Superdiverse Diaspora

Everyday Identifications of Tamil Migrants in Britain

Demelza Jones

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Over the past decade, the concept of 'diversity' has gained a leading place in academic thought, business practice, politics and public policy across the world. However, local conditions and meanings of 'diversity' are highly dissimilar and changing. For these reasons, deeper and more comparative understandings of pertinent concepts, processes and phenomena are in great demand. This series will examine multiple forms and configurations of diversity, how these have been conceived, imagined, and represented, how they have been or could be regulated or governed, how different processes of inter-ethnic or inter-religious encounter unfold, how conflicts arise and how political solutions are negotiated and practiced, and what truly convivial societies might actually look like. By comparatively examining a range of conditions, processes and cases revealing the contemporary meanings and dynamics of 'diversity', this series will be a key resource for students and professional social scientists. It will represent a landmark within a field that has become, and will continue to be, one of the foremost topics of global concern throughout the twenty-first century. Reflecting this multi-disciplinary field, the series will include works from Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, Law, Geography and Religious Studies. While drawing on an international field of scholarship, the series will include works by current and former staff members, by visiting fellows and from events of the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity. Relevant manuscripts submitted from outside the Max Planck Institute network will also be considered.

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Demelza Jones
School of Natural and Social Sciences
University of Gloucestershire
Cheltenham, UK

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To Lyra

Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

1

Introduction

In the Tamil director Mani Ratnam's film, *Kannathil Muthamittal* (2002), a middle-class family from Tamil Nadu in southern India travels to war-torn northern Sri Lanka in an attempt to trace the biological mother of their nine-year-old adopted daughter. The girl, Amudha, was abandoned in a refugee camp as a baby, but is now desperate to learn the truth about her past. While walking in the countryside with a local guide, Amudha's father, Thiruchelvan, is captured by Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) fighters. As he is dragged away at gunpoint, his guide's pleas that he is 'a Tamillian from India' fall on deaf ears, and in desperation, Thiruchelvan begins to recite Tamil poetry:

> *Our eyebrows are lowered, our eyes closed, lips parched, teeth clenched. We walk with our backs bent. We whom you rule over, lock us up in cages, flay us with staves. Let the skin of our backs fester!*

The cadres halt and raise Thiruchelvan to his feet. He continues to speak the poem as the mood of the unit's commander shifts from hostility to recognition and fraternity, and the two men complete the recitation in solemn unison:

One day our eyebrows will arch. Our closed eyes will open again. Our puckered lips will throb and our clenched teeth grind. Rule over us until then!

Thiruchelvan and his guide are released unharmed, with the commander promising to arrange a meeting with Amudha's biological mother; who, it transpires, is also an LTTE fighter and the commander's sister. Meanwhile, a parallel scene depicts Amudha straying alone into the dense jungle that surrounds the family's village lodgings. From the undergrowth emerge girls—little older than her—but dressed in the battle fatigues of the LTTE and carrying rifles. The girls regard Amudha in silence for a moment, before she flees, crying, back to the village.

As portrayed in Ratnam's film, Tamils are an ethno-linguistic population whose historical homelands transcend the modern state borders of India and Sri Lanka, and who, through historic and contemporary processes of migration, are now also a global population; including a significant presence in Britain. Existing research on Britain's Tamil population has focused on Tamils of Sri Lankan origins or heritage, who are the largest group and who have largely migrated to Britain as refugees (or through associated migration) following the outbreak of civil war in Sri Lanka in 1983. But Britain is also home to Tamils of other state origins; mainly South Indian, but also (in much smaller numbers) Malaysian, Singaporean, Mauritian and South African (communities resulting from colonial-era migrations from southern India explored in Chap. 3). This study is the first to give detailed consideration to the narratives and experiences of Tamils from these diverse state backgrounds, and addresses the question of if, when and how diasporic identification is experienced and expressed amongst nominal members of a superdiverse diaspora population, whose ascribed membership comprises different state origins, but also differing migration histories, a consequent diversity of relationships with the 'homeland' and varied socio-economic and legal statuses in the country of settlement. The book draws on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork completed as part of doctoral studies at the University of Bristol (awarded 2013). The fieldwork involved observational work in community associations and supplementary schools, political gatherings, places of worship and public religious festivals, and in Tamil people's homes. I also conducted in-depth interviews with forty-six Tamil migrants

from diverse state backgrounds (and with associated diverse characteristics), who had, at the time of research, settled in cities and towns in the West Midlands and South West of England.

This introductory chapter sets the broader context for the study, but first provides an overview of the intricacies of Tamil ethnic identification in the South Asian 'homelands' and the complex interplay of trans-state versus state-based Tamil identities this involves. I then introduce the migration context which was the backdrop to the study's empirical work, and establish the relevance of the superdiversity concept—the recognition of 'multidimensional' diversities *within* diversity (Meissner and Vertovec 2015; Vertovec 2007)—to the Tamil case.

Tamils in South Asia: Cultural Connections and Divergent Politics

There are almost seventy million Tamil speakers in India (6% of the total population)—with most residing in the southern state of Tamil Nadu (Office of the Registrar General India 2011). In neighbouring Sri Lanka, the most recent census (Department of Census and Statistics 2012) records Tamils as 11% of the island's population (as compared to the 75% Sinhalese majority). A further Tamil community within Sri Lanka—termed 'Indian Tamils' or 'Up-Country [*Malaiyaha*] Tamils'—are the descendants of Tamils from South India who migrated to labour on tea plantations under British colonial occupation (Bass 2013: 11). Considered a separate community in official statistics, these Tamils represent just over 4% of Sri Lanka's total population. The majority of Sri Lanka's larger Tamil minority (sometimes characterised in the literature as 'Ceylon Tamils' or 'Jaffna Tamils' to distinguish them from the smaller *Malaiyaha* Tamil population), reside in the island's northern and eastern regions, although Sri Lanka's capital city Colombo also has a substantial Tamil population. The *Malaiyaha* Tamils are concentrated in the central highland region where tea cultivation takes place, although diversification of labour market participation beyond the plantation sector has encouraged some movement to other areas (Piyarathne 2008: 20–21).

These historic Tamil homelands are connected by cultural commonalities. Although dialectic differences are found, the common lingua-franca is Tamil, with the language's rich and ancient literary tradition suggesting a long heritage of circulation and exchange across these regions (Wickramasinghe 2006: 255–256). In both areas, Saivite Hinduism (veneration of Siva as the supreme being) is the predominant religion and is marked by shared regional particularities such as devotion to the god Murugan. Historically, Tamil Saivite pilgrims have travelled to the holy sites of Sri Lanka, while Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus made the reverse journey to the grand Siva temples of India's south (256). The 'composers of the great Saivite hymns in Tamil Nadu included temples in Jaffna [Sri Lanka's Tamil cultural capital in the island's Northern Province] in their praise as a matter of course' (Hellman-Rajanayagam 1994: 128), and this shared religious heritage is also reflected in common appreciation of devotional art forms such as *Bharatanatyam*—a classical dance. In the contemporary era too, a shared popular cultural milieu has emerged through the circulation of Tamil cinema, produced in Tamil Nadu and consumed by audiences there, by Tamils in Sri Lanka, and in global sites of Tamil settlement (Velayutham 2008: 183–185).

But alongside these similarities, Tamils in these two lands have experienced very different recent histories. In southern India, throughout the Freedom Struggle and into the early post-colonial era, an ethno-national Tamil movement resisted the Hindi-speaking hegemony of the emergent Indian state and mobilised around calls for an independent Tamil nation (Wyatt 2002: 733–734, 2004: 237–238). But by the 1960s, these demands had been defused through concessionary measures by the central government including the establishment in 1956 of the Tamil-speaking state of Madras within India's federal system (renamed Tamil Nadu in 1969) and the Tamil nationalist parties' increasing acquisition of 'mainstream' political power through electoral success in Tamil Nadu (Chadda 1997: 7) and, from the 1990s onwards, as influential partners of national parties (Stepan et al. 2011: 136; Wyatt 2002: 736–737). In contrast, Tamils in post-independence Sri Lanka have been subjected to discrimination and violence by a state apparatus that has consistently privileged the language, culture and Buddhist religion of the island's Sinhalese majority at the expense of its Tamil (and other) minorities.

Successive governments' intransigence towards accommodating Tamil demands for recognition and representation led, by the mid-1970s, to the emergence of a secessionist movement within which the LTTE established itself as the pre-eminent armed force (Krishna 1999: 66–78; Wilson 2000: 113–134). Violent anti-Tamil riots occurred periodically in Sri Lanka throughout the post-colonial era (Tambiah 1986: 13), but the most severe took place in July 1983 when a week of appalling violence against the Tamil population began in Colombo, before spreading to other parts of the island. Tamils were brutally killed, or raped, sexually assaulted or injured and Tamil-owned homes and business were torched. While often described as an act of 'retaliation' for the killing of thirteen Sri Lankan soldiers in Jaffna by the LTTE, this reading of the riots as a popular, spontaneous act is questioned by accounts which instead characterise events as state sanctioned and orchestrated: 'it was a series of deliberate acts, executed in accordance with a concerted plan, conceived and organised well in advance' (Sieghart 1984: 76). Security forces failed to halt (and indeed, sometimes joined and encouraged) the violence; eyewitness accounts report mob leaders consulting copies of the electoral-roll to locate Tamil households; and politicians including the Prime Minister, J. R Jayewardene, declined to condemn the rioters, instead offering justifications for their actions (Tambiah 1986: 21–28; Weiss 2012: 51–55; Wilson 2000: 113–114). The violence resulted in the internal displacement of thousands of Tamils and prompted the first exodus of refugees across the Palk Straits to Tamil Nadu (Krishna 1999: 116–117; Weiss 2012: 51–55; Wickramasinghe 2006: 257–258).

These events became known as 'Black July' and marked the transition to civil war between the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. While a full account is not possible here, it is important at least to note that the conflict also incorporated many factors beyond the central antagonism between the state and the LTTE including fighting between rival Tamil groups, the activity of Buddhist nationalist militias and persecution of Sri Lanka's Muslim minority (Wickramasinghe 2006: 243–247, 288–289). Interspersed with two internationally negotiated ceasefire periods, the war raged until 2009, and during this time the LTTE-controlled large swathes of the island's Northern and Eastern provinces. This was a total war with devastating impacts on civilian lives and livelihoods. The LTTE's

use of suicide bombers caused terror in Sinhalese-majority areas, while the Tamil-majority north and east cowered beneath indiscriminate Sri Lankan air-force bombing. On the ground, young Tamils were treated as proxy militants by the Sri Lankan authorities, with extrajudicial killings, torture and disappearances commonplace. In LTTE-controlled areas, Tamils who acted against the 'national interest' (as defined by the militants) faced violent retribution from their armed co-ethnics and the Muslim minority was subjected to violent intimidation and forced displacement (McGilvray and Raheen 2011: 410–419; Thiranagama 2011: 106–107; Weiss 2012: 65–95). The conflict's brutal conflation of combatants and civilians persisted to its conclusion—the LTTE's surrender in May 2009. By early 2009, the Sri Lankan military had overrun much of the LTTE's territory, compelling the militants to retreat to a north-eastern coastal spit (Weiss 2012: 100–101). Hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians were displaced by the fighting or followed the LTTE's line of retreat either in fear of the advancing Sri Lankan army or at the militants' behest. The bombardment of the contracting battle zone had catastrophic consequences for some 300,000 Tamil civilians trapped inside. Unspecified thousands died, and injuries from artillery attacks were left untreated as medical supplies were unable to pass through military blockades. During the final months of the conflict the LTTE escalated its violent forced recruitment (including of children) to replenish weakening front lines, while Tamils who fled into the military's reconquered territories were herded into appallingly overcrowded internment camps (Human Rights Watch 2010; Thiranagama 2011: 2–4; Weiss 2012: 121–146).

For Tamils in India then, ethnic assertion (at least in the past four to five decades) has become largely symbolic in nature, while for Tamils in Sri Lanka, ethnicity has remained (literally) a matter of life and death. Returning to the scene from *Kannathil Muthamittal* evoked in the book's opening pages, Thiruchelvan may speak the same language as his Sri Lankan Tamil captors, and even have access to the shared cultural toolkit required to recite appropriately revolutionary-themed Tamil poetry under pressure. However, he does not share the direct experiences of persecution and marginalisation that has driven his peers to take up arms and embark on a life of guerrilla insurgency so far removed from his own comfortable existence in Chennai. This experiential lacuna is reinforced

in the parallel scene with Amudha. The disarming encounter with the girls in their battle fatigues—at once similar and strikingly alien to herself, and a glimpse at the fate she could have shared had she not been adopted from the refugee camp—embodies the contrasts at play: a known but unknowable, related yet unrelatable experience of being Tamil.

The 'Diaspora' Context

As well as prompting mass displacement within the island, the decades of violence in Sri Lanka produced a huge exodus of refugees. In 1999, Fuglerud (1999: 1–2) estimated that one-third of Sri Lanka's pre-war Tamil population (he excludes *Malaiyaha* Tamils) had fled the island to seek sanctuary in Tamil Nadu or further afield in Europe, North America and Australia, with Britain emerging as one important destination for settlement. Writing a decade ago, Cowley-Sathiakumar (2008: 30) described Sri Lankan Tamils in Britain as a 'largely hidden group', subject to little political, public or scholarly attention. However, the events of 2009 placed this community in the spotlight, as thousands of British-based Tamils converged on Westminster to protest against atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan military during their final military offensive against the LTTE (described briefly above). As Poole (2002: 99) highlights in relation to British Muslims, media reporting of minorities which focuses solely on that group's perceived 'issues' or 'affairs' 'results in a consistently narrow framework of representation'. Similarly, the focus generated by media coverage of the Westminster protests—of Tamils engaged in long-distance nationalism supportive of the nationalist Eelam agenda—led to a synecdochic popular understanding of Britain's Tamil population whereby 'the whole are named, but a part is understood' (Banks 1996: 159). Over the years, attempts to describe my research to people who are not immediately familiar with who Tamils are, have seen the moment of realisation accompanied by exclamations of, 'oh… the ones who were protesting', 'the Tigers', or similar—a folk knowledge derived from dominant media discourse. This is a reductive view even when applied to just Tamil people of Sri Lankan origin, as support for the LTTE and the separatist Eelam movement has been by no means universal

amongst Sri Lankan Tamils within the island or overseas (Fair 2007; Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2008). But the picture is further complicated by the presence in Britain of smaller numbers of Tamils with state origins other than Sri Lankan: predominantly Indian, but also Malaysian, Singaporean, Mauritian and South African. Given the numeric superiority of Sri Lankan Tamils in the British context and the aforementioned focus on the Eelam issue, the non-Sri Lankan Tamil population can be described, to borrow Cowley-Sathiakumar's (2008: 30) phrase, as a hidden group *within* a hidden group. Tamils are additionally 'hidden' within more generalised accounts of the South Asian presence in Britain, being a small minority as compared to the much larger populations of Gujarati, Punjabi and Mirpuri migrants, whose experiences tend to dominate both academic and popular accounts of the 'British Asian' story (e.g. Ali et al. 2006; Sardar 2008; Suri 2006; Visram 2002).

The majority of the scholarship which does exist on Tamil migration and settlement in Britain is concerned with the Sri Lankan section of the population (Balasunderam 2008; Cowley-Sathiakumar 2008; Daniel and Thangaraj 1995; David 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012a, b; Ratnapalan 2011; Taylor 1994; Walton 2015). Tamils of other state origins make cameo appearances in Waghorne's research into London's Tamil-run temples (2004) and in David's work on *Bharatanatyam* and embodied Hindu ritual (2009b), and are the focus of a conference paper by the latter author which describes fire and blade-walking rituals performed by Mauritian Tamils in a London park (2009a). However, these works do not focus on interactions between Tamil migrants of diverse state origins, nor explore the extent to which these migrants subscribe (or do not subscribe) to a broader sense of Tamil ethnicity or diaspora which may transgress the particularities of state origins. One concern of this research then is to ask if, when and how identification with a Tamil diaspora emerges amongst Tamil migrants of different state origins in Britain, whose nominal ethnic kinship belies strikingly divergent experiences of ethnically inflected politics at the point of origin, and varied migration impetuses, trajectories and settlement experiences. Does a shared Tamil language, participation in rituals and ceremonials and transnational consumption of ethnolinguistically orientated popular culture engender identification? Can we, in the Tamil case, find similarities with British Pakistanis, who, Werbner

observes, exhibit 'compelling orientation' towards a broadly South Asian 'aesthetic diaspora':

> an aesthetic world embodied in the flow of mass popular cultural products from the subcontinent, and by nostalgic reinscription in ritual and ceremonial of the pungent tastes and fragrant smells, the vivid colours and moving musical lyrics of a lost land. (2002: 12)

Werbner explains how 'the transnational diaspora these performances embody is a *depoliticised* one that demands from its members nothing except enjoyment and consumption. There is no sense here of a moral or politically grounded transnational subjectivity, of a responsibility for an other' (12, emphasis in original). But, she goes on to say that, imaginings of diaspora also imply 'a compelling sense of *moral co-responsibility* and *embodied performance*, extended through and across national boundaries' (11, emphasis in original). Returning to this study's Tamil case, how crucial is a sense of moral co-responsibility in engendering a sense of diasporic identification? Is identification limited, despite aesthetic commonalities of shared linguistic, religious and cultural milieu, by the divergent recent experience of politicised ethnicity, or, as Vimalarajah and Cheran (2010: 12) assert, does the 'symbolic identity' evoked through the nationalist Eelam project include 'national and transnational… spaces for solidarity' inclusive of Tamils from all state backgrounds?

Trans-State Tamil Ethnic Identity: Ambiguous Elites?

This project's inclusion of Tamils of diverse state origins is novel and deserves further attention, given the divergent experiences of politicised ethnicity described above and the tendency, in the existing literature, to treat these segments of the globally dispersed Tamil population as discrete groups. The dynamic of trans-state ethnic identification plays out ambiguously at the elite level of Tamil nationalism. On one hand, the pan-Tamil cultural world described above *is* evoked by Tamil nationalist elites. The Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist website *Tamil Nation* (Satyendra 2008),

for example, describes the Tamils as 'an ancient people' genetically distinct from the (North Indian) 'Aryan' population, emphasises the endurance of the Tamil language since Classical times and highlights archaeological evidence of an ancient Tamil kingdom encompassing southern India and northern Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, leaders of Tamil Nadu's two main ethno-nationalist parties, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), have taken centre stage at 'World Tamil Conferences'. These events valorise a 'golden age' of Tamil civilisation—the semi-mythologised *Sangam* era (approximately 300 BC to AD 300)—when literary culture flourished under the patronage of warrior kings whose territories crossed South Asia's contemporary state borders (Geetha and Rajadurai 1995). Despite these nationalist evocations of pan-Tamil-ness, ethno-nationalist movements in India and Sri Lanka emerged along distinct lines and followed independent trajectories. A full account of the respective Tamil nationalist movements in South India and Sri Lanka is beyond the scope of this chapter. As Krishna (1999: 60) summarises:

> [Sri Lankan Tamil nationalism has been] driven from moderation and desired accommodation to secessionism… In contrast Dravidian nationalism began as a potentially secessionist movement… but became accommodationist once it realised that the political dispensation of independent India offered it an opportunity to come to power at the state level and accorded it a degree of autonomy on questions of language and culture… [which] proved sufficient to deflect that movement from secessionism.

Amongst the early Indian Tamil nationalists, imaginings of *Dravida Nadu* (the proposed independent Tamil state) did not include the Tamil-majority regions of Sri Lanka, but were limited to the territorial confines of India (Krishna 1999: 81). Meanwhile, for Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists, 'there was little or nothing to be gained and much to be lost' in building connections with Tamils in India (91). To do so would have played into the hands of Sinhalese nationalists, who attempted to diminish Tamil claims by linking them to the external force of 'Dravidianism'; at once figuring the Tamil minority as traitorous 'Indians in disguise' (64–5) and legitimising Sinhalese anxieties as 'a majority with a minority

complex' (Tambiah 1986: 58; see also Wilson 2000: 136–137). Rather, Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist interests lay in asserting the distinctiveness of a historic Tamil presence and heritage within the island itself (Wickramasinghe 2006: 260).

As the Sri Lankan Tamil nationalist movement militarised from the 1970s, trans-state connections increased; even as Tamil Nadu's main ethno-nationalist parties put their secessionist demands aside in favour of political influence and the cultural accommodation of India's central government. The Tamil Nadu ethno-nationalist parties began to espouse a rhetoric of Tamil nationalism which extended beyond the borders of their state; a shift that Krishna (1999: 89) attributes to the removal of their own calls for secessionism as a popular rallying point, leading these parties to seek alternative means to competitively 'lay claims to Tamil heritage and distinctiveness'. Sri Lankan Tamil militants were allowed to train in Tamil Nadu (109), and the rival figureheads of Tamil Nadu ethno-nationalism—the AIADMK's founder M. G. Ramachandran (MGR) and DMK leader Karunanidhi—openly supported their activities (124–5). At the central level, Indira Gandhi made overtures of sympathy towards the Eelam cause (Wilson 2000: 137–139), reflecting both hopes to court electoral support in the Tamil south, as well as Gandhi's political project to reinforce Indian regional hegemony by 'keeping India's neighbours in a constant state of destabilization' (Krishna 1999: 126; see also Wilson 2000: 137–138). Under Rajiv Gandhi's leadership from 1984, Indian policy moved towards direct intervention in the Sri Lankan issue, as 'a self-anointed, benevolent hegemon' (Krishna 1999: 133). But the relationship between Tamil militants, the Tamil Nadu authorities and the Indian central state became increasingly strained as the LTTE refused to 'play ball' with Indian priorities (142; Wilson 2000: 153–155). At the same time, public support in Tamil Nadu for the militants' cause was waning in response to numerous violent incidents perpetrated by cadres within the state—the bodged attempt in 1984, for example, to blow up a Sri Lankan passenger jet, when the bomb instead detonated inside Chennai airport, killing thirty people (Krishna 1999: 141–142; Paus 2005: 40–41). The situation became even more tense as a result of the Indian Peace Keeping Force's (IPKF's) deployment in northern Sri Lanka between 1987 and 1990. The force was soon engaged in counterinsurgency

against both the LTTE and Sinhalese militias and their occupation of the Jaffna Peninsula was marred by appalling abuse of Tamil civilians (Krishna 1999: 186–194). In contrast to the early-mid 1980s, open support for the LTTE by the Tamil Nadu ethno-nationalist parties was now unacceptable to New Delhi and the DMK were dismissed from the Tamil Nadu State Assembly by the central government as punishment for their failure to control LTTE activity within their state (Chadda 1997: 153). In May 1991, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by an LTTE suicide bomber during an election rally in the Tamil Nadu town of Sriperumbudur. The overt support for Sri Lankan Tamil militarism which had proved disadvantageous to Tamil Nadu politicians in the IPKF-era now became politically toxic, as any lingering sympathies towards the LTTE in New Delhi shattered (Krishna 1999: 216–217). Over the intervening decades, Tamil Nadu's political elites have again, at times, embraced the Eelam cause, and moments of crisis in Sri Lanka have offered opportunities to reiterate ethno-nationalist credentials and affect popular mobilisation by drawing on the rhetoric of pan-Tamil nationalism. In 2006, for example, the Sri Lankan air force bombed a Tamil school, and both the DMK and AIADMK leaderships released outraged public statements. Rebuffed by the Sri Lankan authorities for his comments, Karunanidhi responded: 'if Tamils condemning the killing of their Tamil brethren was dubbed a mistake, then they [the DMK] would continue to commit it' (quoted in Mayilvaganan 2007: 949). More recently, the huge civilian death toll during the Sri Lankan military's 2009 offensive against the LTTE sparked popular protests in Tamil Nadu. Capitalising on this public mood, the then-eighty-seven-year-old Karunanidhi embarked on a hunger strike (The Indian 2009), while the leaders of both main parties courted controversy with remarks interpreted as supportive of the LTTE: Karunanidhi's description of LTTE leader Prabhakaran as 'my good friend', for example, and AIADMK leader, Jayalalithaa's, 2009 election pledge to lobby for the deployment of the Indian army to establish a Tamil homeland in Sri Lanka—an endeavour she compared to Indira Gandhi's military support for the secession of Bangladesh in 1971 (The Hindu 2009).

These statements of support were dismissed as 'crocodile tears' by some Sri Lankan Tamil nationalists, who resented the opportunities for political

one-upmanship the issue appeared to represent to Tamil Nadu's rival politicians (Iyengar 2009). In spite of this cynicism though, the Sri Lankan Tamil separatist movement has also dealt in the symbolism and rhetoric of pan-Tamil nationalism, through a 'tendency to look back in order to find the key to the present' (Fuglerud 1999: 160–162). The elevation of the Tamil language to a divine status was a central theme within the LTTE's rhetoric, which drew on the South Indian-centred literary world of the *Sangam* era. The LTTE's popular name—the 'Tamil Tigers'—its flag and its tiger-striped battle fatigues also evoked pan-Tamil historical imagery: the Tiger being the emblem of the *Cholas*, a Tamil empire headquartered in the Kaveri delta of southern Indian which, during its height in the ninth to twelfth century AD, encompassed much of modern southern India and Sri Lanka, along with the Maldives and parts of the Malay Archipelago (Clothey 2006: 3–4). The 'ancient glory' of Jaffna's cultural flourishing under the *Chola* reign furnished the LTTE 'with a powerful nationalist ideology' (Wickramasinghe 2006: 282), and Prabhakaran adopted the *nom de guerre* Karakalan—the name of a *Chola* king (Fuglerud 1999: 155). Nationalist poems produced by the LTTE and circulated on cassette amongst Tamils in Sri Lanka and around the globe made yet more explicit the imagined homology of the LTTE's contemporary project and a glorious Tamil past:

> In those days all the deep seas were ruled by the *Chola* kings. The ships flying the Tiger flag spread the news of heroism to the world… Now the *Sangam* period has come back… The boats of Sea Tigers [the LTTE's navy] flying… Now our Karakalan is climbing over our Eelam ocean. (quoted in Fuglerud 1999: 155)

Thus Tamil ethno-nationalist elites in India and Sri Lanka have occupied shifting and often vexed positions on the question of trans-state Tamil ethnicity and nationhood. Their approach has been at once particularistic in forging distinct nationalist projects, whilst also incorporating claim-making on behalf of ethnic kin or evoking a broader pan-Tamil consciousness or shared historical mythology in support of these projects. In the case of Tamil Nadu's elites, ethno-nationalist trans-state solidarity has been evoked strongly at times, but readily 'dropped' when

inexpedient to maintaining political influence in the broader context of the Indian state (Jones 2012). A key aim of this project then, was to explore how the complexities of these elite-level nationalist narratives played out in the context of the superdiverse Tamil population in Britain, in order to explore to what extent these complex narratives from the South Asian homeland(s) context impacted upon identification with a trans-state Tamil diaspora among Tamil migrants of diverse state backgrounds.

Beyond the Political Realm

A further concern of this research is to widen the analytical optic to incorporate spheres of Tamil migrants' lives other than the transnational nationalist project which concerns much of the existing literature—both in the context of Britain and other settlement sites (Bruland 2012; Brun and Van Hear 2012; Cheran 2003; Fair 2007; Fuglerud 2001, 1999; Godwin 2018; Orjuela 2012; Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2008; Ranganathan 2010; Tharmalingam 2010; Udugampola 2010; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010; Walton 2015; Wayland 2004). While this study is attentive to the role of transnational political engagements in shaping diasporic identifications, in order to capture a greater diversity of forms of identification and engagement, equal attention is also paid to other spheres of migrants' lives: to social networks, the private worlds of home and family and performances of faith and rituals. A body of literature is concerned with religiosity among (predominantly Sri Lankan) Tamil migrants in Western states. See, for example, the aforementioned works by David (2007, 2008, 2009a, b, 2010, 2012a, b) on devotional dance and embodied ritual practice among Tamils in London; Hornabrook (2018) on devotional musical practice; Waghorne (2004, 2006), Dempsey (2006), Clothey (2006) and Taylor (1994) on the construction of Tamil-orientated Hindu temples in London and the USA; and research on ritual processions of Tamil Hindus in France (Goreau-Ponceaud 2009), Germany (Baumann 2006; Luchesi 2008), Denmark (Fibiger 2018) and Norway (Jacobsen 2009, 2008; Schalk 2007). Additionally, Engebrigtsen (2007) and Tharmalingam (2011) have written on the local