapegoats for a population suffering from political as well as economic discontent.

After 1956, Tamil political leaders shifted their focus from demanding power in the capital of Colombo toward demanding autonomy for the northern and eastern regions of the country, but within a federal framework.[32] When the government refused to accommodate demands for Tamil autonomy, many Tamil youths became disillusioned with conventional politics and began to argue for the creation of a separate Tamil state, called Eelam. In the wake of the 1972 Constitution that replaced the one created by the British and recognised Buddhism as the state religion, reaffirmed the primacy of the Sinhalese language, and removed formal safeguards for minorities, the Tamil political parties began to articulate a secessionist agenda as well.

[32] Bose, 'State Crises and Nationalities Conflict', pp. 94–5.

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In brief, Tamil nationalism matured in several stages, beginning at the time of Ceylonese independence. As Tamil demands for political power were thwarted, ethnic consciousness turned into a full-fledged secessionist movement.[33] By 1975, the Tamil Students' Federation had renamed itself the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, in time becoming the guerrilla organisation at the forefront of the struggle for an independent Tamil homeland.[34] In May 1976, several Tamil political parties united to form the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and called for the union of the northern and eastern provinces into Tamil Eelam.

In July 1983, the conflict escalated when militant Tamils killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers in an ambush in the north. Rioting at the soldiers' mass funeral resulted in the deaths of 300 Tamils according to government figures, but as many as 3,000 died according to Tamil accounts. The government failed to condemn or quell the rioting, and there is evidence that it actually encouraged the anti-Tamil violence. Subsequently, Tamil youths began to participate in the insurgency movement in large numbers, and full-scale civil war erupted in the northeastern part of the country.[35] India occupied this war zone in 1987, hoping to disarm the militants and impose order in the region. Instead, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) fought the LTTE until its withdrawal in 1990, at which time the LTTE assumed control of the entire region.[36]

Until the election of the new government in 1994, Sri Lankan Tamils could gain support abroad by pointing to blatant ethnic discrimination by the repressive regime of the United National Party. Indeed, the LTTE was successful at depicting Tamils abroad as a 'victim diaspora', whose members had been forcibly removed from their territory, persecuted, and subjected to the traumas of exile.[37] The platform of the People's Alliance Party, led by Chandrika Kumaratunge, promised to bring an end to the civil war by negotiating with the LTTE. One of the first moves of the new government was to begin peace talks. In August 1995, the President called for constitutional reform that would grant more powers to Sri Lanka's eight regions, including greater autonomy for Tamils. The proposal generated considerable opposition from the President's Sinhalese supporters who believed it offered too much, and also from Tamils who argued that it gave too little. Kumaratunge responded by increasing military activity against the Tamil insurgents. In December 1995, the LTTE lost its Jaffna stronghold that had in essence been a *de facto* rebel state since 1990. But it retained control of land and sea routes to the Jaffna peninsula.

Kumaratunge was re-elected in December 1999, but her People's Alliance Party lost its majority in the December 2001 parliamentary elections. In the meantime, the LTTE had implemented a unilateral ceasefire earlier in 2001. The new Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of the United National Party and a coalition govern-

[33] For further discussion of defensive nationalism or 'reluctant secessionism', see Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

[34] Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, p. 125.

[35] In 1984, President Jayewardene sought 'anti-terrorist' assistance from the United States and Britain to counter the growing Tamil insurgency, but he was turned down. According to the *Sunday Times*, Jayewardene believed that he was rebuffed in Washington and London due to the pressure of large Tamil lobbies in those countries. See Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, pp. 138–9.

[36] This period of the conflict is treated in detail in Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement* (New Delhi and London: Sage, 1994).

[37] McDowell, *Tamil Asylum Diaspora.*

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ment, agreed upon election to the LTTE's offer of ceasefire. Facilitated by the Norwegians, a formal ceasefire agreement was signed in February 2002. Peace talks resumed between the government and the LTTE in September 2002, for the first time in seven years. During the talks, the chief LTTE negotiator indicated that the Tigers would settle for regional autonomy within a federal framework and that separation would be a last resort.[38]

Though Sri Lankan Tamils have portrayed themselves as victims to gain asylum in Western states, the LTTE and rival Tamil militants – like the government – have committed hundreds of gross human rights violations.[39] The LTTE has become known worldwide for its fierceness, most particularly by the Black Tigers, an 'elite' group of suicide bombers. The Tigers have been implicated in numerous assassinations, most notably 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.

The tenacity of Tamil insurgents against the government, including the existence of an LTTE-administered region around Jaffna for five years, has given rise to a newfound sense of pride and ethnonational identity among the Tamil people.[40] Moreover, caste, education, and religious affiliation and other 'identity markers' among Tamils in Sri Lanka have been replaced by a more unified Tamil identity that is rooted in the ethno-nation. This identity stems not only from LTTE victories but also from Tamil networks that exist in the diaspora.

Since 1983, the conflict between Tamil separatists and Sinhalese government forces in Sri Lanka has claimed over 65,000 lives and displaced over a million persons. According to Sri Lankan authorities, one-third of Sri Lanka's pre-war Tamil population has been internally displaced. Most of these 600,000 to 700,000 Tamils live in refugee camps and receive assistance from the Sri Lankan government.[41] Another one-third have left Sri Lanka altogether.[42] At least 110,000 Sri Lankan Tamils were known to be living in the Tamil Nadu state of southern India at the end of 1998.[43] Between 1983 and 1998, more than 450,000 Sri Lankan Tamils sought asylum in Western Europe or North America.[44] Reacting to their high levels

[38] 'Friendly Tigers', *The Economist*, 364 (21 September 2002), p. 42.

[39] For detailed information on human rights abuses, please see United States Department of State, *Sri Lanka: Annual Country Report on Human Rights 2001* as well as the Annual Reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. All are available online.

[40] Rudhramoorthy Cheran, *Changing Formations: Tamil Nationalism and National Liberation in Sri Lanka and the Diaspora*, Ph.D thesis (Department of Sociology, Toronto: York University, 2000).

[41] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Background Paper on Sri Lanka for the European Union High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration* (18 March 1999), p. 19.

[42] Øivind Foglerud, *Life on the Outside: the Tamil Diaspora and Long-Distance Nationalism* (London: Pluto, 1999), p. 1; 'The War the World is Missing', *The Economist*, 7 October 2000, p. 28.

[43] UNHCR, *Background Paper*, p. 15.

[44] Of those applications filed in Western Europe, 32 per cent of the Sri Lankan asylum-seekers made their applications in Germany, 18 per cent in Switzerland, 16 per cent in the United Kingdom, and 15 per cent in France. According to the UNHCR, 25,400 Sri Lankan asylum seekers – 18 per cent of applicants – were granted Convention Refugee status between 1990 and 1998. Another 16,700 Sri Lankans or 12 per cent were allowed to remain in Europe on humanitarian grounds. In Canada during the same period, 25,500 applicants were granted refugee status, 81 per cent of those applying. In the United States, 18 per cent of the 1,000 Sri Lankan nationals applying for asylum were granted it. UNHCR, *Background Paper*, pp. 16–18; See also Christopher McDowell, *A Tamil Asylum Diaspora: Sri Lankan Migration, Settlement and Politics in Switzerland* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1996), p. 6.

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of political activity, former Sri Lankan President J.R. Jayewardene referred to expatriate Tamils living in Western states as 'the world's most powerful minority'.[45] In the following section, I examine the role of the diaspora in sustaining such a high level of Tamil mobilisation over the past two decades.

Transnational opportunities and diaspora politics

Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka is an example of contentious collective action: political action undertaken by persons who lack regular institutional access, who make new or controversial claims, and whose actions fundamentally challenge elites, authorities, or other opponents.[46] Such collective action may be the only option marginalised or oppressed people have against powerful states. However, economic or political deprivation is only a precondition for contentious politics and does not by itself result in collective action.[47]

Scholars of contentious politics generally agree that the confluence of three broad sets of factors accounts for the emergence and development of social movements and more militant forms of collective action.[48] First, insurgents require *mobilizing structures*, the informal and formal organisational forms available to insurgents. Second, contention depends on the presence of successful *framing processes*, the conscious attempts by individuals to fashion shared worldviews and sets of common grievances that justify collective action. Collective action frames are what attract persons to a cause and keep them there.[49] Third, in combination with organisational or internal resources, latent grievances are activated by changes in the broader political context, or *political opportunity structure* (POS). Opportunity structures are 'consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure'.[50] In other words, they are factors external to a movement that influence the movement's emergence and chance of success. Political opportunity structures help explain why a challenger's chances of engaging in successful collective action vary over time and why similar challenges may meet with very different results in different places.

45 Cited in Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, p. 123.

46 Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, p. 3.

47 Tarrow elaborates: '. . . outbreaks of collective action cannot be derived from the deprivation people suffer or the disorganization of their societies. For these preconditions are far more enduring than the movements they support. What does vary widely from time to time and place to place are the levels and types of opportunities people experience, the constraints on their freedom of action, and the threats they perceive to their interests and values. . . . I argue that contention is more closely related to opportunities for – and limited by constraints upon – collective action than by the persistent social or economic factors that people experience.' *Power in Movement*, p. 71.

48 Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics,* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

49 The pioneering work on framing in the social movements tradition is David A. Snow, E. Burke Rochford, Jr., Steven K. Worden, and Robert D. Benford, 'Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation', *American Sociological Review*, 51 (1986), pp. 464–81.

50 Tarrow, *Power in Movement,* pp. 76–7.

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In the contentious politics literature, the concept of political opportunity structure has been very influential in analyses of the genesis and decline of various movements.[51] Most research on opportunity structures has focused on variables such as the openness or closure of political institutions, the stability of elite alignments supporting a polity, the presence of influential allies, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression.[52] Other scholars have considered a state's capability of legislating and executing policies as well as its vulnerability to outside pressure.[53]

If these three sets of conditions – mobilising structures, cultural framings, and political opportunities – must exist in tandem in order for insurgents to instigate and maintain challenges to the state, then the case of Tamil insurgency in Sri Lanka presents a puzzle for scholars of contentious politics. By definition, ethnonationalist groups already contain many of the internal factors requisite for mobilisation: shared identity, common grievances, and organisational resources. In the case of Sri Lankan Tamils, their organisational structure has been consolidated in the form of the LTTE, now recognised even by the Sri Lankan government as the voice of the Tamil people. Common language and ethnic identity have also contributed to the existence of informal networks. Moreover, the collective action frames, within an ethnic population sharing a strong sense of collective identity and grievances formed as a reaction to ethnically-motivated persecution, are particularly strong.

But the political opportunities have not been favourable to Tamil challengers. Reviewing the POS factors outlined above, Tamils were virtually excluded from the political process; Sinhalese elites were united in their support for a unitary state; no influential allies supported the Tamil cause in Sri Lanka; the state engaged in frequent acts of repression; and there was little vulnerability of the 'closed' government to outside pressure. Yet insurgency has existed at fairly high levels since 1983. What accounts for the tenacity of Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka?

I posit that a comprehensive understanding of Tamil insurgency can be achieved by extending our understanding of POS to include *transnational* factors that influence a given domestic political situation.[54] Though scholars of contentious politics have

[51] Ibid.; Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, 'Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes — toward a synthetic, comparative perspective on Social Movements', in Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–20; J. Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *The Politics of Social Protest: Comparative Perspectives on States and Social Movements* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

[52] McAdam, *Political Process*; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*; McAdam, et al., 'Opportunities and Framing Processes'.

[53] Herbert P. Kitschelt, 'Political Opportunity Structures and Political Protest: Anti-Nuclear Movements in Four Democracies', *British Journal of Political Science*, 16 (1986), pp. 57–85; Hanspeter Kriesi, Ruud Koopmans, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Marco G. Giugni, 'New social movements and political opportunities in Western Europe', *European Journal of Political Research*, 22 (1992), pp. 219–44.

[54] Contentious politics scholars have become increasingly interested in international and transnational influences on collective action, but for the most part they consider individuals as being rooted within a single nation-state. See Jackie Smith, Charles Chatfield, and Ron Pagnucco (eds.), *Transnational Social Movements and Global Politics* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald (eds.), *Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Jackie Smith and Hank Johnston (eds.), *Globalization and Resistance* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002). But see Michael Hanagan, 'Irish Transnational Social Movements, Migrants, and the State System', pp. 53–73, in Smith and Johnston for an exception.

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limited their analysis to a single POS for each challenging group, a consideration of ethnic groups acting in the diaspora reveals how persons can operate within several opportunity structures at once. More importantly, it reveals how despite unfavourable conditions in the home country, factors abroad may protract an otherwise non-existent or short-lived insurgency.[55] Such factors constitute a 'transnational opportunity structure.'

By transnational, I mean the ability of political activists to traverse the boundaries of a state, using resources and opportunities available from persons living in numerous polities.[56] My research indicates that, in the case of Sri Lankan Tamil mobilisation against the Sinhalese government, the resources for the collective action come largely from the Tamil diaspora. In employing a transnational opportunity structure framework to analyse Sri Lankan Tamil insurgency, I draw on the POS dimensions outlined above to identify two dimensions of transnational opportunity: (1) openness or closure of political institutions in other states; (2) the presence of allies in other states and in the international arena. In the case of diaspora politics, these two dimensions are necessarily intertwined: migrants settled in new states remain active in homeland politics. Diaspora groups constitute transnational ethnic networks which are then mobilised to aid co-ethnics in the homeland, especially with financial resources.

The movement of immigrants and refugees from a situation of persecution and absence of political rights to open societies characterised by democratic governance, freedom of expression, and anti-discrimination laws has profound political implications. Persons who migrate from a closed society to an open society are able to capitalise on newfound freedoms to publish, organise, and accumulate financial resources to an extent that was impossible in the homeland. In some countries of settlement, public funding even supports various forms of ethnic media and organisation. Migrants and their descendants can then mobilise in the host country to publicise their cause as well as to lobby decision-makers to obtain additional political rights for their co-ethnics in the sending country. Open opportunity structures can even facilitate the creation of distinctive ethnic identities and secessionist movements in the diaspora.[57]

Though Tamil identity is very strong in Sri Lanka, there are limits to its expression in that Tamils have been persecuted because of their ethnic affiliation and have been excluded from holding political office. Indeed, ethnic persecution became the

[55] Benedict Anderson, 'Long-distance Nationalism' in Benedict Anderson (ed.), *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London: Verso, 1998); Adamson, 'Mobilizing for the Transformation of Home', pp. 164–6.

[56] Though beyond the purview of this essay, states, intergovernmental organisations and nongovernmental organisations have also actively monitored – and even intervened in – the Sri Lankan conflict. Their role has been addressed in de Silva and May, *The Internationalization of Ethnic Conflict*, and M. Werake and P.V.J. Jayasekera (eds.), *Security Dilemma of a Small State:* Part 2, *Internal Crisis and External Intervention in Sri Lanka* (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Institute for International Studies, 1992).

[57] For example, Sikh mobilisation from an independent Khalistan originated in the expatriate community rather than from within the Punjab itself, and the Kashmiri Liberation Front first formed in the United Kingdom. On Sikhs, see Singh Darshan Tatla, *The Sikh Diaspora: The Search for Statehood* (London: UCL Press, 1999). On the Kashmiri question, see Patricia Ellis and Zafar Khan, 'The Kashmiri Diaspora: Influences in Kashmir', in Al-Ali and Khalid Koser (eds.), *New Approaches to Migration?*, pp. 169–85.

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primary causal factor for migration out of the country, and many Tamils were accepted in liberal democratic host countries with refugee status. In the diaspora, it became possible to explore and express Tamil cultural, linguistic, and religious identity as never before. Associations were formed, both with an eye toward facilitating integration in the host country as well as toward maintaining ties with the homeland, namely through supporting the quest for Tamil independence. Migration from Sri Lanka has resulted in Tamil identity-building from abroad as well as material support for the creation of a separate Eelam. [58]

Tamil elites have mobilised diasporic identity networks around a variety of activities that ultimately impact the conflict in Sri Lanka. These include (1) information exchange within the Tamil community *via* Tamil-language newspapers, radio, the Internet and ethnic organisations; (2) spreading awareness of the Tamil struggle through marches, conferences, and the lobbying of government officials; and (3) lawful as well as illegal fundraising. All three types of activities – intra-Tamil communication; outreach from the community; and fundraising – reinforce a proud, independent Tamil identity. Ongoing exposure to propaganda about the Tamil struggle and sacrifice in Eelam may also invoke feelings of guilt among those in the diaspora. The impact of these activities, in turn, has been crucial to the perpetuation of the war for an independent Eelam on the island of Sri Lanka. These are outlined in the following sections, with a particular emphasis on diaspora politics in Canada, probably the largest Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the world.

Tamil ethnic networks

Sri Lankan Tamils are literally scattered around the world, but they are concentrated in certain states. Between 110,000 and 170,000 live in the Tamil Nadu province of southern India, whose coast is less than fifty miles from the northern Sri Lankan Tamil heartland. At least 65,000 of them are interned in camps, and as many as 100,000 Tamils have integrated into Tamil Nadu and do not intend to return to Sri Lanka.[59] From a population of fewer than 2,000 Tamils in 1983, Canada's Tamil population has grown to between 110,000 and 200,000 persons, 90 per cent of them in Toronto.[60] There are at least 200,000 Tamils in Western Europe, primarily in Britain,

[58] One Sri Lankan scholar asserts: 'Certain Tamil nationalist myths which had been politically latent began to be openly expressed [since 1983]; there was a deliberate and conscious attempt to create a … political identity.' The impulse for this came not so much from the Tamil centres of Madras or Jaffna, 'but from the expatriate community, who have begun to write extensively on Tamil history and ideology. Their writings are circulated widely and have an important effect on [Sri Lankan] Tamil consciousness.' Radhika Coomaraswamy, 'Myths without Conscience: Tamil and Sinhalese Nationalist Writings in the 1980s', in Charles Abeysekera and Newton Gunasinghe (eds.), *Facets of Ethnicity in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Social Scientists Association, 1987), pp. 77–8.

[59] *Sri Lanka: Annual Country Report on Human Rights 2000* (United States Department of State).

[60] This estimate is based on an analysis of immigration data, census data, and figures given by Sri Lankan Tamils and those who work with Tamils. Most Sri Lankan Tamils entered Canada as refugees or were sponsored by immediate family members who first arrived as refugees and then gained landed immigrant status. The asylum claims lodged with the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board between 1989 and 1993 had an average acceptance rate of 90 per cent, compared to 50–60 per cent for asylum claims overall. See Arul S. Aruliah, 'Accepted on Compassionate Grounds: An Admission Profile of Tamil Immigrants in Canada', *Refuge*, 14:4 (1994), pp. 10–14.

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Germany, Switzerland, and France. Up to 10,000 Tamils live in Australia, primarily in Sydney, and several thousand more are in Singapore and Malaysia.[61] South Africa has a population of one million persons of Indian origin, the majority of them Tamil but not necessarily Sri Lankan Tamil.[62] The United States has close ties with the Sri Lankan government and thus has not accepted many Tamils as refugees.

Britain has been the most important site of the LTTE's overseas political activity. Until anti-terrorism legislation passed in Britain on 28 February 2001 banning the LTTE, the Tigers' international secretariat had been located in London. Anton Balasingham, one of the LTTE's most visible leaders and the chief LTTE negotiator in the 2002–03 peace talks, resides in London as well. There had been speculation that the international secretariat would move to South Africa, where the African National Congress has had close relations with the LTTE.[63] However, the LTTE has maintained its presence in Britain but is operating underground.[64]

Information exchange

The richness of Tamil diasporic networks is evidenced in the blossoming of outlets for Tamil expression, information exchange, and, generally, the rise of Tamil social capital in Toronto over the past two decades. Today there are ten weekly Tamil language newspapers, five of them free. Four Tamil language radio stations broadcast seven days a week and feature very popular phone-in and talk shows. Three cinemas show Tamil language films, and Toronto is also home to the largest Tamil video and music store in the world.[65] There are at least six Hindu Tamil temples, as well as several Roman Catholic congregations. Three Tamil directories list individual businesses as well as social service, political, cultural, and business organisations. The Tamil Eelam Society is the largest ethnospecific provider of social services to Tamils in Ontario. Since the late 1980s, its Board of Directors has had close ties with the World Tamil Movement, allegedly a front organisation for the LTTE. Because the Canadian government has become more aware of the links between the Tamil Eelam Society and the LTTE, the TES has disassociated itself from political activities and is cultivating its image as strictly a social service provider.

No matter where a person lives, however, access to the Internet provides access to news about Sri Lanka. Indeed, the Internet has been an important means of communication among Tamils around the world. Websites provide analyses of current events with a Tamil perspective, chronologies of the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict, and non-political items such as classifieds.[66] These media outlets are sometimes the only

[61] McDowell, *Tamil Asylum Diaspora.*
[62] Reuters, 16 November 1998.
[63] *Indian Express*, 15 November 1998; *Agence France Presse*, 16 November 1998.
[64] Anonymous interview, September 2002.
[65] Cheran, *Changing Formations*, pp. 181–2.
[66] Some Websites are of interest to particular Tamil communities. 'Tamil Canadian', for example, contains news items as well as listings of Tamil associations and suggestions for contacting government officials in Canada. 'The World Mirror', a fortnightly Tamil newspaper published in Canada, has a web edition. The Tamil Circle list-serve distributes news items daily as well as commentaries and queries by subscribers. The Tamil Circle primarily focuses on events in Sri Lanka, but items about events occurring in Britain, Canada, Australia and elsewhere are also posted periodically. In addition to these English-language sources, some sites are written in Tamil script that can be read with specialised software.

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source of information about events in the battle zones due to government censorship. In June 1998, the government prohibited foreign and Sri Lankan journalists from entering the war zones. Information was disseminated by official military press conferences only, and military information in overseas publications imported to Sri Lanka was censored. As a result, even government and military officials downloaded information from the Internet. Indeed, the popularity of news sites such as 'Tamil Canadian' and 'Tamil Net' peaks during times of increased military activity. For example, each of those sites reported receiving more than a million hits during the first two weeks of November 1999, corresponding with a major LTTE operation.[67] In response, the government of Sri Lanka supports its own Websites featuring its version of events, including sites by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidential Secretariat, the Information Ministry and those maintained by state-run newspapers.[68]

The extent to which the LTTE itself has utilised communications technology to disseminate a nationalist Tamil message is revealed by the annual Heroes' Day celebrations. Every November, LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran gives a speech commemorating Tamils martyrs and pronouncing on the progress of the war. Tamils in the diaspora gather together in public spaces for their own commemorations. Increasingly, the homeland is linked with the diaspora during these events. Minutes after the conclusion of the annual address, Tamils around the world are able to hear Prabhakaran's speech broadcast by private Tamil radio stations. Within thirty minutes, the text of the speech and photos of the event are posted on the Internet in English.[69]

Public demonstrations and lobbying

Tamil identity networks are reinforced by political mobilisation, in the form of conferences, marches, and various types of advocacy or lobbying. In Toronto, for example, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Sri Lankan independence in 1998, between 5,000 and 20,000 persons marched on the Ontario legislature, to protest at the treatment of Tamils by the Sri Lankan government.[70] The related conference held the following day featured speakers from Harvard University and the US Institute of Peace and was attended by several Members of the Ontario Provincial Parliament. These types of events are ostensibly held to inform the Canadian public about the situation in Sri Lanka. But they have another purpose as

[67] V.S. Sambandan, '"Cyberwave" Sweeps over Tamils the World Over', Tamil Circle. Online Posting. 1 December 1999 (also posted in *The Hindu*, Online edition of India's National Newspaper, 2 December 1999.)

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] *Toronto Star*, 2 February 1998. Another large rally was held at Queen's Park in November 1995. Organised by the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT) to protest at the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka, 16–20,000 attended, including Liberal Member of the Provincial Parliament Tony Ruprecht whose Toronto riding has a large Tamil constituency. Ruprecht addressed the crowd with a call to 'Stop the Killing' and urged Ottawa to tell the Sri Lankan government to stop the fighting immediately and go to the bargaining table (*Toronto Star*, 19 November 1995).

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well: to remind Tamils of their connections to the ongoing war in their home country and of the sacrifices made by fellow Tamils in the cause of an independent Eelam.

Lobbying by Tamils in Canada is primarily conducted by the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT), an umbrella organisation of ten Tamil associations which has a pro-secessionist stance. The role of FACT, according to one of its leaders, is to 'coordinate activity so that they [the Canadian government] could get one voice from Tamils'. FACT sends correspondence to public officials and meets with civil servants on issues of concern to Tamils. FACT has courted Canadian Finance Minister Paul Martin, a favourite to succeed Prime Minister Jean Chretien as leader of the Liberal Party. Indeed, Martin and dozens of other politicians attended a FACT-organised gala dinner to celebrate the Tamil New Year on 6 May 2000.[71]

The Internet has provided a means for some direct political activity as well. In what the CIA claimed was the first cyber attack by a known terrorist organisation, a group calling itself the Internet Black Tigers bombarded Sri Lankan Embassies around the world with e-mail messages. For two weeks in August 1998, embassies in North America, Europe and Asia received as many as 800 messages a day that read: 'We are the Internet Black Tigers and we're doing this to disrupt your communications'.[72]

Financial support

According to *The Economist*, the funding for Tamil Websites and newspapers comes from contributions by expatriate Tamils as well as from business profits.[73] Indeed, the Sri Lankan government estimates that the Tigers overseas fundraising reaches $80 million a year.[74] Tamil leaders dispute these figures, claiming it impossible that such a newly-formed diaspora could raise such a large sum, a sum that would require average annual contributions of more than $100 from every Tamil individual living overseas. It is the case, however, that the LTTE employs fundraisers abroad. In his study of Tamils in Switzerland, McDowell estimated that in the early 1990s about 5 per cent of Tamils in that country actively worked for the LTTE. Most were young single men who worked as fundraisers, making weekly or monthly solicitations for donations.[75]

In Toronto, police claim that Tiger supporters send as much as Canadian $1m a month to the LTTE to finance the war in Sri Lanka, primarily for the purchase of

[71] Members of the Canadian Alliance Party subsequently, and incorrectly, alleged in the House of Commons that Martin had attended fundraising events for terrorists. Not surprisingly, Tamils were outraged at being depicted as terrorists. The Liberal Prime Minister was quick to point out that such labels should not be applied to entire communities. See *Globe and Mail*, 22 February 2001.

[72] Ali Rogers (ed.), 'Tamil Separatists "Cyber Strike" Embassies'. *Traces*, 3 (July-September 1998). Available online.

[73] 'The War the World is Missing,' *The Economist*, p. 32.

[74] Ibid. For a broader discussion of the importance of remittances to Sri Lanka, see Nicholas Van Hear, 'Sustaining Societies under Strain: Remittances as a Form of Transnational Exchange in Sri Lanka and Ghana', in Al-Ali and Koser, *New Approaches to Migration?*, pp. 202–23.

[75] McDowell, *Tamil Asylum Diaspora*, p. 261.

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weapons and explosives. Another source alleges that Tamils living abroad are expected to pay a minimum of $50 a month per person to the LTTE, and that Tamil businesses in Sri Lanka and abroad are forced to pay the Tigers as well.[76] Though Tamils in Canada are not alone in supporting the Tigers from abroad, the Canada connection is widely known in Sri Lanka. According to G.B. Kotakadeniya, a police spokesman in Colombo, 'Canada has been a hotbed of the Tigers. That is where the biggest contribution comes from.' Konrad Sigurdson, Canada's High Commissioner in Sri Lanka stated: 'As far as a list of countries in concerned, Canada is the worst culprit with regard to funding'.[77] Indeed, the Sri Lankan government has been pressuring other countries, including Canada, to crack down on expatriate Tamils who are major financial contributors to the Tigers.

Another means of fundraising is the production and sale of Sri Lankan-made videos in the diaspora. These feature footage of the war, the hardships of life under the Sri Lankan government, and pro-LTTE events. Tamils may also be asked to buy items to support the separatist cause, for example calendars listing Tamil holidays as well as names of those martyred in the struggle. Lastly, Tamils may feel pressured to shop at Tamil stores that support the Tigers, and even to buy certain products and newspapers.

Tamil leaders have argued that these accounts are exaggerated. Representatives of the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT), for example, have claimed that Tamils in Canada cannot afford to donate as much money as some law enforcement officials claim, and that most money that goes back to Sri Lanka is sent to family members and relief organisations.[78] Indeed, annual private remittances to Sri Lanka have surpassed US$1 billion since 1999, accounting for about 5 per cent of the country's gross national product.[79] Official figures underestimate the actual remittance amounts, as Sri Lankan Tamils are known to use middlemen to transmit money back to relatives. When interviewed, most Tamils state that fundraising for Eelam does occur, but that it is generally for relief work in war-ravaged areas.

Even if money is indeed sent back in the form of remittances and relief aid, Tiger involvement in either activity cannot be ruled out. First, a share of these funds may still go to the Tigers. According to one source, the LTTE in Sri Lanka keeps records of people living and working abroad, their earnings, and – through connections in local banks – how much money they send back. When money is sent to a particular household, an LTTE representative visits the household and asks for a portion of the funds. Second, the majority of relief work in the area is conducted by the Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), which is also closely linked to the LTTE. Certainly, some or most of the TRO funds support legitimate relief efforts, but only those that are in keeping with the wishes of the LTTE leadership.

[76] Research Directorate, 'Sri Lanka: Alien Smuggling', p. 14.

[77] Both quotes are found in Nomi Morris, 'The Canadian Connection: Sri Lanka moves to crush Tamil rebels at home and abroad'. *Maclean's* (27 November 1995), pp. 28–29.

[78] Morris, 'Canadian Connection', p. 29; author's interviews.

[79] See 'Sri Lanka', *Balance of Payments Statistics Yearbook,* 52 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2001), pp. 839–43. Most of this money comes from Sri Lankan workers living in the Middle East, though this declined as a percentage of remittances as Sri Lankans migrated to a wider variety of destinations in the 1990s. For further discussion of migration and remittances in Sri Lanka, see Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, 'The Migration-Development Nexus: Sri Lanka Case Study', *International Migration*, 40:5 (2002), pp. 283–307.

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Host state control over diasporas

The above accounts illustrate how Tamils in the diaspora have been able to operate transnationally to support an ethnic struggle in the homeland. Though much of this activity occurs without the express consent of the states in which they reside, it is not the case that diasporas are able to bypass states altogether. Diasporas constitute deterritorialised networks in the sense that identity and organisation can transcend state borders, but their members do reside in states and their activities target state policies. This provides states with at least some modicum of power over diasporic activities.

Several recent examples illustrate the efforts by international organisations and states to limit particular types of diasporic activities that may be linked to terrorism. Two anti-terrorism initiatives by the United Nations have impacted the ability of the LTTE to operate in various states. First, the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism entered into force on 10 April 2002. Second, UN Security Council Resolution 1373 requiring UN member states to adopt strong measures against terrorist financing was adopted on 28 September 2001. Independent of these measures, Britain and the United States have both labeled the LTTE a terrorist organisation and restricted its activities on their soil. In the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, Canada and the US passed anti-terrorism legislation similar to what had been signed into law in Britain in 2000.

The Canadian government's assessment of the LTTE is somewhat ambiguous. Under the United Nations Suppression of Terrorism Regulations, which are the Canadian regulations made in response to UNSC Resolution 1373, Canada has adopted a series of lists of almost 400 terrorist entities whose financial assets have been frozen. The LTTE was added to these lists on 7 November 2001. However, the LTTE is not proscribed under Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act (Bill C-36) of December 2001.[80] This Act also permits the listing of the names of terrorist organisations and individuals so that their property could be frozen and seized, but its scope is not just financial. It amends the Criminal Code so that knowingly participating in, contributing to, or facilitating the activities of a listed entity is a crime. The LTTE is not among the 31 entities listed under the Anti-Terrorism Act. However, the list is a work in progress, and there have been calls by the right-wing Canadian Alliance Party to add the LTTE.[81]

In a related issue, the Canadian government has been trying since 1995 to deport the former Co-ordinator of the Toronto Chapter of the World Tamil Movement.[82]

[80] The text of the Anti-Terrorism Act can be found on Canada's Department of Justice website (http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/A-11.7/index.html). For more information on how organisations are listed in the Act, please consult the website of the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada (http://www.sgc.gc.ca).

[81] In addition to these Criminal Code reforms, provisions in the Anti-Terrorism Act amend the Income Tax Act such that 'charitable' organisations supporting terrorist groups could be stripped of their charitable status. For details, please refer to the website of the Department of the Solicitor General of Canada (http://www.sgc.gc.ca).

[82] The US State Department claims that both FACT and the WTM are 'known front organizations' of the LTTE. See United States Department of State, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2000, Appendix B: Background Information on Terrorist Groups*. Available online. The WTM's logo contains a drawing of a tiger.

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Allegedly connected to the LTTE as well as accused of acts of intimidation against Tamils in Toronto, Manickavasagam Suresh was found to be a threat to Canada because of his potential to engage in terrorist activity. In February 1998, Suresh was granted a stay of deportation after considerable pressure was placed on Canada not only by Tamils but also by a coalition of human rights organisations and church groups who argued that he faced certain torture upon return to Sri Lanka. Amnesty International referred to Suresh as a political prisoner. Nonetheless, the Federal Court of Appeal upheld the deportation order, stating that those who raise money for terrorist acts are as culpable as those who actually plant a bomb. However, in January 2002, the Supreme Court of Canada ordered that Suresh be given a new hearing on the grounds that he had never been able to hear, and therefore respond to, the specific allegations against him.[83] Eighteen months later, no hearing had occurred, and Suresh was still living in Canada.

The above actions illustrate how states and international organisations are attempting to clamp down on the international networks that support terrorism. They also reveal that diaspora activity, particularly of groups that are highly politicised, can be constrained by the policies and broader political climates of the states in which they reside. Whether these national and international measures actually curtail diaspora activity, most of which has nothing to do with terrorism, remains to be seen.

Conclusions

Members of the Tamil diaspora are linked by a common identity that is rooted in (1) ethnic persecution in Sri Lanka, (2) the shared trauma of migration, including guilt feelings at having left family, friends, and a country behind; and (3) economic and social marginalisation in the receiving society, particularly in the first generation. Politically-motivated ethnic elites are able to capitalise on this shared identity by promoting transnational ethnic networks to support co-ethnic insurgents in the homeland. As described above, these networks engage in three broad categories of activity: information exchange within the Tamil community, outreach to the broader society and state about the Tamil struggle, and fundraising. Many Tamils in the diaspora may not actually support the LTTE, but their presence at Tamil public functions, such as Heroes' Day celebrations or a march on the legislature, lends legitimacy to the separatist cause. Moreover, their financial support has been crucial to the perpetuation of the civil war in Sri Lanka.[84] Whereas Tamils in Sri Lanka have limited opportunities to travel, assemble, express themselves politically, and accumulate wealth, allies in the diaspora have been able to circumvent these constraints and to assist ethnic actors in the homeland. The war is being fought within Sri Lanka, but Tamil efforts are supported by transnational ethnic networks.

[83] See *Toronto Star*, 5 September 1997; *Globe and Mail*, 17 January 1998; *Globe and Mail*, 24 January 2000; and *Globe and Mail*, 12 January 2002. A legal analysis of this case is found in Audrey Macklin, 'Mr. Suresh and the Evil Twin', *Refuge*, 20:4 (2002), pp. 15–22.

[84] This is openly acknowledged by the LTTE. For example, at a Tamil music festival organised by the LTTE in Paris on 1 May 2003, the following statement from LTTE leader Prabhakaran was read to the crowd by the Director of the LTTE's television network: 'Without your support and financial assistance Tamil Eelam struggle would not have been possible. Please continue to support us.'

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This article has provided an empirical case study of a class of nonstate actors who act transnationally to influence domestic and international politics. This study makes contributions to several literatures. First, it adds to the emerging literature on transnational contention by expanding the focus beyond NGOs and beyond actors who are linked by a moral imperative. It focuses on transnational actors with more traditional political goals, in this case, autonomy for an ethnonational group. These actors use the transnational arena to influence national politics in their homelands, and they lobby their 'host' states to implement favourable foreign policies. Whereas scholars of contentious politics have pointed out the difficulties of constructing transnational movements, this research provides a case study of persons with truly transnational identities, identities that are maintained by migrant networks and the formation of associations in the receiving society.

Second, it adds a new dimension to the small number of studies that apply the concept of POS to immigrant and diaspora politics. Existing research either focuses on opportunity structures in the receiving states[85] or employs the term 'political opportunity structure' in a general way, overlooking its components.[86] I have added to this new literature by developing the concept of transnational opportunity structure, and I have done so along two lines. First, I extended existing POS variables outside the domestic sphere so that their transnational dimensions may be included: (1) the openness or closure of political institutions in other states, in this case migrant-receiving states, and (2) the presence of international allies, namely co-ethnics living in the diaspora. Whereas most research on immigrant politics has focused on dynamics in receiving states, my research considers how the POS in receiving states may influence politics in sending states. Second, I have included formal as well as informal dimensions of politics in the concept of transnational opportunity structure. Intra-group communication, publicity efforts, and fundraising by transnational ethnic networks are informal activities that can have significant political ramifications in both sending and receiving states. Such informal activity is especially important to migrants whose access to formal political channels may be limited, for instance for individuals whose citizenship status does not correspond with their country of residence. Regarding formal dimensions of transnational opportunity structure, support from foreign political parties or states could be important factors in civil conflicts. Whereas existing research has highlighted the importance of national and local-level POS in receiving states, future research on diaspora politics should also consider the interplay between opportunities – formal and informal – in various sending and receiving states.

Transnational networks sustain ethnopolitical conflicts, and the diasporas can play a major role because the resources they provide can upset the existing balance

[85] Patrick Ireland, *The Policy Challenge of Ethnic Diversity: Immigrant Politics in France and Switzerland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (eds.), *Challenging Immigration and Ethnic Relations Politics: Comparative European Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Eva Østergaard-Nielson, 'Transnational Political Practices and the Receiving State: Turks and Kurds in Germany and the Netherlands', *Global Networks*, 1:3 (2001), pp. 261–81; Sarah V. Wayland, 'Mobilising to defend nationality law in France', *New Community*, 20:1 (1993), pp. 93–110.

[86] Michael Hanagan, 'Irish Transnational Social Movements, Migrants, and the State System', in Jackie Smith and Hank Johnston (eds.), *Globalization and Resistance* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), pp. 53–73; Adamson, 'Mobilizing for the Transformation of Home'.

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of economic, political and military power in the homeland. This research lends support to the idea that immigrants and refugees – once thought of as weak victims and politically voiceless – can be important international actors. Settled in liberal democratic states and facilitated by the broader processes of globalisation, they can have a significant impact on civil conflicts on the other side of the world. In the case of the Tamil diaspora, the LTTE has set up political offices abroad as well as engaged in extensive fundraising campaigns that have enabled the Tamil insurgents to sustain their quest for an independent homeland. Mobilisation by other ethnonationalist groups in the diaspora might also be analysed from a transnational opportunity framework. Contemporary examples include diasporic activities by Jews and Palestinians aimed at Israel, as well as mobilisation by Kurds, Sikhs, Kashmiris, Serbians, Croatians, Greeks, and the Irish.

Transnational networks sustain ethnopolitical conflicts, but they may not provide enough resources to definitively change the outcomes of ethnic wars. In the case of Sri Lankan Tamils, support from the diaspora has not enabled the LTTE to secure its ultimate goal of Tamil independence. Indeed, evidence of a military stalemate between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka existed by the late 1990s.

A different set of international influences is now affecting the civil war in Sri Lanka. The crackdown on terrorism by Western states in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, and the hardening of public opinion against political violence constricted the transnational opportunity structure for the LTTE's international network. This – in combination with domestic factors such as the military stalemate and the opportunities opened by the election of a new government in December 2001 – pushed the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka to the negotiating table in the autumn of 2002. A few months later, the two parties agreed to pursue peace within a federal framework. The two parties are under tremendous international pressure to make the negotiations work. Once again, the conflict is being influenced by financial assistance from abroad. This time, however, the pressure is coming from states such as Norway, Canada, and Japan as well as from international organisations such as the European Commission and the World Bank who are promising hefty sums for reconstruction and development in Sri Lanka.[87] These pledges highlight the fact that transnational ethnic networks are not alone in influencing conflict through financial assistance. Indeed, the recent involvement of states in the Sri Lankan peace process provides an opportunity to examine the competition and collaboration between state and nonstate actors in bringing an end to civil war. This article drew attention to the role of transnational ethnic networks in *sustaining* ethnopolitical conflicts. Investigation into how various transnational actors might work to *manage* conflicts is just as important and is likely to reveal far different intra-group dynamics and motivations.

A note on sources

Most of my information on the activities of Sri Lankan Tamils in the Toronto area is based on interviews conducted between 1998 and 2001. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, these sources remain anonymous.

[87] At the Sri Lanka Donor's Conference in Tokyo in June 2003, 51 states and 22 international organisations pledged more than US $4.5 bn to be paid over four years for reconstruction and development in Sri Lanka. For futher details, please consult the official website of the Sri Lankan Government's Secretariat for Coordinating the Peace Process: www.peaceinsrilanka.org.

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