

# **THE ROLE OF SUICIDE TERRORISM IN NATIONAL MOVEMENTS: THE TAMIL CASE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Suicide terrorism is controversial to its core. There is much that can be learned from one of its most exploited users—the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. This insurgent group escalated suicide terrorism as it served as a catalyst for their armed campaign for a separate Tamil homeland independent of Sri Lanka. Research has shown that suicide terrorism is logical, strategic, and advantageous because of its success as a bargaining tool. Nevertheless, prior study focuses too heavy on suicide terrorism as a strategy and does not adequately address the role of suicide terrorism in national movements, in this case the Sri Lankan Civil War. This thesis argues that the group weaponized nationalism, through suicide terrorism, and legitimized its usage as defense against the oppressive regimes in Colombo. This argument is supported through a longitudinal study that maps out critical junctures within the civil war, document and text analyses of primary sources, and a sentiment analysis of the group's leader Velupillai Prabhakaran. The focus of this thesis centers on the meaning, justification, and purpose of suicide terrorism situated with a history of ethnic rivalry. In specific, this thesis also reviews current literature and theories of suicide terrorism and applies it to the case in an attempt to answer how exactly suicide terrorism can survive within the backdrop of a national struggle.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to myself, Brandon V. Benny.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I must acknowledge myself. As a first-generation student of color, an immigrant, and a son of a single mother, my academic career has been no easy feat. Throughout my life, I followed no footprints—I made my own. I became my own role model. I forged my own path, and for that, and this thesis, I am most proud.

Secondly, I must acknowledge my mother, Ann-Marie Benny. She is the pillar of my life and my constant motivation to be the best. I do not know what my life would have been had my mother not made ultimate sacrifices. Her support means my world, and my world is her. Thank you mom!

I want to thank Mia Bloom for spending her time with me in order to enhance this thesis. As a pioneer in the field of suicide terrorism, Dr. Bloom's knowledge of LTTE is powerful, and I am thankful for her addition in this project.

Lastly, I want to show my immense gratitude to Erin Jenne, my thesis supervisor. From the start, Erin instilled in me what it meant to be a student at Central European University. Through what seemed like a hundred e-mails, Erin has been there for me throughout every step of this project. Writing a thesis amidst a global pandemic presents its challenges, but once again, Erin rises to the challenge. Thank you so much Erin!

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## INTRODUCTION

It was a tropically humid yet crisp afternoon in the quiet inroads of Negombo, Sri Lanka, where my privately hired local guide for the day parked his green Toyota HiAce van in front of Saint Sebastian's Catholic Church. In the southwest region of the teardrop shaped island, Negombo is considered the second largest city of Sri Lanka following its neighbor, the historic capital of Colombo. As I walked through the archway entrance towards the church, the guide mentioned that the church is one of the most esteemed structures in this part of the island and is thus a respected tourist photo-op. Nestled a few meters inwards from the rough tides of the Indian Ocean, St. Sebastian's Church is one of a few hundred Catholic dioceses in Sri Lanka. It is representative of the roughly one million followers of Catholicism in the majority Buddhist country.

Easter Sunday, on a cloudy late-April morning in 2019, the picturesque church, among seven other public landmarks mostly scattered around Colombo, were the sites of coordinated suicide bombings that injured over five hundred and killed almost three hundred churchgoers that holy morning.<sup>1</sup> Of the eight sites that included Christian and Catholic churches, prominent hotels, and even a residential area, St. Sebastian's Church suffered the most casualties—around one hundred in total. At face value, the outcome and recency of the 2019 Sri Lanka Easter Bombings can seem unrelated to the island's tumultuous past that is the subject of this paper. However, this independent attack highlights a critical juncture in South Asian terrorism, Sri Lanka's journey with suicide terrorism is not only unfinished but is also continuing intermittently.

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<sup>1</sup> ANI, "A timeline of investigation into 2019 Sri Lankan bombings" *ANI News*, April 03, 2021, <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/a-timeline-of-investigation-into-2019-sri-lankan-bombings20210403193444/>

When the British left the isle of Ceylon in 1948, they left a society of a complex ethnic makeup conducive to cleavages.<sup>2</sup> The British withdrew having favored immigrated Tamils for newer development schemes, plantation jobs, and education. Ceylon, at the time, consisted of two dominant populations, 74 per cent Sinhalese, 16 per cent Tamils, and roughly 10 per cent Burghers, Moors, indigenous, and other smaller ethnic communities.<sup>3</sup> The period between the 1948 independence until the 1980s was marked by over 800,000 native Tamils repeatedly oppressed through pro-Sinhalese measures. This was primarily due to perceiving British equity into the Tamil minority as unfair investment and favoritism that challenged Sinhala identity. Not only had the British seamlessly imported over one million Tamils from the south of India for labor, but they further afforded these Tamil migrants determination through higher education, English language lessons, and civil service positions of wealth and power. Eventually, the crown officially installed a power-sharing government, that included the minority Tamil representation in government that was further seen as a threat to the Sinhala identity. Throughout this nation-building, growing resentment was fomented.

Post-colonialism, the Sinhalese asserted dominance and seized majority control over Tamil positions in government. Having a majority in parliament, and outnumbering Tamils from about 6.5:1, meant that ethnic Buddhist Sinhalese had the legal power to enact pro-Sinhalese changes, at Tamil cost, that indemnified lost progress (simultaneously perceived as anti-Tamil policies). For example, one of the first acts in the Sinhalese dominated parliament was The Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948. In the act, it stripped almost half the Tamil population of citizenship that prompted a forced migration and relocation up north to Jaffna. Most notably, the Sinhalese renamed the

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<sup>2</sup> Independent Ceylon (1948–71), *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka/Independent-Ceylon-1948-71>

<sup>3</sup> Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill the Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 46.

island to Sri Lanka, made Sinhala the official language, and made official the religion of Theravada Buddhism. In addition, they codified affirmative-action schemes for education and job sectors—it was mandated in educational, government, public, and work settings that all written and spoken verbiage be in Sinhala. Accordingly, it was difficult for Tamils to own land, receive education, have jobs with livable wages, and eventually representation in parliament.<sup>4</sup> The Tamil United Liberation Front (hereafter referred to as TULF) was the Tamil political response to this blatant discrimination, but the Sinhalese controlled parliament eventually banished TULF from public office.<sup>5</sup>

Younger frustrated Tamils decided to militarize the nationalist fight for Tamil Eelam—a proposed independent Tamil state. As a result, back and forth skirmishes between younger Tamils and Sinhalese ensued with anti-Tamil riots, (non-)deadly attacks, burning of the Jaffna library (a pillar to Tamil national identity), and the event that sparked the civil war, the first Tamil attack that killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers.<sup>6</sup> This overall cost of conversion, after the British left, was not cheap and was not met with unanimity. In 1983, it sent the young Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka into a twenty-six year-long civil war between the Tamil nation's self-appointed militant wing, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (hereafter referred to as LTTE) and Sri Lankan military with help from Indian Peacekeeping Force (hereafter referred to as IPKF).<sup>7</sup> Of the numerous tactics employed by LTTE, it was through copious and heavily destructive offensive suicide bombings, aimed both at hard and soft targets, where they found key strategy in forging a nationalist-separatist movement for Tamil Eelam.

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<sup>4</sup> Bloom, 46-50.

<sup>5</sup> Bloom, 51-52, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Bloom, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Bloom, 55-58.



A number of years after suicide terrorism ravaged the country, my hand could almost slice that same thick and cool coastal air. My hired guide positioned his van in a tight parking spot adjacent to a local corner café across the street from the mangrove shores of the Negombo Lagoon. It was an early weekday morning. Local fishermen, in a line of fishing boats parading down the main canal for a long day at sea, eagerly await their catch of the day to sell at the largest and most famous fish market in the country. Following my afternoon boating and feeding mangrove monkeys in the lagoon, my guide took us to this bustling fish market. I snapped a photo of the front entrance arch which says “Negombo Fish Market” largely written in bolded text underneath the Tamil and Sinhala titles. Thereafter, I started to notice that on most public and official spaces, both languages were often found tandemly displayed. Unknowing of the recently ended conflict in 2009, the sign at Negombo Fish Market was my first recollection of ethnic conflict and division that stems from Sri Lanka’s consuming past.

This introduction builds the foundation of this thesis with my personal recount of my sojourn in Sri Lanka as well as the case introduction that is the nationalist motives, through suicide terrorism, in the Sri Lankan Civil War. The underpinnings of the Tamil rebel movement guides the research question for this thesis—how does suicide terrorism survive as a strategy of nationalist resistance given its immense internal costs?

## PART I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight current literature as well as suggest the shortcomings of research. It posits a full methodological outline that includes project limitations and the guiding framework of this thesis.

### 1.1 THE RESEARCH

While examining ethnic conflict, terrorism, and separatist movements, the case of the Sri Lankan Tamils must not be overlooked. The Sri Lankan Civil War was an armed nationalist uprising. This domestic insurgency eventually graduated into a violent cross-border conflict at the onslaught of Indian and European interventions and peace-building progress—these efforts ultimately failed. Although the Tamil insurgency was eventually dismantled, LTTE's pervasive use of suicide terrorism, and its purpose within Tamil identity, justifies this continuation of terrorism studies.<sup>8</sup> It remains clear that LTTE did not invent this tactic, the group altered the method in a way that it brought defensive actors to the bargaining table.<sup>9</sup> Oppressive measures and terrorism often go hand-in-hand, with the former paving the way for the latter. Nevertheless, this case indeed sheds light on the contribution of suicide terrorism relative to its user's identity. As the research question is posited, how does suicide terrorism survive a nationalist resistance given its individual and societal costs? The nationalist and separatist motives of Sri Lanka's ethnic Tamils as well as their proliferation of suicide terrorism, as demonstrated, is an appropriate case study in dismantling this historical movement that ended a little over one decade ago.

Although this case study can be seen as peripheral, given that is cradled in the past, this topic was chosen for a number of reasons. As one of the longest wars in

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<sup>8</sup> Bloom, 71.

<sup>9</sup> Bloom, 45-46.

modern Asia, LTTE's role in the Sri Lankan Civil War is valuable to investigate due to its distinctive use, and pioneering, of suicide terrorism and evolving it throughout the years of its employment to actualize a nationalist agenda. Furthermore, this campaign of suicide terrorism falls outside the perimeter of direct western involvement and colonialism. In other words, this civil war does not involve common western actors such as the United States, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, etc. The lack of western involvement in the Tamil's insurgency not only speaks to the contribution of this thesis but also to its validity as a case because it deviates from western implications.

This case is even more unique due to the lack of a group ideology. LTTE is categorized as secular. The group did not operate on grounds of religion; it was not a key factor before and during war.<sup>10</sup> An egalitarian desire for a state of equality, separate from an oppressive majority, has been the pillar for Tamil nationalism and has guided the formation of Tamil United Front (TUF) and TULF—both political 'conglomerate parties' before the war started. The role of Hezbollah in tactically training LTTE, with the latter mirroring the former, and the repeated assassination of high-profile figures further makes this a crucial case for investigating suicide terrorism.

The added element of nationalism indeed underscores this case study as this was a nationalist separatist movement. Per the argument, LTTE was able to frame suicide terrorism within nationalist tropes. Here is where this research on the nationalist motives of suicide terrorism is established. As this is a more historically based case, this thesis is framed through a retrospective lens while considering implications for the future and how national movements, that mirror the Tamil case, can utilize tactics such as suicide terrorism in order to gain traction.

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<sup>10</sup> Bloom, 46.

As demonstrated, the case of LTTE directly speaks to the real-world importance and its relevance for policymakers and scholarship for future implications. The detachment of Sri Lanka's ethnic Tamils from a much larger Sinhalese dominated union is the first piece of a much larger puzzle. This thesis pushes the boundaries by incorporating the much larger Tamil population and their identity. Indeed, this analysis of suicide terrorism advances the readers' tools in comprehending how the weak tried to win a war they never claimed to have started.

## 1.2 LITERATURE & CONTRIBUTION

This thesis further justifies the relevance of LTTE case by complementing the growing literature on suicide terrorism and ethnic conflict. Current debate repeatedly emphasizes that suicide bombings were not invented but were innovated and escalated by LTTE. Literature on this exact topic is scant, especially regarding the case study of the Tamils. Consequently, this thesis further elaborates in this field of suicide terrorism in ways that it has not been covered before. Thus, the link between ethnic conflict and nationalism with suicide terrorism is where this research finds its niche.

Respected scholars in this specific debate spend considerable time linking ideology, such as religion and martyrdom, with the act of suicide in past campaigns of insurgency. On the same note, current scholars focus primarily on a rational analysis of suicide terrorism as a wartime strategy; pioneering authors such as Robert Pape, Martha Crenshaw, and Mia Bloom all expound upon the detailed history, usage of violence, and antecedents or motivations of suicide terrorism in the war for Tamil Eelam. For example, Mia Bloom, in *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, spearheads the debate on the motivational components of suicide terrorism—she includes LTTE among her several case studies. Parallel to other scholars, her groundbreaking work is critical to the overall

discourse. However, I argue that she does not properly discern the link connecting the identity aspect with the overall justification of suicide terrorism in the Tamil case.<sup>11</sup>

When Hezbollah first birthed the modern age of suicide bombings in their 1983 attacks in Beirut, Lebanon, the United States, France, and arguably the rest of the western world, caught an unexpected glimpse of the nationalist motives of suicide terror. The United States saw this tactic again play out during the Palestinian uprisings against Israel in November of 2000, as Bloom recalls in the first chapter of her book. This method was played yet again in the North Caucasus conflict between Chechnya and its Russian counterparts. It is worth noting that these conflicts emphasize a communal component, “for the good of the society”, that is focused on a greater good for all, not some. With this understanding, Bloom expanded the definition of martyrdom to extend beyond the boundaries of religious parameters that most suicide terrorism scholars overemphasize.<sup>12</sup> The case of LTTE, I argue, highlights an ideological shift that shows how separatist groups are adapting their strategies by affixing suicide terrorism onto a nationalist scheme.

This thesis, therefore, explores the nationalist structure of suicide terrorism. We do this in an attempt to bridge the dots that are seemingly linking ethnic oppression, identity, conflict, and Tamil nationalism with the acts of suicide terrorism as well as it how it bodes for the Tamils as a cohesive nation. In doing so, it reifies that suicide terrorism played an instrumental role in actualizing nationalist inducements. Constantly reiterating the ubiquitous fact that LTTE is the most prolific user of suicide terrorism in history indeed makes this case more noteworthy; this thesis takes this idea a step further

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<sup>11</sup> Bloom, 63.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 63.

by considering the internal methods that allowed suicide terrorism to be the marketing success story that it was.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to contribute to the understanding of suicide terrorism which continues to be seen as a sub-field to the much larger study of terrorism. This thesis adds ethnic nationalism while taking into account the common precursors to terrorism—such as the repeated discrimination, ethnic persecution, and the oppressive measures faced by the Tamils. Tamil Eelam remains an idea that was demised alongside LTTE. Consequently, scholars argues that Tamil Eelam has no coercive leverage in order to militarily substantiate itself no longer. In the end, the Sinhalese majority made concessions to Tamil religion, autonomy, capacity, language, and seats in parliament.<sup>13</sup> Thus, suicide terrorism played a nationalist role in the Tamil campaigns to actualize the Tamil nation. Lastly, this research is instrumental in shedding light into the nation-building function of suicide terrorism.

### 1.3 DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

This thesis first explores current cycles of debate, and theoretical nature, of suicide terrorism. I suggest that suicide terrorism is an embryonic faction off the traditional norms and motives of terrorism. The research, relative to this case, will attempt to show that suicide attacks carried out, as well as the exact suicide mechanism utilized, help amass momentum in a failing national movement. In this case, I argue that LTTE weaponized nationalism, through suicide terrorism, in order to maximally coerce their opponent to submit to a two-state solution.

To support my argument, I analyze a variety of primary data. This includes the national flag of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), national symbols, an excerpt from a Tamil song,

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<sup>13</sup> Bloom, 71-75.

photos, two vignettes of Black Tiger suicide bombers, as well as Tamil news articles from the Tamil nation in Sri Lanka and a journal from the Tamil diaspora. In addition, I deconstruct 17 speeches from Velupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of LTTE, in his annual Heroes Day address to the Tamil nation. These speeches are vital to my argument as they contain direct remarks from Prabhakaran that elucidates how he justifies the costs of purposely losing soldiers to the benefit of the nation. I further investigate the themes of these speeches, categorize and chronologize them, and conduct a sentiment analysis to reinforce my argument.

To contextualize both theoretical and empirical claims, an interview of Mia Bloom was conducted. Mia Bloom was chosen due to her work in the terrorism discourse, but primarily because she was the only researcher to do field studies in Sri Lanka during the civil war. Bloom's role provides content validity regarding underpinnings of the Sri Lankan Civil War as well as *ex post facto* understandings of the conflict. She met with LTTE leadership as well as surveyed and interviewed both of the Sri Lankan populations while spending a significant amount of time living with the Tamil nation. The purpose of the interview is to gather expert opinion on the driving research questions in this thesis.

To further validate the data, this thesis adopts a two-part approach. The first follows a longitudinal analysis that delineates a cross-period outline of key events as a part of a larger periodization strategy. Second, is an adaptation of David Collier and Gerardo L. Munck's Critical Juncture Framework. The purpose of this method is to justify key periods, in the periodization strategy, by mapping antecedent conditions, shocks, and identifying the critical juncture itself by considering its legacy and outcomes. Since this is a causal case study, a degree of process-tracing is inevitable as casual or explanatory variables are to be identified. Process-tracing aides the periodization strategy

by controlling for periodical changes stemming from key events throughout the insurgency.

A qualitative-longitudinal approach coupled with a Critical Juncture Framework is appropriate because not only is it observational, but it also applies a comparative element to a singular case study over a certain period of time, in this case from 1983 to 2009. Analyzing critical junctures, and visually comparing these, shows development as well as sequences of events which adds relationality to the nationalist element of suicide terrorism. By doing so, this technique, “seeks to bring methodological rigor to the study of large-scale research questions,” cites Collier and Munck.<sup>14</sup>

#### 1.4 CAVEATS, LIMITATIONS, & OUTLINE

Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic, planned participant-observation was not possible. As a result, travel, ethnography, and field research were all suspended as it was nonviable and beyond the bounds of conceivability. Accordingly, this research is an altered version that permits digital ethnography, or a virtual procurement, of primary data. This is coupled with a narrative approach to incorporate my observations from personal travel to Sri Lanka four years ago. Nevertheless, despite the virtual nature of this research, ethics is still of utmost consideration. Respectively, this thesis has been reviewed by an ethics board which confirmed that it adheres to ethical and procedural guidelines aligned with the anthropological principle ‘do no harm’.

In addition to pandemic-related limitations, the limitation of language and conversational nuances limit the range of primary sources. The spoken and written languages of Sri Lanka are Tamil and Sinhala; however, English is officially recognized and is used in certain primary and secondary sources used for this research. A translation

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<sup>14</sup> David Collier and Gerardo L. Munck, *Building Blocks and Methodological Challenges: A Framework for Studying Critical Junctures* (Qualitative & Multi-Method Research), March 31, 2017.



is provided for sources including Tamil. Lastly, I am a firm believer in traveling to the country one is doing research on. The inability to travel to Sri Lanka indeed affected my ability to convey specifics of suicide terrorism and its effect on certain elements such as family or religion. Furthermore, given my intense planning and past travel to Sri Lanka, my positionality must be considered. My narrative approach plays a unique role in framing the subject of this thesis—entities that are palpable—to mitigate the exclusion of subject-based research.

This chapter outlined the theoretical framework as well as my research design and methods. It serves as the guideline for this thesis. The second chapter posits scholarly contributions that includes modest understandings of what sets suicide terrorism apart from existing variations. The chapter carefully constructs the nationalist narrative, that is our theoretical foundation, around suicide terrorism. It serves as the framework for understanding the case study. The third chapter examines the employment of suicide terrorism relative to the Tamil national movement. I demonstrate this by mapping out critical junctures before and during the insurgency, analyzing how suicide terrorism was framed within the community at large, and finally challenging the existing notions of a seemingly dormant national movement. The latter speaks to the outcome of the Tamil national movement and failure of suicide terrorism. I conclude with a summary of my findings and potential policy implications of counterterrorism bureaus and intelligence agencies for future consideration.

## PART II: SUICIDE TERRORISM

The second chapter of this thesis situates the various theoretical levels of suicide terrorism and its holistic motivations with each stage. Furthermore, it attempts to answer the research question by putting forth a literature review by Robert Pape that is supplemented by an interview with leading suicide terrorism scholar Mia Bloom.

### 2.1 TERRORISM & SUICIDE TERRORISM

Mirroring the dilemma frequently encountered and debated by (counter)terrorism bureaus, researchers, journalists, analysts, and scholars, there is no consensus regarding the definition of terrorism. Bloom argues terrorism is both an “act-based” and “actor-based” event.<sup>15</sup> She similarly recalls the multifaceted definition of terrorism, as well as the western definition promulgated by the United States Department of State (hereafter referred to as DOS).<sup>16</sup> Weinberg et al. attribute three primary reasons for the terrorism definition dilemma. The definition of terrorism (one) has become hotly politicized, (two) is the product of grey areas regarding motivations and categories of perpetrators, and (three) can seemingly depend on the psyche of the observer, the person that witnesses the act.<sup>17</sup> After a comparative analysis into multiple definitions, Weinberg et al. defines suicide terrorism as, “[Terrorism is] a politically motivated tactic involving the threat or use of force or violence in which the pursuit of publicity plays a significant role.”<sup>18</sup> For academic purposes, this is the terrorism definition that this thesis adheres to.

In taking this definition of terrorism further, Michael C. Horowitz, in his work on suicide bombings, describes the suicide element of terrorism as, “... an attack where

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<sup>15</sup> Bloom, 3.

<sup>16</sup> Bloom, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Weinberg et al., *The Challenges of Conceptualizing Terrorism* (Terrorism and Political Violence, Vol.16, No.4 (Winter 2004), pp.777-779.

<sup>18</sup> Weinberg, 786.

the death of the [bomber] is the means by which the attack is accomplished. This excludes attacks where the [bomber's] survival is extremely unlikely but is theoretically feasible.”<sup>19</sup> While Horowitz posits the simple addition of ‘suicide’ onto the accepted definition of terrorism, Pape on the other hand takes the meaning a bit further and his definition is advocated in this thesis. Pape states that, “...suicide attacks are designed to achieve specific political purposes: to coerce a target government to change policy, to mobilize additional recruits and financial support, or both.”<sup>20</sup> He further delves into the analytical components, “In essence, suicide terrorism is an extreme form of what Thomas Schelling (1966) calls “the rationality of irrationality,” in which an act that is irrational for individual attackers is meant to demonstrate credibility to a democratic audience that still more and greater attacks are sure to come.”<sup>21</sup> Pape’s leading definition advances the idea that modern suicide terrorism and coercion go hand in hand, and that indeed suicide attacks are becoming a terrorist group’s most coercive method of attack.

The definition of a nation this thesis upholds is described as uniformity and commonality among individuals that share culture, language or history with one another. The concept of a nation many use interchangeably, but incorrectly, with the idea of a religious community, country or state. In echoing Ernest Renan, in his famous *What is a Nation?*, a nation can be perceived as an imaginary concept without tangible manifestations.<sup>22</sup> In their book *Political Geography: An Introduction to Space and Power*, Joe Painter and Alex Jeffrey further explain that nationalism indeed evokes the classic Renan concepts of a nation but they underscore the role of powerful politics.<sup>23</sup> This idea stems

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Horowitz, *The Rise and Spread of Suicide Bombing* (Annual Review of Political Science 18, no. 1, November 2015), 71.

<sup>20</sup> Robert C. Pape, *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (American Political Science Review), 345.

<sup>21</sup> Pape, 344.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Renan, and M. F. N. Giglioli. *What Is a Nation? and Other Political Writings* (New York; Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2018.)

<sup>23</sup> Joe Painter and Alex Jeffrey, *Political Geography: an Introduction to Space and Power* (Los Angeles etc: SAGE, 2012), 147.

from the ability for people to cohesively strive towards desires and goals that a group seems befitting of interest. Painter and Jeffrey further expound the idea of nationalism through three different perspectives—primordial, ethno-symbolist, and modernist. The modernist perspective is that of which is the more commonly understood—human communities that help establish state sovereignty.<sup>24</sup> Michael Billig, in his book entitled *Banal nationalism*, adds ideology and “national identity” to the definition of nationalism and describes it as something naturally occurring yet something that is remembered (which can imply ‘forgetting’).<sup>25</sup> In applying Billig’s notion of ideology to this case, and the lack thereof in the Tamil national movement, Painter and Jeffrey’s inclusion of politics in their definition indeed lends support to the nationalist motives of LTTE.

## 2.2 SUICIDE TERRORISM IN THOERY & PRACTICE

Theories on the motivational components of suicide terrorism are in an in-depth review in *Homeland Security Affairs* entitled *Causes & Explanations of Suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Review* published by Vanessa Harmon et al.. This journal explores existing suicide terrorism theories in recent academic literature.<sup>26</sup> By way of a systemic review, the authors situate causal variables that differentiate each theory and exemplify them relative to literature.

Theoretical motivations of suicide terrorism are categorized into four levels: (one) individual-level motivations, (two) organizational-level motivations, (three) societal-level theories, and finally (four) combination theories. As a part of their framework, the authors argue that organizational and institutional (combination) motivations are the

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<sup>24</sup> Painter and Jeffrey, 152.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 2002), 37.

<sup>26</sup> Vanessa Harmon et al., *Causes and Explanations of Suicide Terrorism: A Systematic Review* (Homeland Security Affairs 14, Article 9) December 2018.

most attributed to suicide terrorism.<sup>27</sup> This is primarily due to organizational motivations being justified on the grounds of strategy and institutional motivations adhering to an establishment that legitimizes the use of suicide terrorism at large.

What is interesting about individual-level motivations, which relates to its definition, is that it incorporates the human as an ontological agent. In its analysis, individual-level motivations ask the ultimate question, what makes a human willing to altruistically kill themselves? Ami Pedahzur et al., in *Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists*, argue that suicide elements regarding altruism is when one sees a suicide attack as a duty, martyrdom, and accepts a post-life existence.<sup>28</sup> Fatalistic suicide terrorism is often seen in tandem with sociopolitical effects. Another individual-level theory, given by Shaul Kimhi and Shemuel Even, argue that no matter the level or theory, an individual-level motivation is always present in a suicide attack.<sup>29</sup> What is worth noting about their theory is that they categorize the individual to fit four categories of motivations—religious, exploitative, retributive, and social/nationalist. The latter motivation, which links heightened politicization to liberation enabled by the nation as a community, is aligned with the motivations of LTTE.

Organizational theories are where most of the prior research falls short of and is where Pape leads with his arguments supported Freedom House Data on LTTE.<sup>30</sup> They argue that one's surroundings play critical roles in motivating a suicide attacker recalling Martha Crenshaw's 1987 *Theories of Terrorism*, where she emphasizes that, "From one perspective, violence is employed by an organization to affect political change, and from

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<sup>27</sup> Harmon et al., 8.

<sup>28</sup> Ami Pedahzur et al., *Altruism and Fatalism: The Characteristics of Palestinian Suicide Terrorists* (Deviant Behavior 24, no. 4, 2003) 405-423.

<sup>29</sup> Shaul Kimhi and Shemuel Even, *Who are the Palestinian Suicide Bombers?* (Terrorism and Political Violence 16, no. 4, 2004): 815-840.

<sup>30</sup> Pape, 349.

the other, the purpose of the organization's actions is simply to sustain the organization."<sup>31</sup> Organizational theories dehumanize individuals in a way that makes emotion and personal choice obsolete.<sup>32</sup> Organization-level motivations is also where interpretivist arguments such as Nick Ayers or Robert Pape argue about the "strategy" involved in employing suicide terrorism. A part of Ayers's argument advocates that organizations strategically use suicide terrorism for tactical advantages in specific.<sup>33</sup> Also worth noting within organizational-level theories are the leadership decapitation theories that propound group disintegration at the fault of no charismatic or encouraging leader as was a primary cause of failure of Worker's Party of Kurdistan (PKK).

Analyzing societal-level theories is quite literal in its meaning—it encompasses religion, education, community, the activities that bind together society as a whole. Within this theory, education is yet another common denominator between the Palestinian youth movements and LTTE as Harmon et al. recall. Nikolaos Biziouras recounts the educational setting in which LTTE was rooted in. Stemming from intra-ethnic tension coupled with the exclusive agendas of the Sinhalese majority, young Tamil university men would utilize their fellowship to air their grievances and views. This comradeship directly links to the eventual formation of the suicide group known formally as LTTE.<sup>34</sup> Biziouras cites, "For these recruits, membership [in this radical Tamil group] promised significantly increased opportunities for upward economic and social mobility within the context of a successful ethnic mobilization drive, even if that drive was based on violence."<sup>35</sup> From this, we are able to apply a society-level theory to

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<sup>31</sup> Harmon et al., 10.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>33</sup> Nick Ayers, *Ghost Martyrs in Iraq: An Assessment of the Applicability of Rationalist Models to Explain Suicide Attacks in Iraq* (Studies in Conflict and Terrorism 31, no. 9) 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Nikolaos Biziouras, *The Formation, Institutionalization and Consolidation of the LTTE: Religious Practices, Intra-Tamil Divisions and a Violent Nationalist Ideology* (Politics, Religion & Ideology, 13:4, 2012) 552-553.

<sup>35</sup> Biziouras, 553.

LTTE as this theory can be further coupled with the theory of cultural frustration posited by Harmon et al.<sup>36</sup> In framing it this way, we are able to incorporate societal issues of poverty, economic status, politics, relationships...in other words, the frustrating ideas of a nation.

Lastly among the tetrad of suicide terrorism theories are combination-level motivations. As is what it implies, combination theories argue that in looking at a suicide attacker, the categorization can involve multiple variables or theories of motivation. What is important about combination theories is that it simply profiles at length rather than in individual moments. In specific, combination theories map out the attack from a susceptible (mostly younger) individual to their death while incorporating these theories at different stages yielding various combinations. More often than not, there is never a one-size-fits-all category for a perpetrator. Similarly, there is no solitary theory that can be confined to the profile of an attacker.<sup>37</sup> This theory lends the most diverse and encompassing support corroborated by Harmon et al. finding this motivation tier most common in groups that use suicide attacks.

Since LTTE is credited as the most prolific and strategic user of suicide terrorism, it is useful to review Robert Pape's 2003 journal *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. I apply combination-level theories that evidence a nationalist strategy, through suicide terrorism, as rationale for LTTE's role in the Tamil struggle for a two-state solution. This is to support the overall argument that LTTE weaponized nationalism in order to progress towards Tamil Eelam.

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<sup>36</sup> Harmon et al., 11.

<sup>37</sup> Harmon, et al., 12.

Terrorism Type	Target Audience	Harm Level	Goals	Examples
<b>Suicide</b>	All.  Risk alienating perpetrators own community.  Suicide risks losing sympathy or potential sympathy for the cause.	Highest.	Maximize coercive leverage.  <b>Can be demonstrative.</b>  Targeted assassinations.  Kill the most numbers of people. Religious Fulfillment, <i>Martyrdom</i> .	Act in which perpetrator his/herself is not expecting to live.  Act successful if the perpetrator is dead by means of his/her own doing: Vehicles (+ bombs), explosives on a belt, airplane into a building. Hezbollah, LTTE, Hamas, Chechens, Al Qaeda, etc.

Source: Pape (2003).

The chart above highlights an in-depth analysis, from Pape's journal, of suicide terrorism.<sup>38</sup> According to Pape, suicide terrorism aggressively maximizes its user's goals while trading off support from external and internal communities. He argues that the use of suicide terrorism is a strategic choice against a state in order to coerce them into territorial concessions.<sup>39</sup> As for why suicide terrorism is commonly favored, the answer lies in the willingness of the perpetrator to die as its main coercive measure.<sup>40</sup> Suicide terrorism is used because it is less costly (in terms of money), no need for escape or extraction plans, unpredictable vessels of carrying out attacks, the level of attack can signal likelihood of future suicide attacks, and it breeches norms of violence; all of these are a part of Pape's 'coercion by punishment'.<sup>41</sup> Due to inherent power imbalances, Pape refers to coercion as 'punishing the adversary' which is, "...to cause mounting civilian costs to overwhelm the target state's interest in the issue [in] dispute and so to cause it to concede the terrorists' political demands."<sup>42</sup> In addition to Ayers, Eli Berman and David Laitin, in *Rational Martyrs vs. Hard Targets: Evidence on the Tactical Use of Suicide Attacks*,

<sup>38</sup> Pape, 345.

<sup>39</sup> Pape, 343.

<sup>40</sup> Pape, 346.

<sup>41</sup> Pape, 346-347.

<sup>42</sup> Pape, 346.



corroborates Pape's rational choice argument as a part of an overall strategy. Berman and Laiting argue that rationality is ubiquitous and altruistic, especially amongst religious insurgencies.<sup>43</sup>

Although religious motivations are not uncommon, subnational groups are seen as wanting more than religious primacy, these groups desire legitimately recognized territory. Mia Bloom argues that “Although, in modern times, both secular and religious groups perpetrate suicide terrorism, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century religion provided the primary rationale.”<sup>44</sup> She confirms the shift from religiously motivated attacks, to that of national causes and cites LTTE and Palestine as her examples.<sup>45</sup> Similar to national movements in the late 80s and 90s, LTTE’s goal was to martially separate their nation apart from Sri Lanka, “The most important goal that a [subnational group] can have is the independence of its homeland.”<sup>46</sup> Pape’s position runs parallel with the arguments of Mia Bloom; in fact, this is a position is widely advocated in the field. Common examples within this nationalist strategy centers around attacks regarding the United States and its involvement in wartime or colonial settings—this above all includes Japanese Kamikaze bombers, Hezbollah campaigns against western (MNF) occupation in Lebanon, and Palestinian uprisings against Israel (a staunch U.S. ally). I contend that this is where the combination theories of suicide terrorism are evidenced. Societal and organizational-level theories intersect under an umbrella of nationalist components of using suicide terrorism. Considering Pape’s logic, suicide terrorism imposes maximum levels of coercion towards

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<sup>43</sup> Eli Berman and David Laitin, *Rational Martyrs vs. Hard Targets: Evidence on the Tactical Use of Suicide Attacks* (Princeton University Press), 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Bloom, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Bloom, 16.

<sup>46</sup> Pape, 348.

a state in order to recruit, fulfill goals, or change policy—some of which are nationally, and not always religiously, motivated such as LTTE.<sup>47</sup>

Instead, LTTE engaged in aggressive suicide terrorism campaigns under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran. Through suicide terrorism, the group validated their nation's struggle through a host of different (violent) means. For example, the group innovated the suicide vest, diversified its perpetrators, and evolved its methods thus transforming the act of suicide bombings. Contrary to the traditional use of suicide bombs (soft targets), LTTE challenged those norms, in combatting Sinhalese advances, by discriminately targeting infrastructure around the country (banks, landmarks, municipal buildings, and Colombo's main airport etc.). Furthermore, LTTE formed air, naval, children, as well as intelligence and reconnaissance units all to maximize its ability to carry out destructive attacks. Behind the strategy, however, there is still a need for nationalist support. It is here organizational level of theories diverge with societal-level motivations by Harmon et al.,. They argue that support is constantly pivoting among communities and that internal justification is paramount for nationalist support.<sup>48</sup>

Although the risk of LTTE's strategy of suicide terrorism is large, it remains the ultimate payoff to inflict pain; the stakes are very high.<sup>49</sup> By considering the dangerous risk of alienating nationalist support, the tradeoffs must be sold in a valuable way that justifies the payoff. I argue this selling point is martyrdom.

## 2.3 THE THEORY OF MARTYRDOM

Thus far, this thesis has been building a puzzle. It has been piecing the various bits of literature with theories surrounding the notion of palatable suicide terrorism in

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<sup>47</sup> Pape, 344.

<sup>48</sup> Harmon 11-12.

<sup>49</sup> Pape, 344, 346.

LTTE case. For the remaining piece of this puzzle, necessary to seeing the picture as a whole, a theory is needed to devise the link between LTTE's use of suicide terrorism and Tamil nationalism. Martyrdom, I argue, plays a central role in the sacrificial nature of LTTE's use of suicide terrorism. Through recruitment and negotiations combined with nationalist symbols such as speeches, posters, and songs, martyrdom was directly used, by Prabhakaran, to justify the internal cost of life in order to recruit more soldiers in addition to mitigating the potential loss of community support Pape calls attention to.

In my interview of Mia Bloom, I asked how exactly martyrdom, from suicide terrorism, was internally justified to keep national support high. Aside from trying its best to quell dissent from within, LTTE maintained strict codes of stringently adhering to discriminate targets that were the Sri Lankan army and those who aided them such as IPKF.<sup>50</sup> As Bloom stated in the interview, LTTE, under Prabhakaran, were painstakingly careful to avoid indiscriminate targets such as Sinhala or other ethnic casualties. In this aspect, martyrdom is not only able to be justified, but also framed as legitimate relative to a nationalist agenda. LTTE's repeated assassinations of high-profile Sri Lankan figures, and its infrastructure, epitomize how suicide terrorism can be justified while exemplifying Pape's punishment of the adversary concept. For example, LTTE's maximum coercion repeatedly yielded negotiations with the Sri Lankan government, with a breakthrough ceasefire in the early 2000s.<sup>51</sup> What Prabhakaran was able to do is capitalize on the outcomes of martyrdom, especially outcomes that bring negotiators to a bargaining table. But more importantly, he was able to broadcast progress towards Tamil Eelam to the Tamil nation at large.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Mia Bloom (May 18, 2021).

<sup>51</sup> Pape, 347.

One particular detail Bloom emphasized was that LTTE was introspective when it came to recruitment. Inclusivity was LTTE's glue that bound together the various divisions of frustrated Tamils and marketing that diversity through martyrdom against offensive campaigns. For example, LTTE enlisted women who were mostly young and unmarried, widowed, and in some cases sexually abused. This was in addition to poor adults, distraught young men upset with the status quo, children, and vulnerable others who championed the idea of Tamil Eelam. This strategy of inclusivity was successful in selling martyrdom as sufficiently good costs of the Tamil nation.

It is then useful to pivot focus on roles of martyrs and sacrifice within national identity. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, supports the ideas of identity and martyrdom within a cultural framework. In using the example of a tomb of the unknown soldier, Anderson says that unknown tombs are a national imaginary or 'ghostly' force because the tomb is empty. This can metaphorically apply to the willingness of potential LTTE martyrs who would consider themselves as empty tombs of the nation. Anderson suggests that the nation would have a forceful reaction should the unknown soldier become known.<sup>52</sup> But the key takeaway is that the culture of modernity is rooted in the fact that the tomb of the unknown soldier is lifeless. Anderson asserts that religious underpinnings have historically been the loci in understanding death. But he argues that, "...nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which-as well as against which-it came into being." LTTE culture of martyrdom is lifeless.

What remains clear about martyrdom, largely suicide terrorism, is that it can sustain an evolutionary ideology and equally its strategy. Nevertheless, discourse must show how martyrdom survives as a strategy of a war of in tandem with resistant

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<sup>52</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1983), 9.

nationalism. This chapter confirms the omnipresent consideration and arguments that there was cogency behind LTTE's usage of suicide terrorism—an assertion repeatedly cited by suicide terrorism scholars as they further attempt to rationalize its employment. But I further challenge this; what lies behind the exchange of martyrdom?

### PART III: THE TAMIL CASE

I never saw the infamous luscious greenery as my late-night Sri Lankan flight from Bangalore landed in Colombo before the stroke of midnight. The waxing crescent of the early October moon gave the capital outskirts an eerie feeling as the incandescent streetlights, that were far and few in-between, were nightlights for the resting tropical underbrush. I knew of Sri Lanka through my grandmother's recollection of Hindu texts, more specifically the Ramayana. The mythical isle of Lanka's jungle expanse was set ablaze by the tail of Hanuman, a Hindu god in the form of a monkey. Hanuman was purportedly set on fire as punishment for being a loyal messenger of Rama as he was investigating his wife's, Sita, kidnapping and imprisonment. The Ramayana is still read by many young Hindu Tamils in modern day Sri Lanka.

After leaving Bandaranaike International Airport, the relative peace felt in the streets of Negombo is ominous. The island was set ablaze yet again, less figuratively, during the Tamil uprisings against the Sri Lankan government's oppressive practices. The Sri Lankan Civil War, widely considered by respected scholars as unprecedented in modern history, lasted from around 1983 till 2009. This civil war amassed over 150,000 casualties, including parliamentarians, prime ministers, and other high-ranking government officials, as well as roughly one million of whom were still displaced or still missing. The goal of the insurgency was to fortify the idea of Tamil Eelam, a proposed independent Tamil state, as well as to justify the decades of unjust discrimination and state-sponsored discrimination ethnic Tamils endured.

The third chapter of this thesis begins the empirical study. This consists of an analysis of 17 speeches, spoken from Velupillai Prabhakaran, for the ultimate purpose of mapping nationalist tropes in his discussions about resistance. Excerpts from these speeches pertaining to the struggle for Tamil Eelam are categorized into a chronological

table of discrete themes in order to show the development of nationalism and the marketing of martyrdom (through suicide terrorism), and how they intersect, all over time. To validate and expound on these themes further, they were included in a critical juncture model complemented by a basic sentiment analysis.

The chapter includes in-depth document analyses of several primary sources of the Tamil nation. This includes national symbols, public Tamil news articles, part of a Tamil children's song, public images relating to LTTE, vignettes of suicide bombers, and a deconstruction of the Tamil Eelam flag. The purpose of this is to link the weaponized ways that promote national sacrifice for the benefit of Tamil Eelam.

### 3.1 THE PROOF IS IN THE SPEECH(ES)

A Tamil calendar year is incomplete without annual Tamil celebrations such as Black Tigers day (July 5) or Heroes/Martyrs Day (Nov. 27). These esteemed holidays are marked by revered appreciation for martyrs who sacrificed their lives, under LTTE, for Tamil Eelam while unyieldingly combatting the Tamil's state of oppression. Every November 27<sup>th</sup>, Velupillai Prabhakaran gives his infamous Heroes Day speech in which he appeals to Tamils, also via satellite television for the diaspora around the world, in a way that encompasses all of the past year's activities while holding LTTE soldiers in highest regard. These speeches are seen as a public 'state of the nation' type of address where perception of strength, often through sacrifice, is of utmost importance.

Analyzing the 17 speeches of Prabhakaran that are available is valuable because though these, we are able to trace the epiphenomenal themes that are the 'meaning-makers' of suicide terrorism. These are discrete themes, of nationalist sentiment, that Prabhakaran emphasizes as he affixes them to his self-immolating soldiers. Accordingly,

this section highlights the various analyses of the themes in every speech in order to correlate them with a chronological timeline of events that parallel critical junctures.<sup>53</sup>

Yielding to a strict code of elusiveness from the general public, Prabhakaran seized his infrequent moments when in view of the minority he chose to represent. Albeit Prabhakaran's Heroes Day speeches were of considerable length, the task of distinguishing his verbiage—that justifies nationalist violence at the behest of oppression—was straightforward. Thus, in reviewing his speeches, I demarcated sentences, from the whole, that spoke to his justification of violence and his depiction of heroes and martyrs under the umbrella of national identity. Therefore, this analysis is a culmination of such specific verbiage, apparent from his speeches in which an English translation was made available, categorized thematically that are then organized by the corresponding year. It is important to note that an English translation was not available for his 1989, 1990, and 1991 speeches.

By analyzing the development of this discourse over time, we can progressively visualize that Prabhakaran's language grew increasingly acute and controversial respective to the war as it was happening as well as negotiation efforts. What is of particular note, the years between 1999 through 2004 contained the years of mediation of the Norwegian-brokered ceasefire that, according to Mia Bloom in our interview, was the most promising set of negotiations that could have led to the creation of Tamil Eelam. As evidenced from the chart, his language and word choice paralleled the chronology of the nationalist separatist movement overall, analogous with, what I argue, were four critical junctures throughout the civil war.

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<sup>53</sup> "Hon.Vellupillai Prabhakaran," Velupillai Prabhakaran, May 31, 2017, <https://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/hon-vellupillai-prabhakaran/>.



## Velupillai Prabhakaran's Heroes Day Speech Themes (27 Nov. 1992-2008)

1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Liberation, Struggle, Freedom.	Nation(al), Struggle, Freedom, Pleading to the International Arena.	Warriors, Liberation, Freedom, Peace, Govt. VS Army, Solutions.	Our land, War, Distrust/Failure, Strength, Worldwide Tamil Support, Genocide, Occupation.	Defeat, Strong, Genocide, Strategy, Guerrilla Warfare, Negotiations, Chauvinism, Militarism, Struggle.	Chauvinism, Racism, <u>History</u> of oppression, Genocide, Denied & devoid, Sacrifice.
1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Why us?, Chauvinism, Racism, Oppression, Genocide.	Peace, Success, Liberated, Tyranny, Oppression, Understood, Mediation.	Peace, Solution, Dialogue, Traitors, Election fraud, Chauvinism, Blame, Ethnic conflict, Terrorism, International Law, Liberation, Sovereignty, De-escalation.	Peace, Success, Liberated, Tyranny, People's movement, Understood, Mediation, Self-determination, Trust/Distrust, Terrorism vs Political violence, Defending violence, Genocide, Tyranny, Racism, Oppression.	Ceasefire, Mutual Peace, Commitment, Destruction, Rebuilding, International Community.	Unsuccessful Peace, False Accusations, Racism, Chauvinism, Elites.
2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	Common Themes
Peace, politics, Racism, Diplomacy/ Mediation, De-escalation, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Hegemonism, Militarism.	Fight, Ideology, war, Helpless, Self-determination.	Fight, War, Genocide, Peace, Freedom, Struggle, Need international support.	Fight, Genocide, Oppression, Support.	Freedom, Land, Fight, Struggle Oppression, Suppress, Peace, Nation, Sovereignty, Occupation.	<b><u>Peace</u></b> (9x) VS <b><u>Genocide</u></b> (7x)

Source: [velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/hon-vellupillai-prabhakaran/](http://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/hon-vellupillai-prabhakaran/)

The Sri Lankan Civil War can be disseminated into four phases, Eelam Wars I, II, III, and IV respectively. While considering the timeline of events during the war, I argue that these four phases fall within the framework of Collier and Munck's Critical Junctures analysis. For the first critical juncture, Eelam War I, it is important to emphasize

antecedent events and the shock. Since this is a critical juncture absent of Prabhakaran's speeches, a review of the civil war timeline was conducted. Respectively, it was the build-up of ethnic tensions (oppression and discrimination), non-violent turned violent confrontations, the formation and armed uprising of LTTE in 1976 by youth/students, the banishment of TULF from Sri Lanka's parliament (the only viable Tamil source of representation), and secondly the shock which was the first LTTE attack that killed 13 Sri Lankan soldiers. Eelam War I maintains its legacy as the first phase of this gruesome war.

The second critical juncture I argue lies in the second-half of Eelam War II after the assassination of Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa in May of 1993; Eelam War II lasted from 1990 to 1995 with a brief 100-day ceasefire before Eelam War III was declared. Prabhakaran's 1992 speech contained emphatic ideas of liberation and struggle that were used in tandem all to emphasize the ultimate goal of freedom from the oppressive reigns of Sri Lankan statehood. With the assassination of the Premadasa less than a year later, his 1992 speech and subsequent 1993 speech warranted scrutinization. It is worth noting in his 1993-95 speeches, Prabhakaran does not mention the violence or assassination attempts by LTTE. Instead, he strategically, and poetically, nationalizes the Tamil struggle to the international world, emphasizes that the movement is a struggle of and for peace and solutions, and goes far to make initial claims of genocide (1995).

The third of four critical junctures, I argue, is not the third Eelam War per se. Elite Tamils highlights five major attacks that are in LTTE's portfolio of notable violence. Two of the five occurred during Eelam War III.<sup>54</sup> The first was the Central Bank Bombing of 1996. Considered the control center for the island's finances, over 91 lives were lost at the hands of a suicide cadre. The second is the infamous Bandaranaike

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<sup>54</sup> Elite Tamils, "Black Tigers Day July 05," Elite Tamils, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

Airport attack in 2001. As the island's largest airport, a 14-member suicide squad destroyed the military air base as well as parked passenger planes, for Sri Lankan Airlines, which cost over \$350 million in damage. Though these are two shocks that are spread five years apart, they are both at the top of LTTEs most daring attacks of which a ceasefire was declared in the year after the airport attack. To cross-reference with Prabhakaran's speeches, 1996 strongly postulated Sri Lankan militarism with chauvinism, a continuation of genocidal aspects, all while acknowledging a strategy of guerilla warfare, "In the conduct of the war it becomes a necessary condition for a liberation movement practicing the art of guerrilla warfare to make strategic withdrawals and to loose areas of control."<sup>55</sup> His 2001 speech seemingly defends LTTEs violent tactics, "This narrow definition [of terrorism] has erased the distinctions between genuine struggles for political independence and terrorist violence,"<sup>56</sup> in which I argue was his most advanced and introspective speech. He aligns the movement under the United Nations Organization charter while categorizing LTTE under the name of "freedom fighters" in liberating the Tamils from genocide.<sup>57</sup> Per the framework, the critical juncture is the proceeding Norway-mediated bilateral ceasefire bringing both sides to the bargaining table to liaise concessions of Tamil statehood. As epiphenomenal, this ceasefire and negotiations added an element of legitimacy to LTTE's use of suicide terrorism to which was exactly what Prabhakaran used to justify violence and nationalism in speeches thereafter.

I map the last critical juncture as Eelam War IV (2006-2009), the dissolution of LTTE as well as the conclusion of the war. From my interview with Mia Bloom, the

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<sup>55</sup> Velupillai Prabhakaran Heroes Day Speech, 1996. <https://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-1996/>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 2001. <https://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-2001-2/>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 2001.

2002-2003 ceasefire and negotiations indeed looked promising.<sup>58</sup> During the Norwegian overseen negotiations, LTTE dropped their demand for a two-state solution and opted for a federal solution.<sup>59</sup> However in a drive to maintain primacy in the north, Prabhakaran unilaterally declared self-control over the north, towards the end of the negotiations, which therefore angered the south yielding a broken ceasefire and the resumption of war that was the impetus of Eelam War IV. Given the antecedent, I suggest the shock, corroborated by Bloom, was the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami with Sri Lanka seeing massive devastation with about 35,000 lost lives. Post-tsunami reconstruction was embedded with corruption with the allocation of aid not including Tamil dominated areas in the east despite the east being the most impacted. There is an argument to be made that, and as Bloom emphasized, events such as Oslo pulling out of negotiations and tsunami reconstruction are antecedent conditions to Eelam War IV. Frustration from failed negotiations were heavily emphasized in Prabhakaran's 2003 and 2004 Heroes day speeches where he attributes the suspension of talks as endless ethnic war against the Tamil Nation in his strongly worded speeches to date.<sup>60</sup> Worth noting in these two speeches, he states that the Tamil nation is in dire need of reconstruction and humanitarian assistance due to endless ethnic war. He further goes on to imply that corruption lies within the Sri Lankan government and is preventing aid from happening.<sup>61</sup> Following the Dec. 26<sup>th</sup> tsunami, which occurred after his Nov. 27<sup>th</sup> speech, the verbiage in his 2005, and subsequent speeches, elucidate vulnerable and desperate undertones. His last speech in 2008, which ironically sounds defeatist, comes

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<sup>58</sup> Interview with Mia Bloom.

<sup>59</sup> Szczepanski, Kallie. "History of the Sri Lankan Civil War." ThoughtCo, July 8, 2019. <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-sri-lankan-civil-war-195086>.

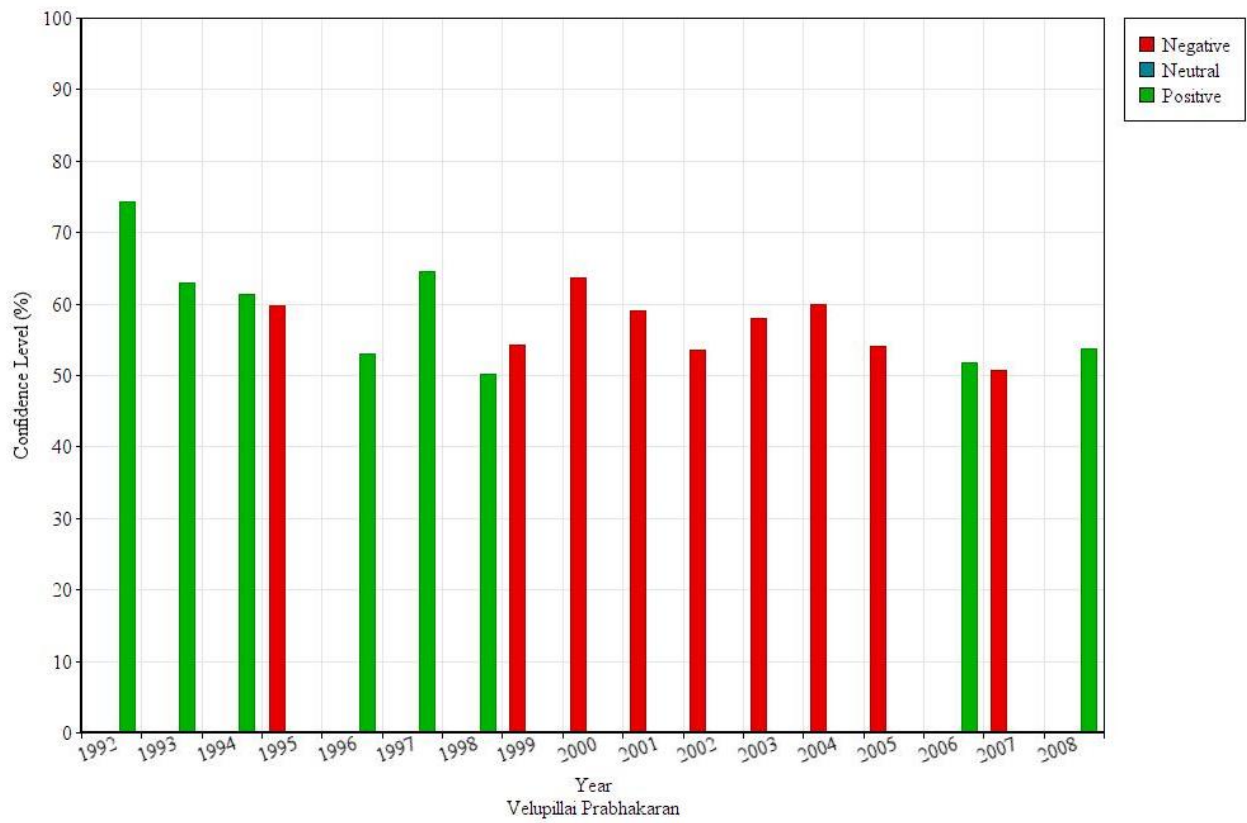
<sup>60</sup> Velupillai Prabhakaran Heroes Day Speech, 2003. <https://velupillaiprabakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-2003-2/>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 2003 & 2004. <https://velupillaiprabakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-2004-2/>

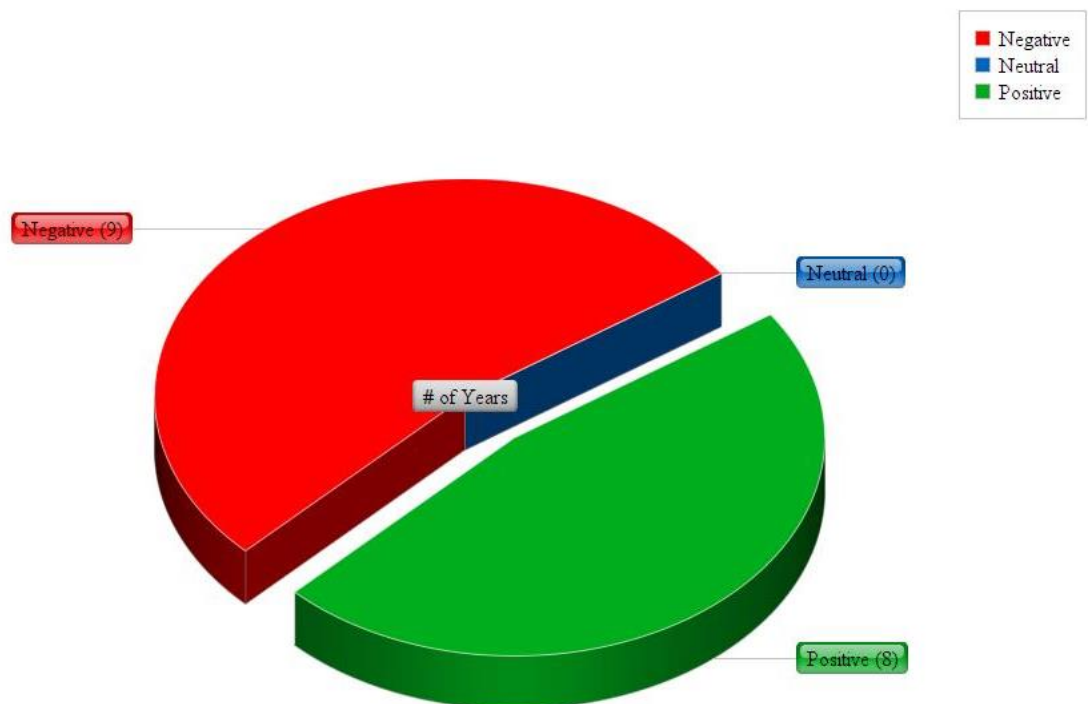
full circle as he reveres those who have died for the Tamil Eelam name. In his boldly worded speech, he defends LTTE's use of violence in an unleashing slanderous message that assistants of the Sri Lankan state are racists, oppressors, occupiers, and genocidal while pleading for legitimacy from the international community, notably India and other SAARC members.

To extend validity to Prabhakaran's views from his speeches, a sentiment analysis was conducted of his speeches in tandem with his specific verbiage. The sentiment analysis was conducted for the 17 speeches available. *Positive* was coded to include statements containing phrases that highlighted significant progress, strength, justification in pitting martyrs/heroes in a favorable aspects, and praising efforts of LTTE. *Negative* means that phrases included losses, dissent of the Sri Lankan government and their forces' advancements (i.e., 'genocide', 'racist' etc.), failed negotiations, and defeatist terms especially related to war. For this analysis, I also coded for *Neutrality*, *Neutral-Positive*, and *Neutral-Negative* to which the algorithm did not yield his speeches to be either. The element of neutrality emphasizes parts of his speeches that were indiscriminatory of emotion and being more informative.

Sentiment Analysis of Velupillai Prabhakaran's Heroes Day Speeches (27 Nov. 1992-2008)



Sentiment Analysis of Velupillai Prabhakaran's Heroes Day Speeches (27 Nov. 1992-2008)



Peace	Genocide
1994	1995
1999	1996
2000	1997
2001	1998
2002	2001
2003	2006
2004	2007
2006	<b>Classification</b> Red - Negative Green - Positive
2008	

Source(s): [velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/bon-velluppillai-prabhakaran/](http://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/bon-velluppillai-prabhakaran/)

In this sentiment analysis, which was conducted through MonkeyLearn, 8 speeches were classified as positive and 9 were classified as negative. If this is cross-referenced with the common themes, 'peace' and 'genocide', it yields the chart below. Not only does this illustration texturize the emotional underpinnings of the speeches, but this analysis also suggests correlations of 'peace' and genocide' within the context of war and national struggle.

I check these associations through manual observation to see exactly how 'peace' and 'genocide' are used. At first glance, what is interesting to note, about 'peace' and 'genocide', is that for the former, the sentiment analysis often coded negative, and the latter coded more positive despite its opposite connotations of meaning. It warrants looking back into Prabhakaran's speeches to see how these themes are manifested. For 'peace', Prabhakaran repeatedly emphasized that the struggle for Tamil Eelam is a peaceful movement. He notes that the struggle, by default, was always embedded in

peace and is all the Tamils had ever wanted. Although the sentiment analysis coded negatively during the mediation period, this can be attributed to the compromise of LTTE's goals. This theory holds merit due to Prabhakaran willing to opt for a federal solution instead of that of a two-state during those negotiations.<sup>62</sup> Prabhakaran used these moments of peace to defend LTTE's actions under the rights of self-determination, racism, the lack of trust in Sri Lankan armed forces, and Sri Lankan militarism. Interestingly, these negative sentiments correspond with the host of shocks, including the airport attack and the 1999 assassination attempt on Prime Minister Kumaratunga (the prime target of LTTE and Sri Lankan head of state) and the critical juncture that was the Norwegian brokered ceasefire all in Eelam War III. In our interview, Mia Bloom notes that LTTE crushed internal dissent.<sup>63</sup> In a different aspect, Tamils weaponized their nationalism, forcibly, by acting violent against other Tamils who were not aligned with LTTE's movement—this is corroborated by Prabhakaran's 2000 speech 'Traitors'. In other words, being a peaceful movement and obtaining peace is a provoking juxtaposition.

The 'genocide' angles of Prabhakaran's speeches, again, coded more positively and occurred in about 7 different speeches. Similar to the 'peace' theme, the positive theme of genocide was used primarily during the first half of Eelam War III which corresponded with the shock of the Central Bank Bombing which was one of the deadliest LTTE attacks. In their deadliest attack, Elite Tamils recalls the 2006 Digampathana Truck Bombing when a Black Tiger struck an explosive-laden truck through busses that were in a naval convoy carrying naval soldiers from Trincomalee. According to the United Nations organization, genocide is defined as killing, or causing harm to members of a group all with, "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national,

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<sup>62</sup> Szczepanski, Kallie. *History of the Sri Lankan Civil War* (ThoughtCo) July 8, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Bloom, 62.



ethnic, racial or religious group.”<sup>64</sup> I argue that although ‘genocide’ connotes a negative meaning, it was used during Prabhakaran’s Heroes Day speeches which means he pivoted ‘genocide’ in a way that Tamil resilience, through suicide terrorism, supersedes. For example, he emphasized genocide in the Sri Lankan army’s attempt to destroy and annihilate the Tamil nation and Tamil identity, linked militarism with ‘genocide’, and justifies violence in response to genocidal violence, “Since the non-violent political struggle became futile and meaningless and at the same time the state oppression intensified in the form of genocide the Tamil people were left with no alternative other than to confront the state violence with violence.”<sup>65</sup>

Through an analysis of Prabhakaran’s Heroes Day speeches coupled with a categorization of discrete themes, we are able to see the origins of nationalist rhetoric in justifying suicide terrorism and how it is made affordable to the Tamil nation at large. Year by year, his language and word choice paralleled the chronology of the nationalist separatist movement overall. This idea was extended through a mapping of critical junctures, corroborated by a sentiment analysis, to support the argument that Prabhakaran indeed managed to weaponize nationalism in a way that justified ‘peace’ and ‘genocide’.

### 3.2 TERRORIST VS FREEDOM FIGHTER

It is another dilemma in the study of terrorism to encounter the divergence between one that fights for freedom and one that is a “terrorist”, both are often used interchangeably. Interestingly enough, a freedom fighter is not always a terrorist and vice versa; however, can a terrorist be a freedom fighter? If one has terrorism in their

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<sup>64</sup> “Genocide,” United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (United Nations), accessed May 27, 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>.

<sup>65</sup> Velupillai Prabhakaran Heroes Day Speech, 2001.  
<https://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/2012/11/07/leader-v-prabakarans-heros-day-speech-2001-2/>

portfolio, does that mean they are incapable of fighting for freedom, justice, or anything else for that matter?<sup>66</sup> Velupillai Prabhakaran, the charismatic leader of LTTE, was the man tasked with making suicide terrorism acceptable to his constituents that is the larger Tamil population and diaspora. He is tasked with marketing this unconventional strategy of war for any individual susceptible to, or capable of, joining. Moreover, this ploy has to make these participants willing to die, and more importantly, mitigate their deaths as a sacrifice for the greater good of their marginalized community. This parallels the research puzzle, which is how suicide terrorism was justified and made palatable to ordinary supporters of LTTE.



*Tamil Eelam National Flag*

*Source: [www.namathueelanadu.com/?p=5813](http://www.namathueelanadu.com/?p=5813)*

This flag shown above, which a basic form of nationalism, was borne from LTTE was made the *de facto* flag of Tamil Eelam. It is a clear indicator of how LTTE weaponized nationalism through violence. This symbiotic relationship is found in banal

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<sup>66</sup> Michael Bhatia, "What Do You Think the Phrase 'One Man's Terrorist Is Another Man's Freedom Fighter' Means?," Choices Program (Brown University, June 25, 2007), <https://www.choices.edu/video/what-do-you-think-the-phrase-one-mans-terrorist-is-another-mans-freedom-fighter-means-2/>.

ways that cater to this strategy. The flag of LTTE, turned national flag of Tamil Eelam inherently advocates for liberation through violence. From its inception at the annual Heroes Day (November 27<sup>th</sup>) in 1990, which the celebration itself is a reverence for martyrs, the flag was adopted for Tamil Eelam to show heroism. The flag has 33 bullets in each section separated by bayonets. 33 bullets are for 33 years between 1948 to 1981 which symbolize 33 years of systemic oppression of the Tamil population at the hands of the Sri Lankan Government.<sup>67</sup> The ‘tiger’ symbol was meant to convey the martial history and national upheaving of native Tamils.<sup>68</sup> There are four colors on display—red, yellow white, and black. Red symbolizes freedom, freedom and liberation from the Sinhala state. Red promotes egalitarianism, gender equality, social justice as well as the abolishment of caste and class. Yellow symbolizes the yearnings for Tamils to govern themselves, the right to Tamil Eelam (a Tamil homeland) and Tamilian rights to self-determination. White is not only a symbol but a demand for purity, honesty, and most importantly selflessness on behalf of Tamilians and their leaders. Lastly, Black, “...reminds that march towards freedom is wrought with dangers, death and destruction. That it's filled with pain and misery. Black signifies determination and resoluteness vital to withstand the adversities and build the new nation of Tamil Eelam to provide security and to defend the borders.”<sup>69</sup>

While a flag remains as the most salient symbol of the nation (Billig), it shows just exactly how LTTE embedded ideas of their suicide terrorism campaign into a national symbol meant to be universally seen and recognized. Furthermore, a flag makes the individual Tamilian feel emboldened and with a sense of belonging. Within the realm

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<sup>67</sup> “Symbols of Tamil Eelam. The Flag of Tamil Eelam Was Designat,” en.google, accessed May 27, 2021, <https://en.google-info.org/index.php/3258465/1/symbols-of-tamil-eelam.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., “Symbols of Tamil Eelam”.

<sup>69</sup> Viduthalai Pulikal, “Tamil Eelam National Flag,” Tamilnation.org, March 1991, <https://tamilnation.org/tamileelam/defacto/flag.htm>.

of suicide terrorism, it evokes, as Anderson would suggest, a sense of public ceremonial reverence.<sup>70</sup> Simultaneously representing both the nation and the military, the flag's symbols were further adopted to be the symbol of various other military wings of LTTE marketed to its same constituents. These symbols are from Air Tigers and Sea Tigers—in addition to Baby Tigers (child soldiers), Women's Military Units of LTTE, and Black Tigers.<sup>71</sup>



Translation: (left) "Let's hit the air"; "In the sky too" (right) "let's create an epic at sea"  
Source: [Vijasan/Eelamview.wordpress.com](http://Vijasan/Eelamview.wordpress.com); [Qurora.com](http://Qurora.com)



Translation: Tamil Eelam Military Structure; Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam  
Source: [velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/hon-vellupillai-prabhakaran/](http://velupillaiprabhakaran.wordpress.com/hon-vellupillai-prabhakaran/)

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, 9.

<sup>71</sup> Bloom, 60.

Black Tigers do not have a specific logo or symbol. Dormant today, Black Tigers are a special unit within LTTE that cater to notable missions. This elite unit is responsible for most of the group's suicide attacks and is therefore the ideal subject to scrutinize for nationalist symbolism. Although they are the most destructive force within LTTE, Black Tigers operate on a more private and emotional levels. More often than not, parents of Black Tigers do not know their child is a Black Tiger until they are notified of their death. Black Tigers are trained to be devoid of any pleasure or social life. Underneath the Black Tigers are further subunits—Black Sea Tigers, for suicide naval operations, and Birds of Freedom, which is the popular Women's cadre of the Black Tigers.<sup>72</sup> The inclusion of women in the Black Tigers, unofficially referred to as Black Tigresses, was encouraged. The persistent use of women as suicide bombers was a due to the ability for women to have less invasive security screening procedures in certain settings such as political events. For example, a female tiger was able to use this strategy to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi, Former Indian Prime Minister.

The Black Tigers became notorious as pioneers of suicide attacks on politicians, military installations and other specific targets. Even during a brief ceasefire period between the Tamil Tigers and the government, and despite popular criticism, the rebels refused to disband the Black Tiger unit, which had become their backbone. Black Tigers were responsible for the assassination of Former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, former Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa and attacks on airports and army bases.<sup>73</sup>

Due to the prestige in being a direct actor in undermining the oppressor (the Sri Lankan state), being a part of the Black Tigers is an aspirational motive. Accordingly, “Black Tigers are not recruited due to poverty or unemployment, but because of their nationalist spirits.”<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, LTTE glorifies Black Tigers—from its secret training

<sup>72</sup> R. Ramasubramanian, *Suicide Terrorism in Sri Lanka* (Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies), August 2004, pp. 9-13.

<sup>73</sup> Dushiyanthini Kanagasabapathipillai, “When Tamil Tigers Remembered Their Suicide Unit,” Anadolu Agency, July 5, 2014, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/when-tamil-tigers-remembered-their-suicide-unit/145271>.

<sup>74</sup> Ramasubramanian, 10.

camps (also located in Lebanon and Palestine) to directly being accepted into the unit only by Velupillai Prabhakaran, and the token of martyrdom that is the infamous cyanide pill to be swallowed to evade imminent capture. Arguably, the most important veneration of Black Tigers is the aftermath of their death. They are heralded as national liberation heroes during LTTE's annual National Heroes Day and Black Tigers Day celebrations. It is through these veneration where we see the pulse of suicide terrorism surviving year after year despite the costs.

LTTE chief Prabhakaran, in an address to women cadres on International Women's Day on March 8, 1996, described the liberation of the Tamil woman as "the fervent child" that was born out of the Tamil "national liberation movement."<sup>75</sup>

Prabhakaran's overall theme was the devotional sacrifice of women black tigers.<sup>76</sup>

When asked to serve a suicide mission, a Black Tiger emphasized their idea of Tamil Eelam—

"I have written a letter to my leader, and was selected to join the suicide squad. I was trained to kill. I was not afraid to die," said a female Black Tiger, who asked not to be named. "I joined the Tamil Tigers voluntarily, and wanted to become a Black Tiger, after having witnessed continuous injustices encountered by my community, and wanted to serve and safeguard my people."<sup>77</sup>

Emphasized in another quote from 1998, Prabhakaran frames the martyrdom of Black Tigers as saviors of the Tamil nation.<sup>78</sup>

"With perseverance and sacrifice, Tamil Eelam can be achieved in 100 years, but if we conduct Black Tiger Operations, we can shorten the suffering of the people and achieve Tamil Eelam in a shorter period of time. This is an era of Black Tigers. No force on earth today can suppress the fierce uprising of the Tamils who seek freedom."<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> "Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)," Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Terrorist Group of Sri Lanka (*South Asia Terrorism Portal of Institute for Conflict Management*). <https://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/srilanka/terroristoutfits/lte.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> Ramasubramanian, 12. LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran Tamil speech on 8 March 1996, address to women cadres on International Women's Day.

<sup>77</sup> Kanagasabapathipillai, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Ramasubramanian, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Ramasubramanian, 9. LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran Tamil speech on 13 May 1998, the first anniversary of the launch of the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) Operation, 'Jaya Sikirui' ('Victory Assured' in Sinhala).



What LTTE does is link their deaths to being sacrificial mechanisms for Tamilians of Tamil Eelam. From Prabhakaran's verbiage that seemingly moralize suicide terrorism in idolizing the deaths of LTTE suicide bombers, we are able to trace this sentiment and apply them to the main idea of how suicide terrorism is legitimized. Moreover, for suicide terrorism to be justified as a national struggle is not limited to direct speeches from Prabhakaran. In fact, it includes the perpetuation from media, holidays such as Heroes Day or Black Tigers Day, Tamilian literature, and local Tamil news. Outlets such as these all situate the idea of sacrificial death with the Tamil nationalist movement.



*Translation: not available*

*Source: Tamil Guardian-Remembering Maalathy 30 years on*

The intersection of LTTE perpetuated violence and nationalist veneration, is shown in this poster released by LTTE, a young woman by the name of Maalathy

swallowed her cyanide pill to avoid capture and detention by IPKF.<sup>80</sup> The news article is written to extend the idea of national sacrifice; “Today marks thirty years since the death of 2nd Lt. Maalathy, the first female fighter of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to lose her life in the Tamil armed struggle against Sri Lankan state oppression.”<sup>81</sup> This was accompanied, with the release of the poster below, by LTTE saying, “Liberation does not mean just freedom from foreign domination and tyranny, but also freedom from religious and gender discrimination ...”<sup>82</sup> While not exclusive to



*“Seeds of liberation: new roots will surely grow”*

*Translation: Not available*

*Source: Tamil Guardian-Remembering Maalathy 30 years on*

<sup>80</sup> *Remembering Maalathy 30 Years On*, <https://www.tamilguardian.com> (Tamil Guardian Ltd., October 10, 2017), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/remembering-maalathy-30-years>.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, *Remembering Maalathy 30 Years On*, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, *Remembering Maalathy 30 Years On*, 2017.



Black Tigers, the infamous cyanide pill is a token of being a tiger and a symbol of liberation. It is a capsule to be worn around the neck filled with cyanide powder that is meant to be swallowed, similar to Maalathy, in the event of imminent capture so one would die without having to be tortured for LTTE information.

The nationalist justification for suicide terrorism is evident in pro-LTTE journal articles. For example, Tamil Guardian's 2007 article entitled *An act of unbelievable determination, bravery and precision* by B Raman – the title alone is an identifying marker of pro-LTTE rhetoric. The article describes the 21-member suicide squad as a part of the Air Tiger mission against the Sri Lankan defensive at Anuradhapuram Air-Force Base. A document analysis, shown below, was conducted to show the nationalist verbiage Raman uses in heralding their mission as successful at the benefit of suicide terrorism.<sup>83</sup> In reviewing the article, I highlighted sentences that included descriptions of how LTTE carried out the suicide attack. The left column are those sentences, the right are supporting words that were used to help describe LTTE's aspect of the suicide mission.

Quote From Tamil News Article	Key Words Describing LTTE Attack
"It was an act of unbelievable determination, bravery and precision successfully carried out by a 21-member suicide commando group of the Black Tigers - significantly led by a Tamil from the Eastern Province - with the back-up support of two planes of the so-called Tamil Eelam Air Force."	<b>Unbelievable determination</b> <b>Bravery</b> <b>precision</b>
"Reliable Western sources say that no other terrorist organisation in the world would have been capable of organising such a raid, which had been preceded by painstaking intelligence collection, planning and rehearsal."	<b>No other</b> <b>Capable</b> <b>Painstaking intelligence collection</b> <b>Planning</b> <b>Rehearsal</b>
"The commandoes, divided into groups, infiltrated into the air base from two directions and, within 20 minutes, took the	<b>Divided</b> <b>Infiltrated</b>

<sup>83</sup> B Raman, *An Act of Unbelievable Determination, Bravery and Precision*, <https://www.tamilguardian.com> (Tamil Guardian Ltd., October 23, 2007), <https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/act-unbelievable-determination-bravery-and-precision>.

security guards by surprise, overwhelmed them, seized their weapons and communication equipment, neutralised a radar and an anti-aircraft gun position and then intimidated their headquarters that they were in effective control of the air base.”	<b>Surprise</b> <b>Overwhelmed them</b> <b>Neutralised</b> <b>Effective control</b>
“Embarrassed by the spectacular display of the LTTE's prowess, the Sri Lankan authorities have been trying to play down the successes of the LTTE operation.”	<b>Embarrassed (The Sri Lankan Authorities)</b> <b>LTTE's Prowess</b> <b>Success</b>
“The helicopters destroyed by the Black Tigers were being used as helicopter gun ships or for VIP transport.”	<b>Destroyed</b>
“It once again underlines the LTTE's reputation as an organisation with a tremendous tenacity of purpose, grit and sophistication in thinking and planning. Its recent set-backs have not weakened its morale.”	<b>Reputation</b> <b>Tremendous tenacity</b> <b>Purpose</b> <b>Grit</b> <b>Sophistication in thinking and planning</b>
“They have only redoubled its determination to keep fighting for its political objective unmindful of the losses in the Eastern Province.”	<b>(Redoubled its) determination</b>

*Source: Tamil Guardian - An act of unbelievable determination, bravery and precision*

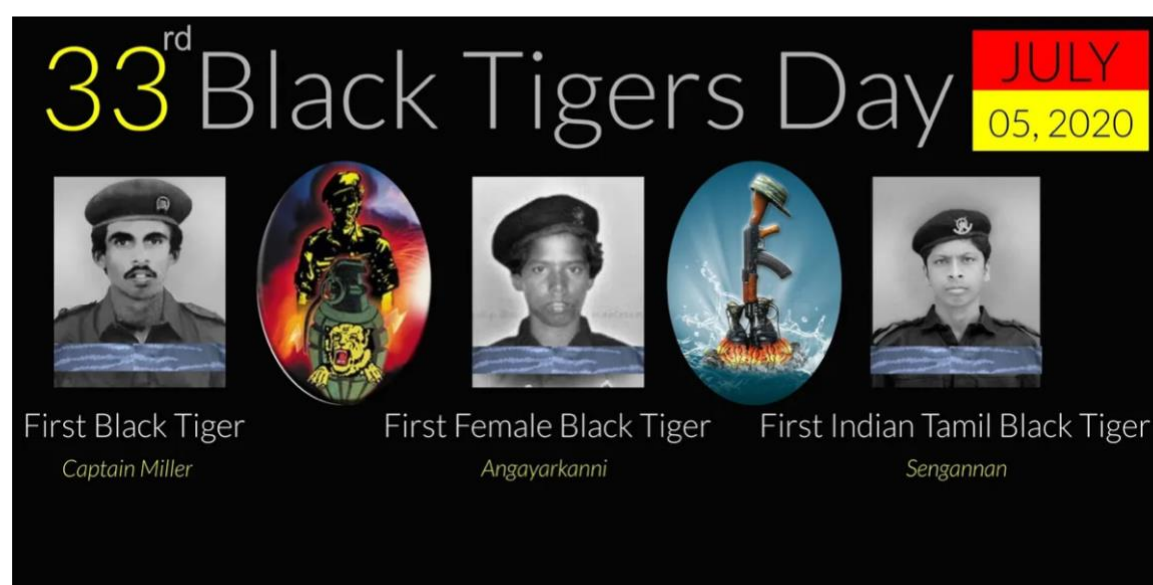
From this analysis, we can directly see justifications for the use of suicide terrorism in the Tamil national movement. The article was chosen because it provides a Tamilian view on how suicide missions are framed and made tolerable to the general Tamil public. Furthermore, it shows just how Tamil national media can sustain a pro-LTTE message while immortalizing the missions of Black Tigers.

Black Tigers are annually celebrated as harbingers of freedom, peace, liberation, and martyrdom in emotional July 5<sup>th</sup> ceremonies held every year since the first Black Tiger death of Captain Miller. In a journal post by Elite Tamils, a Canadian-based diaspora mobilization group, the organization contributes to this nationalization of suicide terrorism by explaining its usage—

In an inter-racial war between the Tamils and the Singhalese, the need for a strategy to safeguard the Tamils from the genocide perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government should be well understood by the world. ‘Necessity is the mother of invention’ is an axiom in this context. In the liberation struggle of the Tamils there is a dearth of personnel for combat, there is also a scarcity of ammunition to fight a war. The LTTE is

saddled with the responsibility to make even this deficiency that exists in the Tamil community to save it from annihilation. The war strategy of the Black Tigers plays an important role in the liberation struggle of the Tamils. Bravery, self-sacrifice with heroism, and the will to defeat tyranny are the hallmarks of their war strategy.<sup>84</sup>

This powerful and direct quote emphasizes a few key elements that are central to LTTE's idea of suicide terrorism—racial war (racism) and genocide. Are these considered mechanisms that provide the umbrella of defense for LTTE? This quote elucidates that suicide terrorism is indeed a strategy, the word is mentioned three times. Nevertheless, what we can deduce is that behind the strategy of suicide terrorism, elements such as racism, genocide, and consequently the need for martyrs (such as the ones below who were the first to die in suicide missions) are all catalysts that speak to the nationalist mobilization behind such a tactic.



Source: *Elite Tamils-Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

Nationalist mobilization for suicide terrorism extends beyond the boundaries and into adolescence with the inducement of Tamil children. While there is no proof that children were used as LTTE suicide bombers, indeed there is evidence that highlights the

<sup>84</sup> *Elite Tamils*, *Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

recruitment of children in LTTE sponsored orphanages that promoted their growth into adult Black Tigers.

The tomb shall wait for me  
 Flowers as offerings shall there blossom  
 A memorial for me who turn into a myriad atoms  
 The burning embers shall watch over me.  
 The poison (cyanide) I bore  
 since I became a Tigress  
 Shall also await me.  
 The hawk and the hound  
 to taste my flesh Shall  
 stalk the field where I do battle.  
 ...All these will I endure for my land  
 To me a grateful nation shall arise.<sup>85</sup>

*Source: Chandre Dharnawardana (Lankaweb.com)*

As evidenced in the hymn, it was not infrequent for “Children in the LTTE schools [to be] moulded and trained in a military environment. The LTTE sponsored orphanages in which children were taught to sing songs with god-like veneration of the leader and his vision.”<sup>86</sup> These symbols, such as this hymn, of LTTE’s vision of freeing Tamils from their oppressor fortify the idea that suicide terrorism is a justificatory tool for liberation. It forges the nation on the martyr’s sacrifice. Regardless, this empirical evidence further shows the tangible manifestation of the various ways in which LTTE solved their problems while not paying the price of doing so.

From the various analyses of Prabhakaran’s speeches, coupled with the symbols of LTTE and the Tamil nation, the tension between being a terrorist and a freedom fighter renders itself even more apparent. In my interview with Mia Bloom, it was this exact sentiment that she cautioned in studying the Tamil case. She mentions that in the

<sup>85</sup> Chandre Dharnawardana, *The LTTE’s ‘Maaveer’ Celebrations: Packaging Suicide Killers as Liberation Heroes*, LankaWeb.com (WordPress, November 23, 2020), <http://www.lankaweb.com/news/items/2020/11/23/the-lttes-maaveer-celebrations-packaging-suicide-killers-as-liberation-heroes/>.

<sup>86</sup> D. G. Harendra de Silva, “The Use of Child Soldiers in War with Special Reference to Sri Lanka,” *Paediatrics and International Child Health* 33, no. 4 (2013): pp. 276.

case of LTTE, one can be vulnerable to being sympathetic for their struggle.<sup>87</sup> But in reflecting their struggle, there is a dualist element to LTTE's usage of suicide terrorism in their campaign. As data shows, evidenced by the group's public perception, there were two campaigns that were waged between the 1983 to 2009 civil war.

The first is what we know—a publicly outspoken, diplomatic, willing, and perceptively peaceful campaign. This was gathered through most of the public forums in which LTTE allowed themselves to be viewed. This includes Prabhakaran's speeches, Black Tiger's day, posters, Tamil news articles, etc. These are the channels in which LTTE can not only justify suicide terrorism, but also affix violence as the only solution when pitted against state-sponsored 'genocide', militarism, oppression, racism, occupation, and other themes publicly pronounced by LTTE. These are the ways suicide terrorism was made palatable and legitimized in terms of remembrance and celebration of "sacrificed martyrs" on the violent road to Tamil Eelam. As corroborated from the data, LTTE knew their audience, and communicated according to with whom they spoke—Tamil community, potential recruits, Sri Lankan State, etc. To quote Bloom during our interview, "Whether it's a state or a non-state actor, there is going to be the discrepancy [of] what do you tell your own constituents versus what are you willing for the world to observe?"<sup>88</sup>

But the bulk of this logic lies within the other binary. The second campaign dually waged was a more emotional (personal) and private movement that encompass the violent tactics LTTE are known for but do not publicly or outrightly promote. An observation made, that speaks to the face validity of the sentiment analysis, throughout all of Prabhakaran's Heroes Day speeches was that he, not once, mentioned the

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Mia Bloom.

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Mia Bloom.

gruesome LTTE attacks that were undertaken throughout the year. Furthermore, he does not mention the repeated assassinations (and attempts), larger ‘suicide’ missions by suicide cadres (not even the word was used), and he never spoke about the strategy of what we know as suicide terrorism. Instead, the ideas of sacrifice and martyrdom was its locum. As part of this cult of martyrdom (LTTE primarily recruits in its constituent population), martyrs are to be preserved as heroes, in yearly ceremonies, and must be met with personal reverence and honor.

Within this realm, cultural frameworks are paramount. As Bloom recalls in her time spent with LTTE in Sri Lanka, during our interview, she drew attention to the vital distinction between what the Tamils call “Thatkolai” and “Thatkodai”.<sup>89</sup> The former, which is what we equate to suicide terrorism, means to kill oneself. The latter means to ‘give yourself’.<sup>90</sup> For Tamils, the loss of life is one thing, but to be a sacrifice or martyr, especially when liberating your fellows is an honor. The idea stemmed from Captain Miller (the first suicide bomber). Thereafter, Prabhakaran unyielding, although calculated, respected suicide bombers by further inculcating the prestige in being a Black Tiger.

Pictures of suicide attackers like Captain Miller were [everywhere] in Tiger territory. The Tigers filmed their suicide attacks and sold CD’s with songs glorifying the Black Tigers, and videos of attacks on the airport, the central bank and other targets. The Tamil [Diaspora] approved the violence or remained silent out of fear, and donated money anyway. These amounted to millions of dollars annually. (Dharnawardana, 2020)

The process of becoming a Black Tiger martyr is no easy feat and is what makes it sought after among the Tamil recruits. Since these are the elite wing of LTTE militiamen, they must pass rigorous tests of skill, rigidity, stability, tactility, and strategy. The idea for LTTE’s suicide attacks are not simply killing yourself (Thatkolai), but who one kills as well as the amount killed is crucial. In this case, it included high profile

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<sup>89</sup> Interview with Mia Bloom.

<sup>90</sup> Chandre Dharnawardana, *The LTTE’s ‘Maaveer’ Celebrations: Packaging Suicide Killers as Liberation Heroes*, LankaWeb.com (WordPress, November 23, 2020).

targets. But Prabhakaran did not stop at exclusivity into his cult of martyrs. Black Tigers feel excitement in living under a strict regimen of anonymity, a *nom de guerre*, and, within the cultural context, being privileged with what we see as certain meaning-makers of living, “steeped in the notion of self-sacrifice [Thatkodai].”<sup>91</sup>

Bloom recalls that suicide bombers, whether it be an individual or a cadre, would ceremoniously meet Prabhakaran at his residence before the mission (Prabhakaran usually remained elusive). He would shake hands with each bomber and take a picture with him or her. Under normal circumstances, Prabhakaran would cook a hefty dinner for the future martyrs, have a pleasant conversation, and he would clear the plates. Albeit performative, these are the cultural nuances, that bestows honor, that speaks to the act of ritualized sacrifice for the nation. Anderson would argue that these are the cultural roots of nationalism associated with martyrdom.<sup>92</sup>



Source: Tamil Guardian-Vignettes of Black Tigers.  
<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/vignettes-black-tigers>

<sup>91</sup> Chandre Dharnawardana, *The LTTE's 'Maaveer' Celebrations: Packaging Suicide Killers as Liberation Heroes*, LankaWeb.com (WordPress, November 23, 2020).

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, 9.

**Black Tiger: Lt. Col. Borg**

*Date of Birth: 1959, November 11 Died: 1990, November 23.*

In the heart of the Vanni district, the Mankulam military camp of Sinhalese was located. It carried out quite a number of atrocities. When Eelam War II began, the Liberation Tigers surrounded this military camp. There was a special plan to attack this camp. It was decided that a Black Tiger attack was needed to capture the camp.

Col. Balraj, who led the attack stated, "When we were planning the attack, Borg asserted, 'I'm the one who knows much about this camp. So I'll be the one to drive the explosive-laden vehicle.' "

Col. Balraj continued, "Borg is not a neophyte in the battlefield". "He was in charge of the district, and he led quite a number of attacks. Before he left on his final mission on 1990 November 23, Borg hugged me and said, 'I'm about to leave'. With this, Mankulam military camp was history. He drove the explosive-laden vehicle. In a few minutes, we heard a big explosion. The military camp was flooded. In a few hours, we captured the camp territory."

Before his final mission, brother Borg went on his home leave for a few days. His village (Semamadu, in Vanni district) is in the vicinity of the Sinhala border. He walked in the sands of his village and appreciated the lake, fields and forest. He was bidding farewell to his familiar surroundings. Nearby, a few children were playing. Brother Borg sat near them and asked; "Little brothers, you know Heroes Day is nearing. Suppose if I die, what will you do on that day?" The little guys retorted, "Why? Are you going to die?" Borg responded, "Suppose if I die, in my memory, will you plant a tree? Each one of you?" The little guys laughed. Borg also smiled.

The day to leave home arrived. Borg had lunch and rested on a mat for while on the verandah. His mother also came nearby and placed a mat to rest herself. Borg requested, "Mother, come near me, and place your mat adjacently." Mother obliged and patted his head. That afternoon, Borg said farewell to his family members (father, elder brothers, younger brothers and loving sister). Finally, he went to his mother and said, "Mother, please place a pottu (blessing charm) on my forehead." His mother obliged accordingly. He smiled, and bid farewell to her. He took a last look of all, from the gate and he left.

A few minutes later, his elder brother shrieked: "Thambi has left his lungi and T-shirt". For that, his mother consoled, "Maybe, he left these, because they had worn out".

Borg's mother says sobbingly: "I couldn't understand, why he behaved rather differently on that last day. Only after he died as a Black Tiger, did I realise why he had asked me to come and sleep next to him, why he asked me to place the blessing charm, why left his clothing. Now, I know".

*Reproduced from a piece by Sachi Sri Kantha.*

**Sea Black Tiger: Major Santhana**

*Date of Birth: 1973, February 11 Died: 2000, June 26.*

Major Santhana knew well that her long dream and the objective would be successful this time. With this, she went to see her mother at home for the last time. Her mother told her, "Child, will you visit us frequently?". She responded, "I'll return mother, very shortly". Her mother, at that moment, didn't understand the meaning of her daughter's words. She bid farewell to her daughter, by hugging and kissing her, with tears. Her mother was unaware that Santhana would only return in photo.

Major Santha was one of the thousands of young women who joined the Movement to fight and liberate the Tamils from Sinhalese dominance. She was in Women's Tiger battalion and in 1995, she joined the Black Tiger team. Once completing the special training assigned for the Black Tigers, Santhana began to search for targets.

When she was about to launch her final attack, and when she boarded the boat, she handed her slippers to her fellow fighter, saying: "I'll not return; so, you can keep this". Within a minute, she cracked, "Suppose, if I return, please give the slippers back to me". Even in her final moments, she delighted in making others smile, with a joke.

On June 26, 2000, the ship 'Ugana' brought armaments, explosives and food provisions to the Kankesanthurai harbor from Colombo for the army. The battle boats of the Sea Tigers and Black Tiger were on their mission to block and thwart this supply ship. About 55 miles from Point Pedro harbour, in the mid-sea, there was a confrontation of high intensity. Black Tiger boats cavalierly rammed the 'Ugana', which then sank. Ten Sri Lankan navy cadres got killed. Those who wrote heroic history were Major Santhana and five of her colleagues; Black Sea Tigers, Lt. Col. Gnanendran, Major Suran, Major Nallappan, Capt. Ilamathi and Capt. Bhamini also settled into the sea permanently.

*Source: Tamil Guardian-Vignettes of Black Tigers.*  
<https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/vignettes-black-tigers>





“21-member Black Tiger elite commandos with LTTE leader V. Pirapaharan, before embarking on their mission towards Anuradhapura [Photo: LTTE]”

Source: *Elite Tamils-Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.



“Black Tigers during [a special] training session.”

Source: *Elite Tamils-Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.



“Black Tigers having [their ritualized] dinner with the LTTE chief [before a suicide mission].”

Source: *Elite Tamils-Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

The two vignettes above describe two instances of Black Tiger martyrdom which adds an illustrative component to the overall war of liberation. Stories such as these, in the *Tamil Guardian*, is how Anderson would consider the cultural roots of nationalism with death of the unknown soldier. These stories would be printed in Tamil newspapers that would then be distributed nationwide. The purpose of vignettes are to shine the sacrificial light of martyr bravery as they partook in the ultimate sacrifice for those that would eventually read about it.

The understanding of suicide terrorism varies and is unique to its beholder. *Elite Tamils* says that, “The world that looks at suicide attacks directed on civilians as an act of terrorism views the war strategy used by the Black Tigers and the LTTE on the same lines. This is blasphemous.”<sup>93</sup> The diaspora group further says, “The war strategy of the

<sup>93</sup> *Elite Tamils*, *Black Tigers Day July 05*, *Elite Tamils*, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

Black Tigers plays an important role in the liberation struggle of the Tamils. Bravery, self-sacrifice with heroism, and the will to defeat tyranny are the hallmarks of their war strategy.”<sup>94</sup> For Prabhakaran, this justification shows how LTTE weaponized nationalism, through suicide terrorism, in order to mitigate internal costs for statehood.

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<sup>94</sup> Elite Tamils, Black Tigers Day July 05, Elite Tamils, July 4, 2019, <https://elitetamils.com/blog/f/black-tigers-day-july-05>.

## CONCLUSION

As this thesis has proven, the Sri Lankan Civil War continues to write its story despite violently ending in 2009. After a strong offensive campaign, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam met their final demise without future prospects for statehood.

Eventually, suicide terrorism proved itself to be the weapon for the weak, not a strategic tool for the strong. LTTE wrote their own story that was their armed fight for liberation from an oppressive regime. By weaponizing nationalism combined with esteemed reverence for the martyred, LTTE managed to internally market the idea of suicide terrorism to the Tamil nation. This research suggests that they were successful due to innovating suicide terrorism, adhering to discriminate targets, diversifying recruitment, and was able to symbolize their struggle in a cultural method that embedded the armed insurgency in the heart of every Tamil.

This thesis complements literature on suicide terrorism and nationalist scholarship by ascertaining how suicide terrorism is framed relative to identity with the added backdrop of a cohesive struggle. It attempted to answer how suicide terrorism survives as a strategy within a war of national resistance. While this study can attest to LTTE's success in marketing martyrdom, it further shows what exactly lies behind the suicide terrorism discourse that primarily emphasizes its strategy. This was overcome by applying a combination-level theory to LTTE's case coupled with a literature review of Robert Pape which was then complemented by an interview with leading suicide terrorism scholar Mia Bloom. As needed, this thesis put forth Benedict Anderson's nationalism theory of cultural martyrdom by arguing that LTTE soldiers can be considered empty tombs of the nation due to esteemed reverence.

While participant-observation was not possible, in addition to other pandemic related limitations, I mitigated this by primarily focusing on a qualitative longitudinal

study that incorporates a semi-quantitative analysis of Velupillai Prabhakaran's speeches as well as a basic sentiment analysis. Research suggest that Prabhakaran promulgated 'peace', in times of compromise, and 'genocide' in times large-scale or high-profile attacks after the 2002 ceasefire. These arguments are supported through an evaluation of shocks and critical junctures throughout the timeline of the civil war. Lastly, this thesis argues that suicide terrorism, largely violence, was embedded in Tamil national symbols. This was concluded through a deconstruction of Tamil national symbols, such as Tamil Eelam national flag and posters, as well as demarcating communication styles in how suicide terrorism is defined for different audiences.

Ultimately, this research underscores a convergence of traditional and composite understandings of suicide terrorism. As proven with the case of LTTE, the definition of suicide terrorism is relative to its user. An implication for future discourse, as this thesis suggests, is that it must consider a re-narrated insight of suicide terrorism when further investigating the role of suicide terrorism in national movements. For Prabhakaran and his Black Tigers, they had an exalted understanding of suicide terrorism while researchers, governments, and other official entities classify them as terrorists. As we now know, there is a fine line between being a terrorist and being a freedom fighter.

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