

# RETRIBUTION OR RECONCILIATION?

An Analysis of the Effects of the Defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on Discourses of Violence and Reconciliation in the Tamil Diaspora

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BTF:	British Tamils Forum
CMC:	Computer Mediated Communication
EU:	European Union
GoSL:	Government of Sri Lanka
GTF:	Global Tamil Forum
HRW:	Human Rights Watch
ICG:	International Crisis Group
IDP:	Internally Displaced Persons
IL:	International Law
IHRL:	International Human Rights Law
LTTE:	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NAFTA:	North American Free Trade Agreement
PTGTE:	Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam
SLA:	Sri Lankan Army
SMO:	Social Movement Organisation
TGTE:	Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam
TNA:	Tamil National Alliance
TULF:	Tamil United Liberation Front
UK:	United Kingdom

## CHAPTER 1: AFTER THIRTY YEARS OF VIOLENCE

### 1.1 Introduction

Since the end of the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in May 2009, Sri Lanka has entered a new struggle: a slow and complex reconstruction process that is characterised by grief, blame and retribution. Although after nearly 30 years of conflict most people in Sri Lanka prioritise peace, there are still tensions between the ethnic groups, particularly in the form of grievances on the side of the Tamils. Grievances are particularly salient in the diaspora, where Tamils remain angry and currently lobby for international pressure on the government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to improve the situation of the Tamil people. As a result of post-conflict policies of the GoSL, historical grievances are rather aggravated than solved, thus also sustaining support for the military organisation that led the struggle for the Tamils: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). On the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2009, the news that LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran was killed in a fight with the Sri Lankan Army (SLA) and that the LTTE were defeated soon spread around the world.<sup>1</sup> This swift military defeat of the organisation and thereby the official ending of the Sri Lankan conflict leaves important questions to be answered: did the defeat of the LTTE lead to an increase of discourses of violence within the international Tamil community? Or does the end of the conflict imply an end to insurgent political activism within the diaspora? How will the remaining grievances of the Tamils develop now the armed struggle towards their goals has ceased? And in what way is the defeat of the LTTE manifested within the diaspora?

The root causes of the conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese are all related to the central issue of the wish of the Tamils for autonomy in a separate state: Tamil Eelam. Grievances arising from marginalisation, oppression and a lack of political participation led to tensions; tensions to militancy; and in July 1983 - later known as Black July - a violent conflict erupted between the GoSL and the LTTE. Although there were several attempts for peace agreements and even the above-mentioned signed ceasefire agreement in 2002, many efforts were fruitless due to the fact that historical grievances were not addressed over the years. Marginalisation of the Tamil community

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<sup>1</sup> The name Velupillai Prabhakaran is also spelled as 'Pirabaharan' or 'Pirapaharan'.

in Sri Lanka dates back to 1950s: a dramatic example is the Sinhala Only Act, or Official Language Act, that passed in 1956 as a law that mandates the Sinhala language as the official national standard. As a result, Tamils became notably underrepresented in employment and politics. The vision of the – politically active part of the – diaspora of Sri Lankan Tamils has always been based on the image of the invulnerable LTTE. The crumbling of their leading organisation leaves the Tamil diaspora without a political and military entity to pursue their goals. With many unaddressed grievances in the post-war phase, it seems likely that we will see a renewed nationalist rhetoric from Tamils worldwide now that the LTTE is defeated. However, at the same time the defeat of the Tigers indicated ‘the hollowness of their propaganda’ for a significant number of Tamils, since the promise of nearing victory was never fulfilled (ICG 2010b: 9). As a result, the Tamil community has become divided when it concerns the future cause of Tamil activism around the homeland conflict.

In the post-Cold War period, it has become clear that many protracted conflicts are very difficult to end. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of negotiated settlements in war, leaving space for remaining tensions to simmer (Licklider 1995; Miall et. al. 2005). As Licklider asks: ‘do civil wars indeed end at all?’ (1995: 683). As we can see at the ending of the Sri Lankan conflict, the military victory of the SLA over the LTTE was one of hard force and resulted in a typical example of non-negotiated peace. As some scholars argue, non-negotiated settlements without a reconciliation process in the post-war phase may lead to a cold peace or ceasefire rather than sustainable peace (Barkan 2006). Civil wars that end through military victory, like the GoSL’s victory over the LTTE, seem to have a lesser chance of conflict resurgence than negotiated settlements, since this usually implies a lack of resources on the side of the losing party (Licklider 1995). This is frequently the case in asymmetrical civil wars, where one of the warring parties is the ruling government. As a result, military victories are – even in identity-based conflicts – usually more stable than negotiated peace. However, at the same time research has pointed to a higher chance of genocide after military victories than after non-negotiated peace (Licklider 1995). Obviously, as is also pointed out by Licklider, this conclusion is subject to many external factors like the availability of humanitarian aid, mediation and the nature of the conflict. Still, in the light of the current diaspora lobby on the alleged war crimes and genocide by the GoSL, this raises

questions for the future of Sri Lanka. Particularly in the light of the supportive Tamil diaspora, it remains to be seen how the struggle for Tamil Eelam will develop in the next few years.

In the complex history of Sri Lanka, the context of a lack of justice and a need for retribution indicates the problematic of the Sri Lankan reconstruction process. During the war there has always been a clear link between the Tamil diaspora and the LTTE, for example through sending remittances and their role in the conflict was in a way crucial for the continuation of violence at several stages of the war (ICG 2010b: 1). Although the Tamil community is left without resources to take up arms again, the past year has shown that the diaspora still has an astounding capacity to mobilise its people, since they set up large-scale initiatives such as the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) and a referendum on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution of 1976.<sup>2</sup> Since the end of the conflict, the eye has turned to the diaspora to replace the LTTE as leader of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. For that reason, the defeat of the LTTE and the future of Tamil Eelam are intricately connected with each other. This leads to the following main question of this research:

**‘What is the effect of the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 on the mobilisation of discourses of violence and reconciliation within the western Tamil diaspora?’**

Empirically, this main question explores the *manifestation* of the defeat of the LTTE. What are the visible effects on or changes in discourses of violence and reconciliation? In which direction is the diaspora moving after the defeat of the LTTE? However, such questions still require a deeper analytical examination of how to measure the effects of an event like the defeat of the LTTE. First of all, it is necessary to look into the issue of remobilisation and what the post-war phase implies for diaspora

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<sup>2</sup> These initiatives were set up by the diaspora in the first months after the war. Referenda were held in most western countries with Tamil diasporas in order to measure the level of support for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam, based on the mandate of the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution of 1976. This resolution called for an independent and sovereign state of Tamil Eelam. The Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam was set up as a political tool for the Tamil community to pursue their aspirations for a separate state. Elections were held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 2010. Both initiatives will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

roles.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, another crucial aspect is to see how trigger events are related to the ideology and cognition of a certain group. The trigger event can thus be considered as a political opportunity or as an agent of change in societal structures. Theories of social movement apply here, but should be understood in combination with theories of social cognition, shared memories and social identity theory with specific focus on grievances and ingroup/outgroup dynamics in order to grasp the 'how' and 'why' of mobilisation. Thirdly, the main question requires insight in the relationship between discursive frames and agents of change and thought in the diaspora. The central issue here is the relationship between discourse and mobilisation and how these are connected to frame alignment and frame shifting. The following section on analytical frames will elaborate on these issues and on the theories that laid the base for this research.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

This thesis is based on the idea that there is a dialectic relationship between mobilisation and the changing or emerging of discursive frames. As the main question implies, discourses are (1) mobilised, and (2) may undergo change as a result of external factors, such as a trigger event like the defeat of the LTTE. How these processes can be understood in a larger theoretical framework will be explained here. This section examines the theoretical concepts that form the basis of the research of the effects of the defeat of the LTTE on the mobilisation of discourses of violence and reconciliation within the western Tamil diaspora. These concepts are respectively: diaspora activism in violent conflict; social movement theory; and frame alignment. The latter will be contextualised by theories on the formation and the power of discursive frames as explained in critical discourse analysis. The theories that are discussed form the analytical frames through which this research project was approached.

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis, the terms 'post-war' and 'post-conflict' are sometimes used interchangeably. Please note that my usage of 'post-conflict' solely refers to the theoretical notion of the term, where 'post-war' refers to the actual situation in Sri Lanka. I emphasise this because for the Tamil people the conflict is not yet solved. As a result of non-negotiated peace, the end of the conflict implies the ceasing of violence more than anything else.

### 1.2.a Diasporas in Violent Conflict

In the last few decades, the term 'diaspora' has picked up much attention in the academic field of conflict studies. Research has pointed to an increasing influence of migrants on their respective homelands and more political weight of diasporic communities in the international arena as well as in their countries of origin (see Baser & Swain 2008; Cheran 2003; Demmers 2005; Orjuela 2008; Shain 2002). As Shain states: 'Diasporas are endemic to the international system, having a capacity for independent and assertive political action' (2002: 116).

Why has the role of diasporas in violent conflict become more salient in recent years? Various factors contribute to this development, some of which are quite prominent such as globalisation and the rise of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and technology. These rapid technological developments have brought a new order to social relations between individuals and between groups by making it almost effortless to bridge large distances. The rise of the Internet, for example, is an important aspect of this process by allowing diasporas to maintain a closer relationship with the homeland, not only socially, but also economically through the sending of remittances and politically through online lobbying (see Bernal 2006; Dartnell 2006; Ranganathan 2009; Turner 2008; Whitaker 2004).

Other contributing factors to the increasing political weight of diasporas are perhaps less apparent. The increasing number of intrastate conflicts after the Cold War has resulted new patterns of conflict: instead of the nation-state, contemporary conflict frequently revolve around identity groups. This new centrality of identity groups in violent conflict is one possible reason for increasing influence of diasporas, since these communities are usually built around the same kind of identities that are central in violent conflict (Demmers 2005). On top of that, Demmers argues that increased boundary production in western countries as a result of racism and ethnic exclusion also contributes to increased political weight of the diaspora. The latter development has become ever more salient since the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001 and contributes to an increasing focus of migrants on their countries of origin.

The reason that diasporas choose to become involved in homeland conflicts can partly be explained by looking into the formation process of diasporas. What makes a

diaspora? In this thesis, diasporas are defined as ‘collectives of individuals who identify themselves, and are identified by others as part of an imagined community that has been dispersed (either forced or voluntary) from its original homeland to two or more host-countries and that is committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland’ (Demmers 2007: 9)<sup>4</sup>. This definition emphasises the significance of homeland orientation of transnational communities, particularly in a conflict setting, which is an important starting point when analysing diaspora roles in violent conflict. On top of that, the definition stresses the process of *identification* of the individual with a larger group of people, as opposed to a primordial belonging to that group.

The diasporic turn that indicates the transition from a group of migrants into a diaspora relies on two main factors: identity and representation. Firstly, the collective identity is the basis of any diaspora, as it entails the individual’s perception of belonging to and identifying oneself with a certain group of people. In this definition, the notion of a diasporic community is already understood as constructed by the members of the group, following Anderson’s theory on imagined communities, rather than being a given fact (2006).<sup>5</sup> Secondly, the diaspora can be seen as a representation of this constructed collective identity that speaks to the hearts and minds of its members. Such a representation is frequently constructed around a rather primordialistic metanarrative of a shared background or a perceived common heritage. Who is behind this constructive process? As Sökefeld argues, so-called ‘agents of diasporic imagination’ appeal to cognitive frames of individuals in order to mobilise them (2006: 275-76). Cognitive frames are thus the mental structures that link events, people, background and culture into a metanarrative or ‘master frame’ that gives meaning to certain forms of action (Snow et al. 1986).

In the light of new patterns in conflict and the increasing emphasis on identity politics in violent conflict, factors like belonging and the maintenance of the connection

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<sup>4</sup> There are many other definitions of the term ‘diaspora’ (see Brubaker 2005; Cheran 2003; Clifford 1994; and Safran 1991), all of which highlight different aspects of the concept of a diaspora. However, Demmers’ definition was chosen for its inclusiveness without being too narrow. Other research-related reasons for this choice are stated in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson (2006) argued that nationalism has its origins in the development of print capitalism. According to Anderson, the printing press ensured that masses were informed of national culture, thus leading the way forward to the creation of collective, imagined communities. From this point of view, the concept of diaspora, being formed around a common national or ethnic identity, is the ultimate imagined community.

to the homeland of the diasporic community give insight in the question why diasporas become politically active and able to exert this much influence. The relationship to the homeland – including its political environment – defines the diaspora in itself and it is therefore not surprising that diasporas would want to become involved in homeland conflicts. In addition, diaspora members frequently intend to return home eventually and thus create a so-called ‘myth of return’. The myth of return can be seen as a nostalgic narrative of the homeland that usually contains a rather idealistic view of the situation back home (Anwar 1979; Brah 1996; Skrbis 1991). It is this same mythic notion in diasporic communities that may lead to a distorted view of violent conflict in the homeland. Particularly when conflict settlement takes place or becomes a realistic option, diasporic narrativity may clash with the situation ‘on the ground’.

For the Tamils, the narrative of the nation that is central to the collective identity of the diaspora is built around the perceived belonging to Tamil Eelam. However, after the defeat of the LTTE this imagination of Tamil Eelam has become fragmented. Although the Tamil identity has concrete anchors in a shared heritage of language, culture and religion, the disillusion of the LTTE’s destruction led to a divided community that no longer acts as a homogenous whole. This, however, will be further discussed in chapter 2.

### **1.2.b Social Movement Theory**

This thesis considers the formation of diasporas as a mobilisation process that can be explained by social movement theory. Contrary to seeing the diaspora as a consequence of migration or as a result of a natural, common need to belong, I consider the diaspora as a constructed entity in the form of an imagined community (Anderson 1992 and 2006; Sökefeld 2006). How then do communities mobilise into a social movement? Social movement theory falls apart in different paradigms:

1. Resource mobilisation approach (Jenkins 1983; Olson 1965): this paradigm emphasises the rational choice behind mobilisation and the factor of agency in the acquirement of resources for the mobilisation of people towards collective action.

2. Relative deprivation approach (Gurr 1970 and 2007): this paradigm is described by Gurr 'as the term used [...] to denote the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the 'ought' and the 'is' of collective value satisfaction and that disposes men to violence' (Gurr 1970: 23). This theory considers grievances as a major source of conflict.
3. New social movement approach (Tarrow 1998; Tilly & Tarrow 2007; McAdam et.al. 1996): this relatively new approach emphasises the political and structurationist aspects of social movements, with specific focus on societal dynamics and collective identities. Contrary to the idea of a movement as a formal group with membership structures, the new social movement is relatively disorganised and more based on a social network.

All three of these paradigms have their strong assets and their weaker points and it is understandable that scholars like Della Porta (2006) and McAdam (1996) plea for a synthesis of the above mentioned theories. This thesis does not choose a particular paradigm, but incorporates parts of them in a common underlying understanding of a mobilisation process that consists of three major components: (1) political opportunities; (2) mobilising structures; and (3) framing (see for example McAdam et. al. 1996; Sökefeld 2006; Snow et. al. 2007). In this thesis, the study of diaspora (re)mobilisation in the post-war phase is based in the thought that these three components are crucial in the formation of a social movement and in the mobilisation of people towards collective action.

Political opportunities are the structures in society that create an environment in which social movements can arise. Such opportunities can arise when institutional structures or power relations change within a society (McAdam et. al. 1996). The defeat of the LTTE and the end of the Sri Lankan conflict are perfect examples of the way in which a change in structures and dynamics can create space for new movements. Secondly, mobilising structures are defined as 'collective vehicles [...] through which people mobilise and engage in collective action' (McAdam et. al. 1996: 3). Pre-existing mobilising structures can be networks or kinship ties. The infrastructure in the international Tamil community that was built up by the LTTE is a good example of such structures. Thirdly, the process of framing provides insight in the way in which elites are

able to frame historical events or grievances as common group narratives in order to create the idea that collective action will eventually result in the fulfilment of a shared need or interest. Originating from Erving Goffman in his study on the individual's perception of society (1974), the term was later used in social movement theory by David Snow et. al. (1986). Framing is defined by McAdam et. al. as 'the conscious strategic efforts by groups of people to fashion shared understandings of the world and of themselves that legitimate and motivate collective action' (1996: 6). In relation to the first two components, framing is the active element of mobilisation, implying agency and intention of the actors involved. In this understanding, leaders can work with the emotions of the masses by the creation of symbols that motivate people to take action (Tarrow 1998). As Tarrow notes: 'Symbols are taken selectively by movement leaders from a cultural reservoir and combined with action-oriented beliefs' (1998: 112). Tarrow thus draws on Goffman's theory of frames by considering discursive frames as schemata of shared interpretation. In other words, such collective understandings enable agents of change to use framing as a political tool of power. Still, it is important to note that schemata of interpretation are fluid and subject to the existing discursive contexts in which they are embedded (Snow 2007). Framing is thus seen as an ongoing process that is constantly reinvented. In terms of remobilisation *after* the formation of the social movement organisation (SMO), like the Tamil diaspora since May 2009, the cultural reservoir obviously provides ample symbols to mobilise thoughts and emotions, as we will see in later chapters.

How will social movement theory be used in this thesis? Elements of all paradigms are integrated in the understanding of social movements that is applied in this research. To illustrate, grievances are an important motivation factor in the Tamil diaspora to act in the struggle for Tamil Eelam. However, as I stated above, framing is an intentional act that implies the existence of agency, including rational choice as described by the first paradigm. Thus, framing can be linked to the first paradigm, mobilising structures to the second and political opportunity structures to the third. In this light, I see framing as the bridge between political opportunities and mobilising structures. However, to fully understand the role of framing in the post-war developments in the Tamil diaspora, we need to zoom in on the process of frame alignment in relation to mobilisation.

### 1.2.c Mobilisation of Discursive Frames: Why do people mobilise?

Social movement theory explains how people mobilise. However, the question remains *why* people participate in social movements or collective action. According to Hunt and Snow (2007), the mobilisation of participation asks for solidarity to the movement and collective agency. This would be attained through the process of micromobilisation. The term micromobilisation was coined by Snow et. al. in 1986, referring to 'the various interactive and communicative processes that affect frame alignment' (1986: 464). Micromobilisation is, in other words, the performative activity that individuals collaboratively undertake for the operation of social movements. However, the mobilisation of participation and solidarity is distinctly different from the mobilisation of individuals for collective action. For that reason, I emphasise the distinction between two forms of mobilisation: action mobilisation and consensus mobilisation (Klandermans 2007). This is relevant for this research because this conceptual distinction indicates the differences in mobilisation processes that *precede* discursive frames and those that are the *result of* discursive framing. The former is described above in social movement theory and the latter is partly encapsulated in the framing process as it refers to 'the dissemination of the views of the movement organisation' (Klandermans 2007: 369). This implies that the mobilisation of consensus or, in other words, a successful framing process, is key to the motivation of individuals to act collectively and thus key to the creation of solidarity.

Rather simplified, we could say that framing is the answer to the question why people mobilise. However, the process of framing and frame alignment deserve more attention than that. Constructed frames frequently have their origin in existing structures and the perception of a common past. Clearly, this is explained as mobilising structures in social movement theory, but the process of frame *construction* may be more complex than those theories imply. In order to fully understand why people mobilise, we need to zoom in on the concept of framing and combine it with critical discourse analysis (CDA)<sup>6</sup>. Although for this research CDA is used as an analytical tool rather than a leading theory, the underlying assumptions of this method are relevant for the

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<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, the terms 'discourse' and discursive frame' are used synonymously, referring to the same concept.

completion of the theoretical framework that forms the base of this thesis. As defined by Van Dijk, 'Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (Van Dijk 2001). This definition of discourse is distinctly different from a linguistic interpretation of discourse analysis that is used as an analytical tool to explain text and talk. However, this research sees discourse as possible political tool for agents of change. As the political theorist and Marxist Antonio Gramsci argued on the relationship between hegemony, language and power, meaning is created by language and allows members of civil society – contrary to the government – to form discursive frames of hegemony and power (Fairclough 2001). In a Gramscian understanding of language and discourse as an instrument of power and hegemony, discursive frames become essential in the formation of schemata of shared interpretation that may motivate people to mobilise.

Important aspects of the way in which frames are constructed are the underlying 'social and political continuities, which are implicated in the generation and legitimisation of [...] behaviour' (Jabri 1996: 94). Such 'schemata of interpretation', including collective identities, interests, values and ideologies, are essential in the process of frame alignment (Snow et. al. 1986). As Giddens argues in his theory on the 'duality of structures', it is the relationship between structure (existing social and political structures in society) and agency (the activities of social agents, often elites) that determines social practices in the end (Giddens in Jabri 1996: 90-91). If we connect this process to social movement theory, the changing of structures is a very similar process to the development of political opportunities. These are often trigger events that allow space for change in the fundamental social structures of the world. In the words of David Apter: 'discourse starts with events which serve as a basis for more reasoned interpretation' (1997: 11). The new structure will then also create space to renew the existing discourse institutions, whereupon the agents of mobilisation can influence the new discourse by framing it in such a way that individuals will resort to collective action. If the mobilisation process is successful, it will result in new social practices on the basis of the new discursive frame.

The interaction between discursive framing and (re)mobilisation is a complicated relationship. My assumption in this research is that the relationship between events and

discursive frames is mediated by shifting social and political relationships between agents of change in the process of frame alignment. The changing or emerging of discursive frames is intricately connected to the availability of opportunity structures and also have to be mobilised in order to become commonly accepted. However, claiming that mobilisation allows for the manifestation of discursive frames or the other way around would be too simplistic. Instead, I argue that this dialectic relationship should be seen as cyclic or even as an intensifying spiral. Both discourses and social movements have to be maintained and reinvented in order to remain activated, so the two need each other in this process. In the analysis of the data in chapter 4, the thesis will elaborate on this specific theoretical understanding.

### **1.3 Research Design and Methodology**

This thesis is based on a combination of (1) literature research, (2) qualitative content- and discourse analysis of three major Tamil websites and (3) exploratory fieldwork in Sri Lanka and London. The majority of the data used in this research project is the result of the extensive content analysis and critical discourse analysis conducted on the Internet. The three diaspora-run Tamil websites discussed in this thesis are: Tamilnet; Ilankai Tamil Sangam<sup>7</sup>; and the British Tamils Forum (BTF).<sup>8</sup> These particular websites were chosen for their popularity within the Tamil diaspora and their accessibility in terms of language and archives. Most importantly, though, these websites are created for different purposes and have different audiences – as will be discussed in chapter 2 – and thus together give a more nuanced representation of online Tamil discourses. All three sources are highly popular among Tamils. Tamilnet is claimed to be objective, mimicking a newsbank style similar to the Guardian or BBC, and is also clearly aimed at the outgroup as well as the Tamil community. While Sangam has a comparable archive and data bank to Tamilnet, both Sangam and the BTF are organisation-affiliated websites that are clearly aimed at the ingroup. Since these two organisations are very salient in the set up of the new initiatives in the diaspora in the last year, they are valuable sources for analysis of discourse around them.

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<sup>7</sup> Ilankai Tamil Sangam will from now on be referred to as 'Sangam'.

<sup>8</sup> These websites can be found respectively under the following URLs: [www.tamilnet.com](http://www.tamilnet.com); [www.tamilforum.com](http://www.tamilforum.com); and [www.sangam.org](http://www.sangam.org).

There are some significant reasons for the emphasis on the Internet: firstly, the Internet is a vibrant place for the manifestation of new – or changing – discourses, since it is easily accessible and relatively cheap. Secondly, the Tamil diaspora has been very active on the Internet for over a decade. Websites like Tamilnet.com and Tamilsforum.com are examples of well-known news sources for the Tamil population in the homeland as well as the international Tamil community. Thirdly, the effects of the military defeat are still evolving, as the end of the conflict is relatively recent. As a result, existing discourses of violence or reconciliation may change quickly and in unexpected ways. The World Wide Web is the most likely setting for the manifestation of newly emerging or changing discourses, again because access to the medium is cheap and a quick way to frame events and provide information to a wide audience. The fourth reason is the fact that it is very complicated to study the diaspora through interview fieldwork, since the diaspora is heavily divided since the end of the conflict. Opinions differ to such an extent that generalisable conclusions can hardly be drawn. Instead, studying only the political engagement of the diaspora that has manifested in discourses as these are visible on the Internet, is a more accurate and reliable way to study the current developments within the transnational Tamil community, even though it limits the scope of the eventual conclusions. Not only does this method leave out the problem of distinguishing objective and subjective information, it also eliminates the problematical issue of incomplete or erroneous information from respondents out of fear for retribution. As analysis of the news reports and articles on these websites exclude interference of the researcher in the information given, this method leaves only a light ‘footprint’ of the researcher in terms of interpretation. In addition, to minimise wrong interpretation the messages were placed in a historical and ideological context and were analysed with attention to their sources and intended audience.

The sampling and coding process as part of the content analysis was partly derived from Dartnell (2006) and Van Zoonen et. al. (2010 forthcoming), following three initial steps:

1. Key words search: number of hits from key search terms that were derived from preliminary research on the Tamil diaspora after the defeat of the LTTE. Key words included: diaspora, Tamil Eelam, LTTE, Transnational Government, and

- Global Tamil Forum. Remaining texts were scanned for relevant sources to make the gathered data more inclusive.
2. Sampling procedure: deciding on amount of texts to be analysed, based on the relevance of the sources and feasibility in the set timeframe. For example, samples were only taken from texts related to the western part of the diaspora, since this is where the political engagement of the Tamil community was most salient. This implies that the conclusions drawn in this thesis only include the politically engaged part of the western Tamil diaspora. The term 'text' here also refers to sources outside the literal meaning of the word, for example photos, movies and songs.
  3. Coding procedure: categorisation of genres, subgenres and themes until exhausted. All data was categorised along a timeline to create an overview of visible changes after the defeat of the LTTE. This inventorisation led to three salient themes around which the structure of this thesis is based. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will each discuss one of these themes.

After the sampling and coding part of the content analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) was conducted for smaller samples based on the three significant themes to reach more in-depth results. These themes are concerning the initial response of the diaspora to the defeat of the LTTE; the discursive shift from militancy to a non-violent continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam; and the frame shift towards a human rights discourse that is now central to the diaspora's lobby. The discourse analysis was focused on metanarratives, rather than semiotics, in order to understand change and movements across time.

Being aware of the fact that CDA is sometimes criticised for its openness to bias and subjectivity, I tried to historicise the data as explicitly as possible. To avoid bias, I interpreted the data with my own personal position as a researcher in mind. Although I use a relatively structurationist approach to the data, my epistemological view of social structures is interpretative rather than positivist. In other words, my aim in this research is to give insight in our understanding of social processes rather than explaining them. I consider social structures as constructed in order to give meaning to all that we encounter in this world. Although I refer repeatedly to the concept of agency in this

thesis, I apply a relatively holistic ontology to the data. In other words, the factor of agency for the individual is always contextualised by the larger framework of elements that together form the interpretative system of our world. Although this approach lies on the edge between holism and individualism, the analysis of individuals as actors in this research is always contextualised by social, political and institutional structures and as motivated by social meanings. By studying social science from a hermeneutic point of view, I aim to give meaning to action. As Hollis declared: 'Actions derive their meaning from the shared ideas and rules of social life, and are performed by actors who mean something by them' (1994: 17). This thought will be a leading thread throughout this thesis.

As part of this research project I also conducted exploratory fieldwork in Colombo and London. Due to the short timeframe, most of my respondents were Tamil NGO-workers and academics, but some members of the diaspora were also interviewed. The sampling method for my interview respondents consisted of snowball sampling as well as simple random sampling. Snowball sampling proved to be useful in Sri Lanka, where people are frequently unwilling to speak about sensitive subjects like the war and the LTTE. My main contact in Colombo, a Tamil NGO-worker, introduced me to my interview respondents and they introduced me to more respondents. In London, I interviewed Tamil diaspora members through a method of simple random sampling, by selecting individuals from the larger population.

I would like to emphasise that the interviews are in no way used to draw generalisable conclusions and are not representative for the whole diaspora. Instead, these results were used to contextualise the results from the discourse analysis and to illustrate arguments with my experience in both Sri Lanka and London. Finally, the literature research of secondary sources that was carried out for this research project is discussed in the theoretical framework above and will be referred to throughout this thesis.

## **1.4 Chapter Outline**

In the following chapters, my thesis aims to show the transformation of the Tamil diaspora from a heavily divided and disillusioned group after the crumbling of the

LTTE in May 2009 into a strongly engaged diaspora with new leaders of thought and ideology and renewed mobilising capacity one year later. Although the diaspora is still divided, this thesis shows how the effect of the defeat of the LTTE made a significant frame shift in the diaspora possible, resulting in new initiatives and new possibilities for the future of both Sri Lanka and the diaspora. The chapters in this thesis are structured along the themes that emerged from critical discourse analysis.

Chapter 2 examines different diaspora roles in conflict to contextualise the initial response of the Tamil diaspora to the defeat of the LTTE. By looking into diaspora activism in relation to phases of conflict, the chapter aims to highlight patterns in the development of conflict ideologies in the post-war phase. Secondly, an analysis of the initial changes in diaspora activism after the Sri Lankan conflict intend to clarify the way in which the political opportunity structures of the defeat of the LTTE created space for the shifting of frames. Chapter 3 first looks into the underlying theoretical aspects of shifting frames and elaborates on the core understanding of the relationship between discursive frames and mobilisation in this thesis. Secondly, the chapter discusses the analysis of the first frame shift in the Tamil diaspora: the shift from supporting militancy towards a non-violent continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. By analysing the new initiatives in the diaspora that led to the remobilisation of the Tamils in the first year after the war, this section aims to provide insight in the changing dynamics in the diaspora as a result of the defeat of the LTTE. Chapter 4 looks at the second frame shift in the diaspora: from fighters to victims. It discusses the two most important cases in the human rights lobby of the Tamil diaspora: the detainees in the IDP camps of Sri Lanka and the Mullivaikal Massacre. Finally, it looks into the consequences of the increasing gap between Tamils in Sri Lanka and Tamils in the diaspora since the end of the conflict. Chapter 5 will discuss and conclude the findings of this thesis.

## CHAPTER 2: DIASPORA ROLES IN A POST-WAR SETTING

*Outside the University of London I meet a Tamil student. 'Well, Tamil-British,' she adds, since she was born in the UK. Her parents are from the north of Sri Lanka, but migrated to Brent, London, 26 years ago to move away from the violence. When I ask her if she follows the news from Sri Lanka, she nods fervently 'Of course! I feel part Tamil and I have family living there. The [world wide] web makes it much easier to follow everything, but you never know if it's all truthful.' Together with her parents she will be attending the Remembrance Day ceremony at Westminster on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2010. 'I sort of feel involved in the war, even though I never visited the north, where my parents are from. Not everyone feels that way, but I think it's our turn now to stand up and let everyone know what's happening back home.'*

Since the end of the war in Sri Lanka, the eye has turned to the resourceful diaspora for continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. Although a relapse into violence is not to be expected in the near future, examples from the past show the importance of reconciliation: looking at the ceasefire agreement in Sri Lanka in February 2002, the lack of dialogue and maintained discourses of violence resulted in a 'frozen peace' rather than sustainable reconciliation and eventually led to continuation of the conflict (Korf 2006). As the ICG described the current situation in Sri Lanka, it is 'a bitter peace' (ICG 2010a). Feelings of hatred and grief have not disappeared with the defeat of the LTTE and are brooding within the diaspora. We have seen that diasporas have become increasingly powerful actors in homeland conflicts in recent decades and for that reason it is important to ask what *kind* of roles can diasporas play in violent conflict?

This chapter outlines the different roles that are attributed to and claimed by conflict-originated diasporas in different phases of conflict. The focus of the chapter is on the question what happens to conflict-related ideologies of politically engaged diasporas once a conflict is terminated. Are diasporas peacemakers or peacewreckers? This chapter specifically examines the socio-political developments in the Tamil diaspora that transformed a rather stagnant and strong ideological framework into a setting that leaves ample space for major frame shifts. The analysis in the last section of the chapter will be contextualised by the preceding discussion of the history of Tamil diaspora activism from the viewpoint of the theories on different diaspora roles in violent conflict.

## 2.1 Different Roles

While the first chapter of this thesis examined the reasons for diasporas to become involved in homeland conflicts, the kind of influence they exert comes in different forms. According to Orjuela (2008), four different roles of diaspora in conflict can be distinguished:

1. direct support for the parties at war (remittances, funding, networks, information, resources, external factions);
2. advocacy and propaganda to mobilise international support (advocacy, discourse, protest, mobilisation);
3. influencing ideas and discourses in the homeland (media, cultural expression, democratisation in host country);
4. supporting development and reconstruction (remittances, investment, tourism).

Depending on the nature of the conflict, diasporas may choose one or more of these roles to play in the homeland. Similarly, these roles may also be attributed to diasporas by parties in the conflict itself. This is clearly visible in the Tamil diaspora, where the LTTE continuously pressed the Tamils abroad for support of the movement and funding of the war. Whether voluntary or forced, the role of the Tamil diaspora in funding resources for the war in Sri Lanka was a crucial factor in the continuation of violence at several stages of the conflict (Fair 2005; Orjuela 2008; Cochrane et. al. 2009).

Although the four roles distinguished by Orjuela seem relatively clear-cut, in reality they may work out in very different ways. As Orjuela herself acknowledges, diasporas are highly diverse: their backgrounds and ways of action vary immensely and it is usually only part of the diaspora that is politically engaged with the situation in the homeland. Moreover, sometimes very heterogeneous diasporas may even play contradictory roles when the community is heavily divided (Smith 2007). As a result, it is hard to discern patterns in the roles that diasporas choose to play in conflict. While diasporas can exert significant influence on conflicts in the homeland, the nature and phase of the conflict partly determines the way in which a diaspora acts. Clearly, diasporic activism is limited or made possible by the availability of resources and

political space to act. However, research has shown that diasporic activism changes accordingly to changing phases of conflict (Bercovitch 2007; Bernal 2006; Turner 2008).

Bercovitch argues that patterns in diaspora activism are indeed more clearly visible when linked to phases of conflict, distinguishing between political, economic, military and socio-cultural influence (2007; see Table 1).

<b>Conflict phase</b>	<b>Approach to conflict management</b>	<b>Patterns of diasporic activism</b>
Stable peace	Diplomacy	
Contradiction	Preventive measures	Political/ diplomatic: advocacy Economic: remittances, resources
Conflict emergence	Preventive measures	Political: lobby, advocacy Economic: remittances Military: direct support, recruitment
Conflict continuation	Crisis management	
Conflict escalation	Peace-keeping	
Violent conflict	Conflict containment	
Conflict termination	Peace-keeping	Political: promoting dialogue to external audience
De-escalation	Peace-making	
Post-conflict restructuring	Peace- building	Political: challenging regimes or corruption Economic: DDR, rebuilding Socio-cultural: promotion of justice, remembrance, reconciliation

Table 1: Conflict phases and approaches, related to patterns of influence by diasporic activism.

Source: adapted from Bercovitch (2007) and Miall et. al. (2005).

According to Bercovitch ‘the various phases of a conflict’s evolution [...] provide useful signposts for [...] the contribution that outside parties, such as diasporas, may make in each phase’ (2007: 25). Looking at the list above, Orjuela’s first role of direct support may have very different implications at different phases of conflict. For example, Table 1,

which was adapted from Bercovitch's table with additions from Miall et. al. (2005), shows how direct support in the form of remittances can be crucial in conflict emergence, while remittances may also be positively effective in the reconstruction in the post-conflict phase. As a London Tamil said: 'I used to donate part of my salary to the LTTE, but now they are not fighting I don't know for sure what to do.[...] I want to send money to my family, but only for building up our country instead of funding the war'.<sup>9</sup>

For the Tamil community, one of the resources that were most easily available and accessible for diaspora members to influence the Sri Lankan conflict was the Internet. During the conflict, websites like Tamilnet functioned as news providers for the ingroup as well as a medium to raise awareness among external parties.<sup>10</sup> However, diasporic use of the Internet in the Tamil community has always served a particular purpose that aligns with the phase of the homeland conflict, thus becoming an example for Bercovitch's theory. Ranganathan explains that the Internet functioned as the most authentic source of information during the conflict, making the diaspora an important factor in the war (2009). Where international news agencies and NGO's are silenced by the government, 'online sources that employ locals to pass on information fill the void for news from the other side' (Ranganathan 2009: 714). The changes from conflict to post-conflict setting, however, are still in progress and are only now starting to manifest in new media. As Ranganathan argues, the Tamil community in the homeland has put much pressure and faith in the diaspora for taking up the cause of Tamil Eelam, but the position of the diaspora must also be seen in the context of a second generation of Tamils abroad that may not be fully attached to the nationalist discourse (2009). On the other hand, the current peace process shows that anger and grievances are vividly present in the diaspora, possibly even more than in the homeland (ICG 2010). As a result, the Internet is still an important source of power for the Tamil diaspora, but asks for a different approach. Instead of providing news, websites like Tamilnet, Sangam and the BTF now focus on either advocacy and lobbying or mobilising the community.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Tamil activist, male, in London, 19 May 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Although Tamilnet is highly popular among Tamils, there are many other news websites, such as the Tamil Guardian, Tamil Nation and Tamil Eelam News.

## 2.2 Peacemakers or peacewreckers?

Looking at Table 1, we may ask: are diasporas peacemakers or peacewreckers?

According to Smith, it is impossible to discern predictive patterns in either the constructive, destructive or latent character of the diaspora's role in conflict: research of many cases has shown that diasporas and conflict are simply too diverse to draw generalisable conclusions (2007). However, it seems that the historical context of the diaspora is the key to understanding the interests and ways of diasporas as it characterises the members of the diaspora and their actions (Smith 2007). As the philosopher Gadamer argues on what he calls 'effective historical consciousness', all human understanding of the world around us is historicised by our experiences. In other words, human consciousness is not so much a reflection of the past as it is an operation on past experiences (Gadamer 1989). In this thesis, I argue that diasporic roles in conflict, particularly in the post-conflict phase, are largely determined by their past experiences. Following Gadamer's theory, what diaspora members understand as 'truth' can hardly be contextualised by predictive patterns as there is no external meaning to the conscious meaning that people attribute themselves. In addition, diaspora activism in the post-war phase is case-specific because the human understanding of truth is fluid and constantly affected by new experiences. Although the tables above show that there are similarities among diasporas, their actions are dependable on historical circumstances to such an extent that any analysis should be contextualised very carefully.

Shain argues that there are four factors that determine the diaspora's stance towards conflict resolution:

1. Identity maintenance
2. Contesting the leadership of the transnational ethnic community
3. Organisational and bureaucratic interests in homeland conflicts
4. Concerns about the political and social status in the host society (2002: 128-134).

First of all, maintaining the collective identity is an important factor for the diaspora, particularly in the light of Brewer's theory. The homeland may be seen as the 'physical

embodiment' of the diaspora, forming the basis of its collective identity. How this influences the diaspora's stance depends on the position of the warring parties in the conflict towards this identity and the extent to which this identity is linked to the root causes of the conflict. In case of the Tamils, for instance, the struggle for Tamil Eelam is intricately linked to the diaspora's identity. As a result, support of the conflict is at the same time support for the maintenance of the collective identity of the diaspora. In the Tamil case, the stance of the diaspora would most likely be positive towards the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. Later in this thesis we will see that identity maintenance is an important factor, but that it does not necessarily suggest support for the continuation of *violence*.

Secondly, the leadership of a transnational ethnic community may be contested when homeland elites do not acknowledge the main actors in the diaspora. On the other hand, when diaspora organisations are closely linked to one of the parties in conflict, like the LTTE had transnational factions, nationalist politics become a common goal rather than an issue of contention. Still, contested leadership is not unknown to the Tamil diaspora: a report by the Tamilnet Editorial Board, just weeks after the defeat of the LTTE, stated that:

'No one should forget that the diaspora, especially of those who migrated after the 1972 constitution have a say on Tamil Eelam, as the Eezham<sup>11</sup> Tamils have not accepted the Sri Lankan state and have become the diaspora largely as a consequence to it.'<sup>12</sup>

Particularly now the different interests and opinions of the Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in the diaspora become more strongly divided, transnational leadership is a significant issue. This will be discussed more extensively in the third chapter of this thesis.

Thirdly, diasporas may have organisational and political interests in the homeland conflict. As Shain says: 'settlement of a homeland conflict may threaten long-cherished

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<sup>11</sup> The term 'Eezham' is an alternative spelling for 'Eelam' that is frequently used in various texts about the Tamil community. 'Eezham' stands for the geographical territory of Sri Lanka as a whole and thus the reference of 'Eezham Tamils' indicates the belonging to the country, rather than specific ethnicity.

<sup>12</sup> 'Historic task awaits all freedom fighters', Tamilnet, 7 June 2009. Available at: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=29547>.

political institutions in the diaspora community' (2002: 132). If the existence of the conflict itself is associated with the maintenance of diaspora institutions, it is not likely that the diaspora will function as 'peacemaker'. If a conflict does reach settlement under such circumstances, a resurgence of the related diaspora organisations can be expected. A similar development was seen in the Tamil diaspora, only days after the defeat of the LTTE, when numerous diaspora-run websites called for continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam:

It is time for the Tamils to reignite their struggle for freedom with more vigour and commitment. It is time for the Tamils to learn from the mistakes of the past and march forward towards protecting their homeland. It is time for the Tamils to mobilise their global resources to launch diplomatic & economic offensives against the Sri Lanka. It is time for the Tamils to bring the Sinhala Buddhist regime which is attempting to destroy us to the courts of justice. It is time for the Tamils to act, act immediately and act wisely.<sup>13</sup>

'It is also high time now that all Tamil entities join together in truly reflecting the minds of the people they claim to serve rather than serving the minds of others. Failing, they may never be able to find political or social platform among their own people.'<sup>14</sup>

As we have seen in the past year, these statements were followed through for the largest part in the form of new institutional and political initiatives, as will be discussed extensively in chapter 3.

Finally, political and social status in the host country can influence a diaspora's stance towards the homeland conflict. This was visible in the Tamil diaspora after the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. When the LTTE was defined as a terrorist organisation this had a negative effect on Tamil diaspora members in countries where the War of Terror started in full force. As a result, many diaspora members chose not to support the armed struggle of the LTTE any longer. However, it is not likely that this factor will have any effect on the current lobby in the Tamil diaspora.

Whether diasporas are peacemakers or peace wreckers clearly depends on many

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<sup>13</sup> 'Time to Transcend and Transform', Sangam, 20 May 2009. Available at: [http://www.sangam.org/2009/05/Transcend\\_Transform.php?print=true](http://www.sangam.org/2009/05/Transcend_Transform.php?print=true).

<sup>14</sup> 'Demonstrate the politics of war', Tamilnet, 24 May 2009. Available at: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=29444>.

different factors. However, these theories hardly look into the post-conflict phase in particular. In this phase of conflict I argue that other rules apply when it comes to the role of diasporas. Clearly, resources, organisational structures and historical context play a large part in this, but at this stage another major factor comes into play: the nature of the settlement. In my opinion, the way in which a conflict is ended largely contributes to the character of diasporic influence. For example, violent conflict can end in a ceasefire, a peace accord, negotiated peace or non-negotiated peace. All have different implications for the parties involved and the relationship between them. Looking at the Tamil community worldwide, there is much anger against the Sinhalese government since the end of the conflict and grievances are aggravated due to a lack of reconciliation and justice. The non-negotiated settlement at the end of the asymmetrical Sri Lankan conflict now results in demonstrations in the diaspora and a negative feeling towards the GoSL. The Tamil demonstrations on Remembrance Day, 18 May 2010, in Westminster London illustrated how the end of the conflict affected the Tamil people: the central messages were 'justice for the victims', 'call for war crimes investigations', 'boycott Sri Lanka' and 'massacre'. As a Tamil diaspora member said: 'More than 40,000 Tamils were murdered by Colombo. We all heard the stories and saw the images.[...] There is nothing fair about this peace and now we want justice.'<sup>15</sup>

### **2.3 The Tamil diaspora in the Sri Lankan conflict**

Does the nature of a violent conflict change when diasporas become politically engaged? In other words, in what way can diasporas influence conflicts? To answer this question we will look at our case study of the Tamil diaspora to examine diaspora involvement in homeland conflicts.

In the years of conflict in Sri Lanka, the LTTE has built an extensive overseas network in the various diasporic Tamil communities around the world. This network includes transnational – political - branches of the LTTE and an extensive infrastructure for resources and funding. Since the defeat of the LTTE, the network has mostly remained intact, thus providing the opportunity for regrouping of the organisation in the international Tamil community or use of the network for other Eelam related

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Tamil diaspora member, male, in London, 18 May 2010.

purposes (ICG 2010b: 8). The Tamil diaspora has been most well known for its financial role in funding the LTTE, being a crucial factor in the prolonging of the war at several stages. According to the International Crisis Group, remittances by all Sri Lankans worldwide were estimated around \$ 2,8 billion in 2009 (ICG 2010b). Although the LTTE collected part of their money by force, as a form of tax or by threatening those who sought protection of the LTTE, many Tamils also gave their money willingly (Fair 2005). Voluntary donations were frequently either the result of belief in the cause of the LTTE or because of family members living in the conflict. This was also visible from the fact that donations increased when the LTTE was successful and declined after setbacks (Fair 2005). In addition, the LTTE's use of informal banking made it possible for diaspora members to send money to family and loved ones where this might otherwise have been problematic.<sup>16</sup> To illustrate, since the defeat of the LTTE, the diaspora is forced to use other channels for sending remittances: the Bank of Ceylon claims that remittances from the UK have 'risen sharply to a monthly average of three million sterling pounds now from 50,000 pounds earlier' (Sunday Times 2010).

Beside the financial aspect, the Tamil diaspora also fulfilled a function of advocating for the situation of the Tamils. Key themes were repression, injustice and, more recently, also human rights abuse. The Sri Lankan conflict has been intricately connected with a strong emotional sense of victimisation and injustice on the side of the Tamils. Thus the mobilisation of international support has been considered as an important responsibility of the diaspora since many years. An important factor in this process is the existence of a large network of diaspora-run media, part of which is the leading focus of this thesis. With a twofold role of raising awareness and informing the Tamil community at the same time, diaspora-run media 'contributes to forming opinions and framing the understanding of conflict and peace issues' (Orjuela 2008: 446). This role of the diaspora is thus also of symbolic importance for hope and alternative solutions to the seemingly endless problems between the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Closer to the end of the war, this diaspora role became more prominent, particularly when the LTTE's power diminished. A distinct human rights discourse with the recurring theme of war crimes has received increasing amounts of attention from the

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<sup>16</sup> Informal banking systems, used in many South Asian and Middle Eastern countries, are also known as the 'Hawala' trade.

international community, particularly since the end of the conflict, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

However, it has to be noted that the Tamil community cannot be considered as a unitary being that advocates for the cause of Tamil Eelam: not every Tamil supported the Tigers during the war and not every Tamil in the diaspora considered him or herself to be part of this struggle (ICG 2010b). Since the defeat of the LTTE, the diaspora has been more divided than ever. On top of that, there seems to be an increasing disjuncture between the interests and needs of Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in the diaspora. At the Academic Roundtable on 'Sri Lanka in Transition' at Utrecht University in May 2010, Nicholas van Hear (2006) argued that the diaspora should now be distinguished into four separate strands as a result of shifting dynamics after the defeat of the LTTE on the basis of recent fieldwork:<sup>17</sup>

1. LTTE rump/old guard
2. LTTE heritage (including and especially the second generation Tamils)
3. Middle guard/middle ground (attempts at opening up the discussion for pluralism. Resurgence of the struggle for Tamil Eelam outside the LTTE sphere, though not as well organised as other strands of the diaspora.
4. Anti-LTTE factions

The middle two categories are most interesting for this thesis, because these are the new diasporic fractions that have become active after the war. The LTTE heritage is now becoming more visible as the new generation of Tamils seems eager to take over their parents' fight. As the Financial Times wrote in October 2009, the young Tamils are 'swapping bombs for blackberry's' and are willing to aid the LTTE heritage in the struggle for Tamil Eelam<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, the middle guard of the diaspora is organising itself around alternative efforts to claim Tamil Eelam and to attain justice. Although this group is still crystallising its aims and organisational structures, their actions will be discussed extensively in this thesis. Whether new and alternative initiatives like the GTF and the TGTE solely resulted from the efforts of this middle

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<sup>17</sup> These arguments are based on unpublished research on the Tamil diaspora after the defeat of the LTTE by Nicholas Van Hear in cooperation with Catherine Brun. Publication forthcoming.

<sup>18</sup> See [http://www.sangam.org/2009/10/Young\\_Tamils.php?uid=3717](http://www.sangam.org/2009/10/Young_Tamils.php?uid=3717).

guard is debatable, since the LTTE heritage is also active in this area, but this will be examined in later chapters.

The case of the Sri Lankan conflict shows that diasporas can play a significant or even crucial role in homeland conflicts. As external actors in violent conflict, they frequently have different tools available to influence the situation at home. It also shows that an event as the defeat of the LTTE – and thus a new phase of conflict – can result in shifting dynamics in diaspora activism and eventually lead to renewed mobilisation. In other words, new dynamics make space for new roles to play.

#### **2.4 Post-war ideology: who takes the lead?**

As soon as the war in Sri Lanka ended, one of the first questions to be asked was: what is left of the ideology of Tamil Eelam? The initial debate among Tamils was around the question whether the diaspora was responsible for the continuation after the defeat of the LTTE or not. Although the diaspora admitted that militancy had failed, talk of the possibility for a non-violent continuation of the fight soon established (ICG 2010b). This eventually resulted in new political realities such as the Global Tamil Forum and the Transnational Government for Tamil Eelam, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The post-war phase in Sri Lanka can be considered as a new ‘episode of contention’ in the words of Tilly and Tarrow (2007). Episodes, defined as ‘bounded sequences of contentious interaction’, can be characterised by a certain event that led to the start or the resurgence of contention (Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Analysing and comparing documentation of such episodes can thus point to the signifiers of systemic change. As was explained in the last chapter, new episodes or events may create space for renewed relations between actors and new roles to be taken on. For the Tamil diaspora, this development implied taking over the responsibility of the LTTE for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. Being one of the three major themes that emerged from the qualitative content analysis that was conducted for this research, the diaspora’s role in terms of *responsibility* was a major concern in the Tamil community relatively soon after the defeat of the LTTE. Chronologically parallel with the discourse of alleged war crimes and retribution – as will be discussed in chapter 4 – the many

reports in the archives of Tamilnet and Sangam showed how the diaspora claimed and received the role of the LTTE's 'substitute' in the fight for the homeland.

However, to state that the diaspora claimed this role as a unitary being is too hasty. On the contrary, as was stated above, the post-war Tamil diaspora is more divided than ever. In London, a Sri Lankan NGO-worker told me: 'The diaspora is messed up. There is no consensus at all and all their initiatives will come to nothing. [...] Tamils march the streets at demonstrations, but they only represent a small part of the Tamil community.'<sup>19</sup> If the diaspora is indeed divided, how then was the image of a unified diaspora created after the war? The following samples from online reports and articles allow some insight in the first post-war steps towards remobilisation in the Tamil community, but also indicate how consensus mobilisation is still to be reached (emphasis by author, spelling as in the original text):

(1) 'The onus of facing the situation *now entirely rests on the Eezham* Tamil diaspora, as it is the only entity that has the freedom of expression.'<sup>20</sup>

(2) 'The transformation of the struggle from the command structure to a popular participatory structure may have initial difficulties but the *nation cannot shun from its responsibility*.'<sup>21</sup>

(3) 'Our foremost priority is to help *our brethren* in pain.'<sup>22</sup>

(4) 'With freedom and democracy suppressed by an arrogant dictatorship of the Rajapakse-brothers and the genocidal events continuing behind closed doors, it is the *sacred duty* of the Diaspora Tamils to bring these crimes to the international community and press for action.'<sup>23</sup>

(5) '*Let us not betray* the struggle nor its goals as evolved, formulated and consolidated by the sacrifice of many thousands of combatants and civilians under the leadership of the

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Sri Lankan NGO-worker, London, 15 May 2010.

<sup>20</sup> 'The Onus is on the Diaspora', Tamilnet, 7 July 2009, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=29734>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem

<sup>22</sup> 'Time for diaspora to stand up for homeland Tamils', Tamilnet, 6 July 2009, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=29731>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem

LTTE.<sup>24</sup>

All of these five examples are derived from Tamilnet and were published in the first weeks of July 2009. At the first sight, they seem to contain a threefold message: that the struggle for Tamil Eelam is not over; that the diaspora has the capacity to act against the GoSL and defeat is not an option; and that the grievances that drove the Tamils into violence in the first place are not forgotten. However, there is more to these texts than a unitary message to the GoSL and the international community. First of all, these samples clearly refer to the larger narrative of the nation and the ideology of Tamil Eelam as the rightful homeland of the Tamils. Each sample appeals to the responsibility of the Tamil diaspora by including signifiers of either the heritage of the Tamil people or their current conditions. Samples 1 and 2, for example, emphasise the 'Eezham' background of the Tamils and the collective belonging to a nation. Samples 3 to 5 are the words of a former Jaffnese vicar and current President of the Global Tamil Forum, S. J. Emmanuel, and go further than the first two by speaking of 'brethren in pain' and 'sacred duty'. Phrases like 'nation', 'us' and 'our brethren' imply a common ancestry that calls for unitary action.

Instead of the objective news reports that are characteristic for Tamilnet, the website now seems to focus on addressing the ingroup directly in order to mobilise the Tamil people for collective action. Interestingly, the samples above now show significant similarity to the articles of Sangam, a source that is traditionally addressing the Tamil community with clear boundaries towards the outgroup. Consider the following samples of Sangam from the same time period as the samples above:

(6) 'Diaspora youth have to give the Sri Lanka Government an ultimatum: Resettle the internment camp civilians, and propose a just and fair approach to resolve the Tamil political question. Or face the wrath of the diaspora.'<sup>25</sup>

(7) 'View the possibilities: Boycott Sri Lanka products. [...] Target Big-Label companies. [...] Stick a bad label on Sri Lanka Tea. Similarly, stick a bad label on tourism industry;

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<sup>24</sup> 'Do not weaken the goals and direction of Eelam struggle', Tamilnet, 8 July 2009.  
<http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=29747>.

<sup>25</sup> 'Diaspora Youths Should Lead', Sangam, 13 July 2009,  
[http://www.sangam.org/2009/07/Youths\\_Lead.php?uid=3611](http://www.sangam.org/2009/07/Youths_Lead.php?uid=3611).

“Wish to sunbathe in blood soaked beaches?”<sup>26</sup>

Although the message of samples 6 and 7 are comparable to the samples from Tamilnet, there is an interesting difference in tone. Where Tamilnet discusses the possible ways forward after the defeat of the LTTE and seems to mobilise its supporters towards collective action, Sangam appears to address the diaspora as a unitary group with collective needs and interests. The tone of the texts is frequently written in the imperative form of writing and seems to give direct orders to the diaspora. If we compare the reports on Tamilnet to those of Sangam in the same timeframe, it becomes clear that the regrouping of the diaspora is a more prominent issue for the latter. From the 18<sup>th</sup> of May until the end of July, diaspora-related issues seem rather quiet except for the reports mentioned above. Sangam, on the other hand, reports frequently of remobilisation, gathering what is left of the movement, and calls for boycotts or other forms of action. This difference is easily explained when looking at the backgrounds of the websites: while Tamilnet claims to report objectively, Sangam is linked to the association of Tamils in the USA. This is, for instance, clearly visible when one visits the Sangam website: on the front page visitors are called to boycott Sri Lanka and support the campaign of Tamils against genocide.<sup>27</sup>

However, since the end of the war, the number of opinion articles and features, displaying voices that are aimed directly at the Tamil community, is increasing despite Tamilnet’s claim to objective journalism. The fact that Tamilnet publishes such reports, even though part represents the voice of external actors, is significant in the historical context of the website. In the first years after the founding of Tamilnet, the two main problems of the website in reaching an audience beyond the Tamil community were its nationalistic discourse in the content of the website and the lack of recognition of Tamil concerns by the international community, the latter resulting in ignorance of the website by the masses. Whitaker argues that, in solving the problem, Tamilnet’s founders adapted to the market-popular forms of writing: ‘the seemingly “objective neutral” hyperreality of the [...] Western press and academia’ (2004: 487). According to Whitaker, the discursive styles of new media are twofold: on the one hand, in form they adapt to market-popularity, by conforming to a familiar product that ‘sells’. Tamilnet has

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<sup>26</sup> Ibidem

<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.sangam.org/>. The Sangam homepage was last accessed on 18 July 2010.

adapted to the larger market by copying appearances of Western online news banks in order to reach a wider audience. In access, on the other hand, they are driven by what Whitaker calls 'identity-resistance popularity' (2004: 472). This latter style aims at a 'kind of identity-asserting and resistance-driven popularity' (Whitaker 2004: 471). In other words, the access to websites such as Tamilnet are largely determined by the identity that is presented in terms of content and the boundaries that may be drawn by this, for example through the use of nationalist symbolism.

Interestingly, it is the same nationalistic discourse that was problematic in the first years that is now increasingly visible on Tamilnet. The post-war phase coincided with an increase of nationalism in the diaspora. As Whitaker explains, Tamilnet's success is the result of its ability to adapt to the demands of the market they aim to reach (2004). In the light of Bercovitch's theory on diaspora activism in different phases of conflict, this responsiveness to the situation is not surprising. Now that the Sri Lankan conflict has ended, it seems that Tamilnet has yet taken on a new role. Apparently, the actors behind the website now consider the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam as important a role for the diaspora as playing the watchdog.

In the light of the effect of the defeat of the LTTE on discourses of violence and reconciliation in the Tamil diaspora, this chapter has shown that the end of the conflict brings new dynamics in the relationship between the different actors in the conflict. As the eye has turned to the diaspora in the post-war phase, it is particularly this group of Tamils that experiences the shifting and restructuring relationships. The chapter has shown that diaspora can play significant roles in conflict, in both positive and negative ways. The post-war phase opens space for new collective action and a possible continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. With the end of the conflict the Tamil ideology has not disappeared. How this has led to three major new initiatives or remobilisation in the diaspora will be discussed in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER 3: SHIFTING FRAMES – RECLAIMING THE NARRATIVE OF THE NATION

*It is the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2010, exactly one year after the ending of the war in Sri Lanka. At Westminster, London, the square is filling up with Tamils, dressed in black. Some hold candles in their hands, other lay flowers at Churchill's statue, where a large sign of the number 40,000 overlooks the square. It stands for all the victims that were killed in the final months of the war. The silent mass of people is in sharp contrast with the loud roaring of the cars and buses that surround them during rush hour. It is Remembrance Day, organised by the British Tamils Forum, in commemoration of those who fell. However, other unresolved issues also shine through in this mass of people: between all the black, red Tiger flags are held up high, reminding the audience of the fact that the fight is not over and the Tigers are not forgotten. Towards the end of the demonstration the flags are taken down. A Tamil woman tells me: 'My family died in the war and I cry for them every day. I also have feelings of revenge, but this is not the time to show them. I got so angry when I saw the flags that I asked them [the organisation] to take them down and I'm glad they did. We need alternative and peaceful campaigns now, not the Tigers'.<sup>28</sup>*

As the main question of this thesis implies, a process of mobilisation enables the manifestation or the changing of discourses. We cannot assume that a discourse or a discursive frame appears out of nowhere, thus implicating the existence of actors behind this process. I argue that the dominant frame in a certain discourse can only thrive as a result of an active and *performative* process that creates consensus among the people involved. In other words, new discursive frames need mobilisation of thought in order to manifest. However, it would be too shortsighted to presume that mobilisation only precedes frame shifts and leave it at that. Not only do discursive frames need to be maintained and reinvented, as was explained in the theoretical framework in chapter 1, they can also *lead* to mobilisation and collective action. For that reason, I propose a cyclical understanding of the relationship between mobilisation and discursive frames. This chapter aims to provide insight in the interacting spiral of mobilisation and framing that forms current discourses of violence and reconciliation in the Tamil diaspora by examining the shifting of ideological frames before and after the defeat of the LTTE. By

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Tamil activist, female, London, 18 May 2010.

addressing theoretical issues such as agency, meta-narratives, collective memory and the power of social cognition in the process of frame alignment, chapter 3 aims to give insight in the direct effect of the defeat of the LTTE on the Tamil diaspora on discourses of violence and reconciliation.

The conceptual understanding of discourse and mobilisation that is explored here is based on the empirical evidence from critical discourse analysis of online reports and articles in the Tamil community. The results of the fieldwork that was conducted for this research show interesting patterns of changing discourses of violence and reconciliation, thus raising several new questions: first of all, as soon as the war ended, the Tamil diaspora chose a non-violent continuation of the struggle. Does this imply a clean break with the LTTE ideology that was dominant for decades? If yes, what is the reason for this drastic turn? Is this choice made for a lack of resources to continue the cause of the LTTE or was there more unrest in the Tamil community to begin with? Secondly, the diaspora has shown a shift from supporting militarism towards a discourse of human rights abuse in the longer run after the war. In other words: the fighters have become victims. Should this shift be seen as a natural development or rather as a strategic move? However, as this discursive frame is currently the core of the diaspora lobby the analysis of the second frame shift will be continued in the next chapter to allow for a more extensive analysis.

In short, this chapter is about the organisational practices that enable discourses to transform into active discursive frames that have the power to lead to collective action and about the process of frame shifting in the Tamil diaspora. As the main problem of this thesis has historical, empirical and theoretical components, this chapter is structured as such. The first section examines the historical aspect of the new initiatives in the diaspora. This is followed by a discussion of the major changes in discourses of violence and reconciliation in the Tamil community, as derived from critical discourse analysis. The last section aims to show how the evidence presented here leads to a more complex understanding of the relationship between discourse and mobilisation than is frequently assumed in various existing theories.

### 3.1 Remobilisation in transnational space

In the light of social movement theories, the Tamil diaspora can be considered as an existing social movement. However, the formation of the diaspora as a movement was based on the structures of the LTTE during the war. Only after 1983 did mass migration take place as a result of the conflict. Hence the diaspora is mostly a so-called 'victim diaspora', rather than, for example, and diaspora of economic migrants. As we have seen, the defeat of the LTTE left the diaspora without the leadership they had relied on for many years. Although the diaspora played a significant role during the war, as discussed in chapter 2, the different diaspora organisations usually acted in cooperation with the LTTE and not alone. It was the LTTE that coordinated most of the diaspora activism through its main umbrella organisations (Fair 2005). For that reason, it is not surprising that the diaspora would feel the need to regroup or remobilise in order to continue the struggle for Tamil Eelam after the defeat of the LTTE. The remobilisation of the diaspora is still an ongoing process at the time of writing, but the foundation has been laid out in the past year through three major new initiatives in the Tamil community: the Global Tamil Forum (GTF); the referendum on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution of 1976; and the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE). The development of these initiatives paralleled the first significant frame shift in the Tamil diaspora: the new discourse of openly choosing the non-violent continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam instead of militarism. This section explores the three initiatives and discusses its effect on discursive frames.

#### 3.1.a Global Tamil Forum

The first new initiative, the GTF, was founded only months after the defeat of the LTTE on the 23rd of July in 2009. This umbrella organisation was formed by several grass root diaspora organisations<sup>29</sup> 'to restore Tamil Peoples right to self-determination and democratic self-rule in their traditional homeland'.<sup>30</sup> As one of the first initiatives after

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<sup>29</sup> For a list of all participating Tamil diaspora organisation, see: <http://www.globaltamilforum.org/gtf/>.

<sup>30</sup> Quote from 'About GTF', available on <http://www.globaltamilforum.org/gtf/content/about-gtf>.

the war, this new congregation was meant to unite the Tamils under a single transnational banner for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. The GTF was quick to declare its non-violent means to reach its goals, not directly following the footsteps of the LTTE. The announcement of the formation of the GTF in July was mostly symbolic, since the official inauguration of the umbrella organisation only took place in February 2010. At the Inaugural General Meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the GTF was addressed by several British MPs, which led to much anger from the GoSL. It was argued by the GoSL that the GTF was a cover-up for what used to be the LTTE, but their voices were not heard by the British government.

Soon after the formation of the GTF, it seems the organisation chose another issue as its main concern: human rights. Where the GTF's initial main concern was self-determination for the Tamil people, this seems to have changed into a human rights discourse that rather fights for justice. In historical context this is not a surprising development: in the last months of 2009 the problematic situation with internally displaced people in Sri Lanka deteriorated fast and received much attention from the international community. Whether this development of the GTF was a strategic move or not will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

### **3.1.b Referendum:**

In 1976, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) unanimously adopted a resolution on the rights to self-determination and self-rule, a mandate for 'the restoration and reconstitution of the Free Sovereign, Secular, Socialist State of TAMIL EELAM' (TULF 1976). Later this resolution would be known as the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution.<sup>31</sup> Towards the end of the war in Sri Lanka, 33 years later, the mandate was brought up again for the first time by the Tamil diaspora in France. Because no democratic space has been provided for the Tamils since 1976, a secret ballot was organised for French Tamils to express their will for Tamil Eelam as nationhood, based on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution. The result was unanimous support to the military struggle of the Tamils, as stated in a press release on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2009:

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<sup>31</sup> Also spelled as Vaddukoddai.

'Nous déclarons au nom du peuple tamoul qui a plébiscité la résolution de Vaddukkoddaï, que nous sommes infailliblement solidaires de la lutte d'indépendance menée par les Forces Tamoules sur la terre tamoule en vue de la libérer de l'occupation militaire. Nous déclarons que la volonté d'indépendance du peuple tamoul, démocratiquement exprimée en 1977, est encore actuelle et légitime.' (Tamilnet, 10 May 2009).<sup>32</sup>

This statement would be the first step towards the fully organized referenda on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution that were held in many countries with Tamil diasporas. The first official referendum for all eligible Tamil voters was held in Norway on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 and had a significant outcome: over 80% of all eligible voters turned up to vote and 99% of the votes aspired Tamil Eelam. All following referenda, mostly in western countries had similar turnouts with a record of 99,4% pro Tamil Eelam in Australia in April 2010. Although it is very hard to say how many people in the diaspora are politically active or in support of the new initiatives of the Tamils, the referendum results indicate an undeniable choice of the diaspora for the continuation of the struggle. Although there is much debate about the transformation of the struggle, the eventual goal of Tamil Eelam is not forgotten.

This form of self-organised democracy received much attention from the media and the international community. Naturally, the professionally organised referenda indicate a strong mobilising capacity of the Tamil diaspora and show that the longing for an independent Tamil Eelam did not cease with the end of the conflict. However, the question remains to what extent the outcome will have any effect of the future cause of the diaspora. In any case, the democratic set-up of these referenda provided an excellent base for the formation of another diaspora initiative that followed shortly after the war: the concept of a transnational government.

### **3.1.c Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam**

Probably the most interesting of all new initiatives in the diaspora is the Transnational Government that the Tamils formed after the war. The TGTE is intended as a tool for the Tamil diaspora 'to pursue Tamil aspirations through political and diplomatic means in

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<sup>32</sup> Full press release available at: <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=79&artid=29314>.

the immediate future' (TGTE 2010). Parallel with the referendum on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution, the TGTE was set up swiftly after the defeat of the LTTE and developed itself more professionally in the year after. When the military base of the Tamils in the form of the LTTE collapsed, it was felt by part of the diaspora that there was a need for a political entity to strengthen and unite the Tamils in their struggle for Tamil Eelam. As was stated on Tamilnet exactly four weeks after the end of the war:

'A situation is going to emerge in which no Tamil in the home country could open mouth to ask for justice and to express their heart-felt aspirations. Only the diaspora and the transnational government could uphold the freedom of aspiration and freedom of expression of Eezham Tamils.'<sup>33</sup>

The 'situation' that the citation refers to, obviously, has to be contextualised by the developments in May 2009. The end of the war led to thousands of casualties with an almost genocidal character – as the Tamil would later claim. On top of that, after the war it became more evident that the newly attained 'peace' would be relatively one-sided: particularly in the political sense, the Tamils are basically voiceless in Sri Lanka. President Rajapaksa's victory speech on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2009 said that there were no minorities in Sri Lanka, only those who 'have no love for the land of their birth' (ICG 2010a: 12). Since then the Rajapaksa government has made no attempts to reform the political field in Sri Lanka and the presidential and parliamentary elections on the 26 January and 8 April 2010 showed again that there is currently no possibility for Tamils to participate in politics. In the light of these developments it is not surprising that the Tamil diaspora chose to take political matters into their own hands.

Like the referendum, the concept of the TGTE is based on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution in 1976 in order to regenerate the democratic climate that existed at that time. The success of the referendum in 2010 showed that the diaspora still has the capacity to mobilise and thus laid the base for the large-scale elections that took place for the formation of the Transnational Constituent Assembly. On the one hand, the TGTE seems to hold on to traditional forms of governance and democracy as the foundation of this project. For example, the final report of the Advisory Committee on the foundation of

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<sup>33</sup> 'Breaking the deadlock through transnational governance', Tamilnet 15 June 2009, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=29596>.

the provisional TGTE (2010) repeatedly refers to institutions, such as the EU and NAFTA, and to international law (IL) and international human rights law (IHRL), such as the right to public participation in democratic governance and participation in constitution making (TGTE 2010).<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, the same report emphasises the novelty of transnational governance and the uniqueness of this endeavour. According to the report, the TGTE should not be confused with a government in exile, since it has no specific host country. If, for instance, the TGTE would be compared to the Tibetan government in exile, that would overlook the lack of space that the Tamils received for such an undertaking in comparison (Tamilnet, 15 June 2009).<sup>35</sup>

The concept of transnational governance is a new phenomenon indeed. In the report of the advisory committee it is argued that this form of governance is a natural consequence of transnational life (TGTE 2010). In the light of increasing political weight of diasporas such an argument seems to make sense, but the question remains to what extent the TGTE will have the power to reach the political participation that it aims for.

### **3.2 Frame Shift 1: From militancy to non-violent struggle**

What do these initiatives tell us about the effect of the defeat of the LTTE on discourses of violence and reconciliation in the western Tamil diaspora? As soon as the war in Sri Lanka ended, the diaspora sent out a clear message to the rest of the world that the defeat of the LTTE did not imply the end of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. The swift remobilisation efforts in the diaspora in the form of the initiatives described above showed the GoSL as well as the international community that the Tamils were still capable of mobilising the community. On the one hand, such messages implied hope for many Tamils, as it suggested that their case for self-determination was not lost. On the other hand, the defeat of the LTTE also laid bare the division within the Tamil community: even though the results of the referendum on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution showed unification of the Tamil voice, this does not indicate the trust of the Tamil people in undertakings such as the TGTE. Several respondents in the London

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<sup>34</sup> The TGTE was first known as the Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (PTGTE). Only after the elections in 2010 the word 'provisional' was removed.

<sup>35</sup> 'Breaking the deadlock through transnational governance', Tamilnet, 15 June 2009, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=29596>.

Tamil diaspora told me that they did not have faith in transnational governance. As a Tamil activist declared:

'I don't believe that the transnational government will have any effect in international politics. Don't think that people in Sri Lanka will see anything change now that this government is set up. There are some who see hope in these ventures, but the diaspora is far too divided to support [the TGTE] with the unitary voice that it needs. Until we can act as one group, this government will be powerless'.<sup>36</sup>

Considering the response of a number of diaspora members to the remobilisation, it should be emphasised once again that these developments in the Tamil community are the efforts of the politically active part of the diaspora only. It is hard to determine how many people truly act in the name of or support the diaspora, since many Tamils are not willing to speak of organisational diaspora practices as a result of fear in the LTTE-era. However, as I stated earlier, this research means to show the shifting of discursive frames as part of a mobilisation process that is still developing. The discursive frames presented here thus represent the politically engaged part of the diaspora rather than the whole Tamil community.

CDA of text sources on the new initiatives of the diaspora show a clear discursive frame that is distinctly different from discourses prior to defeat of the LTTE: a choice for non-violence. Regard the following samples of the way in which the TGTE is presented (emphasis by the author):

(1) {T]he transnational government we speak of is a novel experiment that has no precedence. Whatever excuses there may be, the contemporary world system including its apex body the United Nations, have shown least regards for the life, safety, dignity and human rights of Eezham Tamils and even now continue to abet structural genocide in the island of Sri Lanka. There is no second word that *all Eezham Tamils* are traumatised and grieved by the grave *injustice* committed on them *by the entire world system*. Unless the world system recognizes the self-determination of Eezham Tamils and directly intervenes in the island, no justice is going to be seen.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview Tamil activist at a London-based Tamil NGO, London, 15 May 2010.

<sup>37</sup> 'Breaking the deadlock through transnational governance', Tamilnet, 15 June 2009, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=29596>.

(2) 'In a situation, when the guns of three decades old armed struggle were silenced to avoid human catastrophe of Mu'l'livaaykkaal, the responsibility and duty of taking the leadership of the continuity of the struggle have been handed over to all Tamil speaking people, particularly to those in the diaspora. *Righteous* and long aspiration of Tamils to get independence and sovereignty is now negated at various levels by twisting that it was only an aim of the LTTE.'<sup>38</sup>

(3) The 30-year long *legitimate* campaign of the Eelam Tamils to realize their *right to self-determination* led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has suffered a serious setback through military aggression by the Sri Lankan armed forces, during which these armed forces violated of humanitarian laws and all civilized norms. [...]

A symptom of the *lack of political space* for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka is the 1983 Sixth Amendment to the constitution of Sri Lanka which prohibits even discussion of a separate state, in violation of freedom of speech. *The physical insecurity* of Tamils is embodied in the 1979 Prevention of Terrorism Act [...] and in the Emergency laws that have allowed hundreds of thousands of enforced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, torture and rape of Tamils with total impunity by the perpetrators. [...] It is the absence of political space for meaningful political participation, coupled with the absence of an international mechanism to resolve national conflict *in accordance with law* which led to the evolution of the Tamils' peaceful campaign for their rights into an armed campaign under the leadership of the LTTE. [...] [A]ny meaningful political campaign for the Tamils' rights can be pursued only from outside the island today.<sup>39</sup>

These three samples originate respectively from the Tamilnet Editorial Board, the new formation of LTTE after the war and the TGTE Advisory Committee. They were written at different stages in the development of the PTGTE and thus need to be contextualised historically, but they provide significant insight in the framing of the remobilisation of the diaspora.

The first example is one of the many messages on Tamilnet and Sangam about the question what the TGTE is, should be or could do and was written only one month after the war. Very prominent in this report is the sense of 'us, Tamils' against the rest of

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<sup>38</sup> LTTE Press Release on the TGTE, 'LTTE welcomes all diaspora ballots', 9 November 2009. Excerpts available at <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=30578>.

<sup>39</sup> Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam. 2010. Formation of a Provisional Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam: Final report based on the study by the Advisory Committee. 15 March 2010.

the world. Interestingly, it is not only the GoSL that receives the blame for the misery of the Tamil people, but the 'entire world'. Also noteworthy is the fact that language seems to be used to frame diaspora activism as 'rightful'. In sample 1, as well as other reports in the studied archives, the authors seemingly derive legitimisation for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam from external factors: metanarratives of injustice and structural genocide are used to appeal to the Tamil masses.

Sample 2 is remarkable as it is an excerpt from an LTTE press release *after* the war. Apart from an announcement of a new formation of the LTTE in the post-war phase, not much is heard from the organisation since 18 May 2009.<sup>40</sup> This sample presents the war in Sri Lanka from an particularly biased viewpoint by arguing that the war was ended 'to avoid human catastrophe' instead of a defeat as the result of a lack of resources and the death of a leader. This is not to say that the claim to victory by the GoSL was unbiased, where Rajapaksa declared to have freed the Tamil people from the 'clutch of the LTTE'. Nevertheless, the reference to the Mu'l'livaaykkaal violence in the last phase of the war is evidently a bridge to the hearts and minds of the Tamil diaspora.<sup>41</sup> In any way, the sample above shows the victimisation of the Tamil community, thus again claiming the right to act.

The third sample is an excerpt from the final report of the Advisory Committee on the formation of the TGTE. It was released in March 2010, shortly before the finalisation of the TGTE. This carefully written report yet again frames the war in Sri Lanka and specifically its last phase in a particular way: terms as 'legitimate', 'right to self-determination', and 'in accordance with law' seem to seek legitimisation of the

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<sup>40</sup> The new formation of the LTTE was announced on the 21<sup>st</sup> of July, 2009, by an 'Executive Committee' at the headquarters of the organisation. It declared Selvarasa Pathmanathan, better known as KP in past LTTE activity, as the new leader of the movement. However, Pathmanathan was arrested on the 5<sup>th</sup> of August that same year. His successor, Visvanathan Rudrakumaran, took over as the new *de facto* leader, but not much has been heard from the LTTE since then. This is likely to be the consequence of the new TGTE, of which Rudrakumaran is the current coordinator. This is not to say that the international community or the GoSL have forgotten about the past LTTE activity. Remnants of the organization are still active in many diaspora countries, leading to arrests of the cadres every now and then. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, for instance, seven LTTE suspects were arrested in the Netherlands for funding terrorism. On top of that, some argue that the TGTE is in fact a re-branded continuation of the LTTE and should therefore be shunned by the international community. See for the complete press release:

[http://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2009/07/21\\_July\\_LTTE\\_English.pdf](http://www.tamilnet.com/img/publish/2009/07/21_July_LTTE_English.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Also spelled as Mullivaikal. The Mullivaikal Massacre refers to the last stage of the war, when thousands of people were brutally slaughtered in the no-fire zone of Mullivaikal. It is said that over 40,000 innocent victims were killed in this period.

TGTE. This is in itself not surprising considering the fact that the TGTE is a new phenomenon and is supposed to gain recognition of the international community as opposed to the LTTE. Similar to the second text, sample 3 refers to the military aggression of the SLA and seems to neglect the role of the LTTE in the suffering of the Sri Lankan Tamils. What does the portrait painted by these samples imply for the TGTE as a new initiative in Tamil political activism? Although it is clear that the initiative is meant to be a political tool for reaching the eventual goal of a separate state, the tone of the initiators reminds of a lobby group rather than a political entity that will be able to find its place in the international political world.

### **3.3 Narrative of the Tamil nation**

We can conclude that the formation of the TGTE parallels the emergence of a new discursive frame that leaves the militant ideology of the LTTE behind. All three initiatives in the diaspora emphasise their choice for non-violence. However, this choice cannot simply be seen as a logical response to the extreme violence in the last phase of the conflict. The end of the war left the Tamils without any resources except one: the democratic freedom of the diasporic Tamils in the context of the respective host countries. Therefore the choice for this frame shift was at the same time crucial and strategic for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. In their lobby for international support, the claims to non-violence in combination with the victimisation of the ingroup create a sense of innocence that suggests a right to justice. From the samples above, it can be stated that the actors behind the initiatives make good use of mobilising structures in their references to the metanarrative of Tamil nationalism. Such metanarratives, also called master frames in the words of Benford and Snow (1986), are specific schemata of shared understanding that activate the imagination of a group of people (Sökefeld 2006). In this case, the collective Tamil identity is central to the struggle for Tamil Eelam and thus forms a pre-existing structure that speaks to the majority of the Tamils, whether they are in support of the initiatives or not. Although the reinvention of the Tamil identity is here explained as the ideal consensus mechanism, the end of the conflict also laid bare the differences and division within the Tamil

community.<sup>42</sup> For that reason, the new discursive frames could not manifest without a preceding process of consensus mobilisation.

This leads to the question where these initiatives stand in the cyclic relationship between mobilisation and discursive framing. I argue that the initiatives can be seen as a form of micromobilisation in the larger process of remobilisation of the social movement, as was explained in chapter 1. The need for consensus on the future of Tamil Eelam asked for an active process of frame alignment in order to remobilise the Tamils under a new definition of collective 'Tamilness'. The last chapter showed the eagerness of part of the diaspora to continue the struggle and the efforts that were made to create consensus in discursive frames of the diaspora's mobilising capacity through new media. However, in order to activate such discursive frames, I argue that a performative process is needed for a definitive frame shift for consensus on collective action. Micromobilisation in the form of the new initiatives in the diaspora is a good example of such a performative and activating process.

Although this line of thinking may suggest that the new initiatives are only contributors to the mobilisation of discursive frames, they are also the result of existing frames. As was explained in the second chapter, the initial response of the diaspora to the end of the conflict also helped to create the space that was needed for setting up the initiatives. Returning to the main question of this thesis, I argue that the defeat of the LTTE provided the political space for new dynamics in the diaspora, but that the changes in the discursive frame of the militant struggle should be seen as an inevitable move of the diaspora rather than a willingly made choice. Looking at the actors behind post-war political activism in the diaspora, it is clear that they are partly the same individuals and organisations that were part of or in support of the LTTE during the war. As chapter 2 indicated, it is the LTTE heritage and the new generation that is taking over in the post-war phase. For that reason, the reclaiming of the narrative of the Tamil

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<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that the idea of the 'Tamil identity' is debatable, since historically it falls apart in different categories. For instance, in Sri Lanka, there is a distinction between Tamil in the north, those in the east, the Colombo Tamils and the 'uphill' Tamils that live in the central part of the country. Even though the Tamil identity in itself is a disputed term, the collective sense of a belonging to Tamil Eelam overcomes this problem. The long war has contributed to a strengthening shared sense of 'us against them' that keep the metanarrative of the Sri Lankan Tamil alive. As Orjuela (2008) describes it, the Tamil identity, being the centrepiece of the conflict is collectively built around trauma and grievances and thus form a new understanding of collectivity.

nation as a new discursive frame should be seen as a strategic move as well as an ideological one. Although a new generation of Tamils is rising to take over the struggle for Tamil Eelam, the heavyweights of the LTTE heritage are still the leading agents of change in newly emerging diaspora activism.

Apart from the aim to fulfil the right to self-determination in a separate state of Tamil Eelam, the GTF and the TGTE both focus on another issue: human rights. As was stated above, the core of the diaspora lobby towards the international community consists of claims to justice as a result of human rights abuse. This brings us to the second major frame shift that was visible in the past year: the new human rights discourse in the Tamil diaspora. This, however, will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCOURSE AS A POLITICAL TOOL

*When we make our way through the traffic jams in the city centre of Colombo, my driver points out the window at an immense billboard, showing the face of a grinning man. 'It's the Big Man', he says, 'or that's what they call him.' He is surprised to learn that I know it is Mahinda Rajapaksa, the Sinhalese President of Sri Lanka, re-elected during the presidential elections in January 2010. Then my driver shrugs and says: 'Well, Rajapaksa makes sure we know his face here. He sees all, you know....' When I arrive at my apartment one hour and three armed checkpoints later, I realise that, in fact, he does see all.*

The first results of the archival analysis of Tamilnet and Sangam showed that a significant amount of reports around May 2009 were concerning the alleged war crimes by the SLA. One article after another reported of the deaths of civilians and attacks or bombings in no-fire zones. The period from January 2009 until the end of the conflict demonstrated a dramatic increase of violence in Sri Lanka, so these reports do not come as a surprise. However, in the first year after the war, these subjects have kept on playing a large role in the diaspora lobby, eventually even overshadowing the struggle for self-determination. Naturally, the international community also picked up the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka in 2009. As a result, the claims of the Tamils fitted well on the international agenda, despite a lingering suspicion against Tamil organisations for supposed links with the LTTE.

To what extent can the changing focus of Tamil discourses on human rights be considered as a continuation of the ideological Eelam cause? Is this a separate lobby from the diaspora or is it the same lobby in a different outfit? This chapter analyses the second frame shift in the Tamil diaspora after the war and will discuss the new discursive frame in the light of samples from Sangam and the British Tamils Forum. Secondly, the chapter examines to what extent the online images, themes and symbols that indicate the changing of discursive frames are a direct reflection of developments in the reconstruction process of post-war Sri Lanka. The frame shift towards a strong discourse of human rights abuse, justice and reconciliation within the Tamil diaspora has resulted in a closer relationship between them and the international community by appealing to larger issues that are high on the global NGO agenda. However, what does

this imply for the reconstruction process in Sri Lanka and reconciliation between the Tamils and the Sinhalese? Is the Tamil quest for justice an ultimatum in order to reach reconciliation? And are these new discourses in the diaspora the result of expected development or should these changes be considered as strategic moves?

#### **4.1 Frame shift 2: From fighters to victims**

The second and possibly most important frame shift in the diaspora for the future of Sri Lanka is the emerging of the discursive frame on human rights. Where Tamil websites used to report the progress or downfalls in the struggle for Tamil Eelam, the tone has now changed into a human rights discourse that is clearly aimed at the outgroup: the international community. As was stated in the first chapter, the reconstruction process in Sri Lanka is characterised by grief, blame and retribution. Tamil claims of human rights abuse, war crimes and even genocide alarmed many people worldwide and resulted in a wave of media attention. Although human rights were violated on both sides in the Sri Lankan conflict, the use of human rights discourses by the Tamil diaspora seems to aid political goals quite well. For example, in the light of the LTTE's defeat in May 2009, this renewed discourse may have consequences for the way in which the international community handles the outcome and damage of the conflict. While the LTTE was repeatedly blamed for war crimes, use of child soldiers and human shields, the victimisation of the Tamil people on the basis of the last phase of the war and the aftermath of the conflict seems to aid a strategic cause as well.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that speaking of the victimisation of the diaspora in the post-war phase does not mean to say that Tamils were no 'victims' during the war. On the contrary, the Sri Lankan conflict has demanded 80,000 to 100,000 lives, among which were a significant number of innocent civilians and children. No one can deny that the Tamil people have suffered gravely from the war as well as from its aftermath. However, the background of many Tamil organisations and the new initiatives in their linkages with the LTTE makes it difficult for NGO's and other international organisations to respond to the Tamil claims.

This section will first look into the two most important cases in the human rights discourse of the Tamil diaspora: the detainment of the internally displaced persons and

the Mullivaikal Massacre.

#### 4.1.a Detention Camps

In the last stages of the war, an estimate of 280,000 people was displaced by the extreme violence in Sri Lanka. These Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were taken to so-called safe-zones by the SLA in purpose built camps. Due to the large number of IDPs in relatively small areas, the conditions in the overcrowded camps were – and still are – far below international standards and many have died there as a result of a lack of hygiene, food, water and sanitation (ICG 2010a). Particularly the flooding in the fall of 2009 resulted in deteriorating circumstances and a fatal combination of spreading disease and lack of health care. According to the ICG, most returnees from the camps ended up in ‘transit centres’ where conditions were even worse or returned to find their homes destroyed, the land not fully demined, and they found themselves left with no supplies or resources (ICG 2010a). In the perception of the Tamils, it is imaginable that the treatment of war victims in the IDP camps is seen as a continuation of the deprivation that Tamils have felt for decades. The fact that much of the blame for their situation could also be addressed to the LTTE does not affect the Tamil perception on this matter, because in the Tamil discourse the government of Sri Lanka is the ‘rogue’ to blame (Korf 2006).<sup>43</sup> As a result, even Tamils that would initially not choose to make claims against the government are now caught between the government and the politically active part of the diaspora. Particularly Tamil parties in Sri Lanka, like the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), see the stance of the diaspora as an obstacle to negotiation and reconciliation, rather than a constructive effort to improve the situation of the Tamil people in the homeland (ICG 2010a).

Back in February 2009, Human Rights Watch (HRW) already published the report, ‘War on the Displaced’, on the issue of the IDPs in Sri Lanka (HRW 2009). It described how large numbers of Tamils were trapped in the violence between the LTTE and the SLA in the northern Vanni province of Sri Lanka (HRW 2009). It would still take

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<sup>43</sup> Korf argues that parties in conflict define the ethnic other as the ‘rogue’ (2006). The discourse of the ‘rogue other’ justifies violence against the enemy but also legitimises punishment. Korf: ‘roguishness is about who holds the discursive power over law and justice: those who hold power define the law and decide who stands outside the law’ (2006: 280).

months, however, until the GoSL finally decided to release the detainees from the camps in December 2009, under mounting pressure from the international community. Still, the operation of opening the camps proved to be a complicated and lengthy matter: at the time of writing, the largest of the camps, the infamous Menik Farm, is still in operation. Although 75% of the people in the camps have returned home, by the end of April close to 77,000 people still remained in the 'temporary' camps (UN 2010).

As a direct response to the situation in the IDP camps, the Tamil community has made claims of human rights abuse of IDPs on the side of the GoSL ever since the end of the conflict. Many diaspora-run Tamil websites have framed the treatment of IDPs as crimes against humanity, human rights abuse or even genocide and demand an independent international investigation. A report by the U.S. Department of State on incidents in the last stages of the war in 2009 served as an additional incentive to pursue these claims as it reported several – severe – breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL).

#### **4.1.b Mullivaikal Massacre**

While the detention camps were central in the diaspora lobby until the end of 2009, as soon as the first IDPs were released the lobby shifted towards the alleged war crimes of the SLA in the last stage of the war. There is no doubt that the final phase of the Sri Lankan conflict was characterised by brutal attacks and high numbers of casualties. Tamil sources, such as the British Tamils Forum and the Tamil Guardian, state that over 40,000 civilians were killed in the final months. Although it is difficult to discern fact from bias in the last phase of the war, it is clear that the costs of the Sinhalese victory over the Tamils were extremely high.

One year after the war, at the diaspora-run remembrance ceremony on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2010 in London, the last months of the conflict were framed as 'Mullivaikal Remembrance Day'. Mullivaikal was a no-fire zone (NFZ) in the north of Sri Lanka, but came under heavy attack in the spring of 2009. Although the term 'Mullivaikal massacre' directly refers to the artillery fire attack on a temporary makeshift hospital in the area, killing 49 people, the phrase has now become a reference to the many attacks on innocent civilians. As the banners of the British Tamils clearly showed at Westminster,

the Tamils call for an international war crime investigation on the basis of the events around the Mullivaikal Massacre. In this claim for justice, the atrocities committed by the LTTE are hardly ever mentioned.

#### **4.2 Human Rights as a Discursive Frame**

The kind of political activism that is seen from the Tamil diaspora since May 2009, characterised by its aim for the engagement of the international community and full of claims for justice and retribution, is not entirely new. Fair argues that the diaspora always had a 'three-fold message':

1. 'that Tamils in Sri Lanka are innocent victims of military repression by Sri Lanka's security forces and of Sinhalese anti-Tamil discrimination;
2. that the LTTE is the only legitimate voice of the Tamils and is the only vehicle capable of defending and promoting Tamil interests in Sri Lanka;
3. that there can be no peace until Tamils achieve their own independent state under the LTTE leadership.' (2007: 184).

In a sense, the current Tamil claims are in line with earlier messages on the legitimisation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. In addition, the means through which the current leaders of the diaspora act out their ideology show similarity to the LTTE's ways: 'dissemination of propaganda through electronic mail, the World Wide Web, through dedicated telephone hotlines and radio broadcasts; as well as gatherings to promote their message (Fair 2007: 143). However, the discursive frame of the Tamil people as victims of the GoSL used to be built around grievances of marginalisation instead of larger frames of human rights. In other words, the new discursive frame appeals to a broader understanding of rights that apply to all human beings, rather than being case-specific to the Tamils. In the post-war phase, the atrocities of the SLA have become a superlative of these grievances and are also picked up by many governments and NGO's worldwide. As a result, the lobby of the Tamils has now become part of a larger human rights agenda.

The shift from militarism to a discursive frame of human rights abuse did not originate from the last phase of the war only. Instead, the roots of this frame shift can be traced back to the fall of 2008 when Sri Lanka experienced an increase of violence in the conflict. Analysis of political activism in the archives of the BTF and Sangam shows that war crimes, IDPs and even genocide were already an issue on the Tamil agenda a year before the end of the war. For example, photo archives on the website of the BTF show Tamils at demonstrations in October 2008, holding placards that call for intervention of the international community in the 'indiscriminate bombing' and 'genocide' of the GoSL against the Sri Lankan Tamils.<sup>44</sup> However, subtle changes are visible in the messages of the Tamil demonstrations in the UK in the period from the summer of 2008 until May 2010. For instance, a candlelight vigil in London on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July 2008 emphasised the accusations of genocide on behalf of the GoSL, but also showed banners with slogans such as 'Tamils' yearning is for Tamil Eelam' and flags and umbrella carrying the tiger symbol of Tamil Eelam.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, the London protests of 11 April 2009 were solely focused on acts of genocide. Although hundreds of Tiger flags coloured the masses red and yellow, the struggle for Tamil Eelam was not mentioned at all. Instead, the placards and banners called for immediate ceasefire, international intervention in the acts of genocide and human rights abuse by the SLA and GoSL, and showed visuals of brutally killed Tamils in Sri Lanka.<sup>46</sup>

In the last phase of the war, it seems that the claim to self-determination in the state of Tamil Eelam faded while the human rights discourse of the Tamil diaspora gained strength. However, this does not imply that Tamil Eelam has been forgotten. The end of the war simply brought a need for a redefinition of the Tamil identity. The defeat of the LTTE resulted in a fragmented Tamil community and a significant setback in the struggle for Tamil Eelam. Still, as the referendum on the Vaddukkoaddai Resolution proved, the overwhelming majority of the Tamils chose to continue to fight for the

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<sup>44</sup> See the British Tamils Forum at <http://www.tamilsforum.com/Reports.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Candle light vigil, London, 23 July 2008. British Tamils Forum. Visual sources available at: <http://btf.jalbum.net/july2308/>. Accessed: 27 July 2010.

<sup>46</sup> London Protest March, 11 April 2009. British Tamils Forum. Visual sources available at: <http://picasaweb.google.co.uk/btfmedias/LondonProtest11042009#>. Accessed: 27 July 2010.

homeland. As a result, the claim to Tamil Eelam reappeared in the diaspora lobby in the first months after the war, as was visible in Tamil diaspora protests in the fall of 2009.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.3 Consequence or strategy?

Comparing the human rights discourse to the discursive frame shift from militancy to non-violence, as described in chapter 3, there are some similarities and some differences. Consider the following samples of claims of human rights abuse, war crimes and genocide from the archives of Tamilnet, Sangam and the BTF (emphasis by the author):

(1) 'How do we distinguish and attribute blame to a non-state, proscribed group classified as a terrorist organisation such as the LTTE, when the state – *which has signed up to international conventions and charters* – is the aggressor.'<sup>48</sup>

(2) 'The ashes of the war–butchered Tamils haven't been settled; the blood from their wounds hasn't healed; we can still hear the cries of babies, unloved and alone, their parents slaughtered; the media continues to carry images of IDP detainees screaming from "*Sri Lankan Guantanamoes*".'<sup>49</sup>

(3) 'We civilized people have no trouble mourning thousands of Bosnian victims of Yugoslavian ethnic cleansing. We can be appalled at the displacement, enslavement, and murder of villagers in Darfur by government-directed Sudanese militiamen. But where is the horror and disgust at the *deliberate butchery* of 30,000 to 40,000 ethnically distinct Sri Lankan Tamil civilians by armed forces carrying out what was clearly a *state policy*?'<sup>50</sup>

(4) 'The Sri Lankan state has been using set of paradigms to shape its roadmap and conduct the State's programme against the cause of Eezham Tamils. These include, 'War for Peace', 'Eliminating Terrorism', 'Post-LTTE scenario', 'Sri Lanka free from minorities', 'Co-existence as Sri Lankans', 'Development of East' and 'Development of North.' [...]

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<sup>47</sup> See British Tamils Forum press releases:  
<http://www.tamilforum.com/Press%20releases.html>.

<sup>48</sup> 'Stop Sri Lanka's Crimes'. Sangam, 26 October 2009,  
[http://www.sangam.org/2009/11/Stop\\_Crimes.php?uid=3732](http://www.sangam.org/2009/11/Stop_Crimes.php?uid=3732).

<sup>49</sup> 'A Voice from the Ashes', Sangam, 6 May 2010,  
[http://www.sangam.org/2010/05/From\\_Ashes.php?uid=3940](http://www.sangam.org/2010/05/From_Ashes.php?uid=3940).

<sup>50</sup> 'Remember the May 2009 Massacre of Tamils', Sangam, 10 May 2010,  
[http://www.sangam.org/2010/05/TfO\\_Remember.php?uid=3943](http://www.sangam.org/2010/05/TfO_Remember.php?uid=3943).

The Sri Lankan state, playing the geopolitical card, has enjoyed the flexibility of these readily available paradigms that have enabled confluence of Colombo's interests with those of the powers. The net result of this confluence of paradigms is nothing other than Colombo sustaining a politico-military environment in its favour to effect a systematic programme of Tamil subjugation, a continued genocide in the island.<sup>51</sup>

As was emphasised in the second chapter, sample 5 again shows how the tone of Tamilnet's reports has changed in recent years. Although the website seems to make an effort to objectively show the arguments of all parties involved, particularly the post-war phase has brought the Tamil opinion to the table. However, closer examination of the three main archival sources for this research prove that Sangam and the British Tamils Forum, being part of diaspora organisations, still send out a much stronger message. In the aftermath of the conflict, the essential differences between the sources become visible in the content of the reports. Where Tamilnet continues to publish well-informed reports, the other two sources make use of a more emotional form of journalism, by portraying the Tamil issues in images that directly speak out to the Tamil people. On top of that, both Sangam and the British Tamils Forum seem to make an effort to mobilise the Tamil community for the human rights discourse. Since the latter two are organisational components of the Tamil movement, the display of emotions can be seen as a strategic move in mobilising the community and securing support (Goodwin et. al. 2007).

Sample 1 originates from October 2009 and should be interpreted in the context of anti-terrorist laws that led to an initial focus of the international community on the war crimes on the side of the LTTE. Similar to the samples discussed in chapter 3, it is interesting to see that the Tamil diaspora once more reaches to international acknowledged laws and rights by referring to international charters and conventions in order to legitimise its actions. This is particularly characteristic for the Tamil human rights discourse, as is even more explicitly shown in samples 2 to 4. The most significant part of the second frame shift is the diaspora's choice to portray their issues as part of greater international concerns. The samples (2 and 3 respectively) refer to major issues that concerned the international community in recent years, by comparing the IDP

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<sup>51</sup> 'Taking stock on the first anniversary of internationally abetted genocide', Tamilnet, 22 May 2010, <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=99&artid=31800>

camps to the mistreatment of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay and by comparing the last phase of the war to the ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia and the genocide in Darfur. IHL and IHRL have thus become fixed points in the Tamil diaspora lobby to strengthen its claims.

Finally, the last sample is an excerpt from a report published on Tamilnet exactly one year after the end of the war. Presented as 'taking stock' one year further, the article shows an interesting view on the situation in Sri Lanka and the response of the international community. The text blames the GoSL for presenting the Sri Lankan issues in paradigms that will legitimise their actions. Likewise, it blames the international community for approaching the post-war issues in this way as well. However, the significant part of this is that the Tamil diaspora has chosen to do exactly the same in their lobby against human rights abuse of the Tamil people. By continuously referring to internationally acknowledged rights, conventions and charters, the Tamil diaspora also speaks in line with leading paradigms in international law. Interestingly, this kind of political activism illustrates the spiral relationship between mobilisation and discourse: the human rights discourse is mobilised by the political engaged elite of the diaspora, while it also lead to mobilisation of the Tamils on the basis of collective sentiments that are active within the Tamil community.

Should the choice for a human rights discourse be considered as a natural consequence of the defeat of the LTTE or is it rather a strategic move to engage the international community in the struggle for Tamil Eelam? On the one hand, it has to be remembered that without this lobby the Tamil diaspora is relatively without resources. Although the diaspora has shown the ability to raise funds in immense amounts, taking up arms was never an option after the end of the conflict. Instead, the actions of the GoSL in the last phase of the war and the detainment of IDPs in the many Sri Lankan camps provided ample reasons for the Tamil diaspora to take up this matter as the centre of the post-war lobby. On the other hand, the samples above seem to indicate a rather strategic approach of the human rights lobby. Not only does the diaspora make strategic use of their displays of emotion related to human rights issues to secure support, the politically engaged Tamils have also used discursive frames that aligned with international concerns very effectively. This is not to say that the Tamil diaspora claims are unjustified or conspiring against the outgroup. On the contrary, the atrocities

committed by the GoSL in the last phase of the conflict are more than enough reason to ask for justice. However, the question is whether this approach is constructive for the reconciliation process in Sri Lanka.

The stance of the western Tamil diaspora towards the GoSL and the outgroup in general is negative and rejecting to say the least. As Orjuela already stated two years ago, it seems that the Tamils and the Sinhalese in the UK have become more segregated and polarised along ethnic lines than the two groups in Sri Lanka (2008). By continuously emphasising the guilt of the Sinhalese government, the diaspora has become an obstacle to the current process of reconciliation in the homeland. As the ICG explained in their report on the diaspora after the LTTE, the gap between Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in the diaspora is increasing (2010b). Their needs and interests are shifting in different directions and this makes the political engagement of the Tamil diaspora highly problematic. Contrary to the call for justice and war crime investigations, Tamils in Sri Lanka seem to long for peace before anything else. Without basic resources like food and proper housing, grievances are present among the Sri Lankan Tamils, but it is not surprising that justice is not on the minds of the victims of war.

Instead of a sole emphasis on the claim to Tamil Eelam, the Tamil diaspora has now transformed the situation in Sri Lanka into a matter that concerns all, thus also speaking in the name of the Sri Lankan Tamils. While diaspora Tamils claim to speak freely where Sri Lankan Tamils cannot, some Sri Lankan parties declare that the human rights discourse of the diaspora is an obstacle in the peace process (ICG 2010b).<sup>52</sup> Considering the response of the international community to the alleged war crimes in Sri Lanka, an independent investigation may eventually take place. However, it remains to be seen whether this will benefit the Sri Lankan Tamils in the future.

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<sup>52</sup> The increasing gap between Sri Lankan Tamils and diaspora Tamils was clearly visible when the TNA broke off the cooperation with overseas fractions in 2009. This led to much anger from the diaspora and the GTF in particular (ICG 2010b).

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

*On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 2010, Amnesty International launches its campaign 'Sri Lanka: Justice and Accountability'. In the entrance hall I meet Puni, a Tamil woman who is eager to tell me her story. 'These are the places where I can actually say what I want to say about the situation in Sri Lanka, to spread the story of all the people that have died,' she tells me. 'We have a double click on our phone line, so I know we're being checked, but I'll keep on spreading the word.' She is glad that Amnesty has picked up 'the hard work of the diaspora to reach justice for the victims', but she is sombre about the future. 'We long for justice after all those years, or I am afraid we will never find peace.'*<sup>53</sup>

This thesis sought to address political activism in the Tamil diaspora after the end of the Sri Lankan conflict by researching the following main question: 'What is the effect of the military defeat of the LTTE in May 2009 on the mobilisation of discourses of violence and reconciliation within the western Tamil diaspora?' In this last chapter, the empirical and theoretical conclusions based on the findings of this research will be discussed.

In the second chapter on different diaspora roles in accordance with phases of conflict, it was explained that the end of the Sri Lankan war brought new dynamics to the social and political relationships in the Tamil community. By choosing – and framing – for the continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam, the politically engaged part of the diaspora created space for large-scale remobilisation and the shifting of discursive frames. As was analysed in chapters 3 and 4, this resulted in two significant frame shifts: from militarism to a non-violent struggle, and from fighters to victims. These two shifts are related in the sense that both leave the LTTE era of violence behind and frame the struggle for Tamil Eelam as a political one. On top of that, the mobilisation of the first discursive frame, through efforts of micromobilisation such as the GTF, the Referendum and the TGTE, opened the way for the second discursive frame to manifest in the sense that these initiatives enclosed the second frame of human rights discourse in their agenda's.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Tamil activist, female, London, 19 May 2010.

However, if we consider the new discourses of violence and reconciliation as means to an end, these would be different ends among the two frame shifts. As was explained in the third chapter, the discourses on the new initiatives seem intended to show the fundamental 'rights' of the Tamil diaspora as a legitimisation of its political activism. In the light of the new leadership of the initiatives, these claims may not be surprising as the main actors still have their origin in the old diaspora branches of the LTTE. The current leaders of thought in the Tamil diaspora thus seem to shift from *enforcing* such rights to *claiming* the rights, in the hope that the international community will cooperate and support their case for Tamil Eelam. As to the second frame shift, the human rights discourse is currently the core of the diaspora lobby. In the newly attained 'democratic freedom', the Tamils attempt to reach justice and retribution for the suffering of the Tamil people. However, as was discussed in chapter 4, this move can also be seen as a strategic move, rather than a natural consequence of the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka. Although the human rights discourse has its origin in 2008, the political opportunities of the last phase of the war and the post-war actions of the GoSL provided ample material for making the situation of Sri Lanka a pressing issue than concerns the whole international community.

Apart from the two major shifts of discursive frames, in retrospect a third frame shift can be distinguished. Although this shift may have taken place unintentionally, as a consequence of the two others, it is still worth noting: in the past year, the concept of 'Tamil Eelam' has become metaphorical rather than bound to territory by a sense of locality. The homeland of the Tamil people as it was a centrepiece in the war, seems to have lost its sense of locality. Despite the fact that the diaspora has voted for Tamil Eelam in the referendum, endeavours as the Transnational Government for Tamil Eelam emphasise self-determination in *transnational* space. As the separate state of Tamil Eelam seems a fading possibility, it could be argued that Tamil Eelam has become a metaphor for justice. This, however, would form an interesting topic for future research. Although it seems that this lobby has overshadowed the struggle for separatism, I argue that the issue of Tamil Eelam will return to the table as soon as the international community responds in an acceptable manner.

This thesis also demands some concluding remarks with regard to theory building. As I stated throughout the chapters, I understand the dialectic relationship

between discursive frames and mobilisation as an intensifying spiral in which the active and performative practice of framing plays an essential role. The synthesis of social movement theory and critical discourse analysis comes close to portraying the developments in the Tamil diaspora in a theoretical framework, but this is still rather static. Although the cyclical understanding of changing discourses is not new, as for instance described by Jabri, seeing this interaction as a spiral movement shows the dynamics of intensification and diminishing of discourses and mobilisation in a larger framework of mobilising structures and political opportunities. As the data in this research shows, mobilisation and discursive frames can strengthen or facilitate each other, or the other way around. Instead of seeing frame alignment as the bridge between the two concepts, it is their interactive cooperation that should be stressed.

In conclusion, I argue that the mobilisation of discourses of violence and reconciliation in the Tamil diaspora was affected by the defeat of the LTTE in several ways. Not only did this event open up space for change and new choices, the end of the conflict also forced the struggle for Tamil Eelam to take a different road, as was explained in chapters 2 and 3. Considering the near and the long-term future of Sri Lanka, the effects of the new initiatives in the Tamil diaspora remain to be seen as these are new political endeavours. As was also clear from the responses of several diaspora members, there is a large part of the Tamil diaspora that does not take these ventures too seriously. In the light of the human rights discourse, though, the diaspora seems to have set an ultimatum: no justice implies no reconciliation. I argue that discourses of violence have thus ceased as the diaspora clearly chose a non-violent continuation of the struggle for Tamil Eelam. However, discourses of reconciliation are virtually non-present. As a result, the diaspora has become an obstacle to the reconstruction process of Sri Lanka.

The stance of the diaspora may prove to be highly problematic in the light of the divided diaspora as well as the increasing gap between the Tamil diaspora and the Tamils who remain in Sri Lanka. As has been mentioned throughout this thesis, the diaspora can no longer be seen as a unitary entity. The defeat of the LTTE laid bare the differences within the Tamil community when it comes to identity and ideology and thus led to fragmentation of the Tamil movement. Although the outcome of the Vaddukkoaddai referendum indicated a strong will to continue the cause for Tamil Eelam among diaspora members, there is still much debate about the means through

which the goals should be pursued. In addition, there is the increasing gap between Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in the diaspora, as was explained in chapter 4. For future research, it would be desirable to analyse this gap between Sri Lanka and the diaspora in the light of the reconciliation process in the homeland in a comparative study of fieldwork in the former war-zones of Sri Lanka and countries with major Tamil diasporas, such as the UK, the USA and Canada. The future of Sri Lanka and of the Tamil diaspora relies on many uncertain factors, like the new initiatives and the role that the international community will take on in relation to the alleged war crimes. The first year after the Sri Lankan conflict has shown much change in the diaspora, but this process of crystallisation of new ideologies and discourses that are now still fluid has not yet come to an end. Time will tell how the political activism in the diaspora will evolve and if the new discursive frames will bring the Tamils closer to their eventual goal of Tamil Eelam.

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## **Illustrations**

Cover photo: 'Tamil Demonstration' by Guy Briselden.

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## **List of Interviews**

E-mail interview with Jaffna based Tamil NGO worker, female, 28 April 2010.

E-mail interview with British NGO-worker, female, 1 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil NGO worker, female, Colombo, 5 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil family, 1 female, 2 males, Colombo, 6 May 2010.

Interview with Sinhalese NGO-worker, male, London, 15 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil activist at a London-based Tamil NGO, female, London, 15 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil diaspora member, male, in London, 18 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil activist, female, London, 18 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil activist, male, in London, 19 May 2010.

Interview with Tamil activist, female, London, 19 May 2010.

Email interview with Indian NGO worker, female, based in Tamil Nadu, 29 May 2010.

## APPENDIX A: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Adapted from Norman Fairclough (1995b)

### Methodology CDA:

1. How is the text designed?
  - a. Intertextuality:
    - genres
    - voices
    - narratives
  - b. Language:
    - representation: what is present/absent, what is most prominent?
    - relations/identities: participants voices, audience?
  - c. Visual:
    - image/text relationship
    - visual narratives
  
2. How is the text produced?
  - a. Objectivity of the source
    - which website?
    - opinion, feature or news report?
  - b. Power relations between author and audience
    - formal/informal?
  - c. Interpretation
  
3. What does the text indicate about the (new) media order of discourse?
  - a. Fixed or shifting boundaries?
  - b. Particular choices, associations
  - c. Tendencies of change
  
4. Socio-cultural processes and their effects
  - a. Social conditions, incl. economic and political
    - wider context
    - situational context
  - b. Opportunities and constraints that may have affected the text
  - c. Systems of knowledge, ideology and belief
  - d. Social relations of power and positioning of people as social subjects