‘Eating Against War’

Food Identity in Post-Civil War Sri Lankan Tamil Region

By

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Abstract

This thesis argues that food *(Mullivaikkal Kanji, a rice porridge)* is used as a symbol to heal the wounds inflicted on the Sri Lankan Tamil people by the long-standing internal turmoil and the ensuing civil war (1983-2009), as well as to protect Tamil identity and remember the war in the post-war period. *'Mullivaikkal Kanji'* simultaneously represents and symbolises displacements, marginalisation, resistance and various forms of insecurity that arose in the war and continued into the post-war period. In addition to serving as a means of sustaining the lives of the Sri Lankan Tamil people during the conflict, the dish *"Mullivaikkal Kanji,"* which is prepared and shared collectively, serves as a "war monument" for the Sri Lankan Tamils, who are not allowed to erect tangible war memorials. In addition, embodying the identity of the post-war Tamil folks in Sri Lanka, this saltless dish also personifies their resilience and survival, encapsulating the identity of a people who had survived a civil war. I contend that the post-war Sri Lankan Tamil community articulated "eating against war" as an actual result of that war through the collective cooking and distribution of *Mullivaikkal Kanji*.

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Introduction

The neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu, which shares a border with my motherland, Kerala, Southern India, along with its literature, cinema, music, cuisine, and traditions, is as familiar to me as it is to most people in Kerala. Above all else, Tamil nationalism is a fascinatingly resilient concept deeply rooted in that culture's foundation. This inquisitive thought about the nationalism that encompasses Tamil language, politics, cinema, music, and cuisine has led me to the exploration of the resistance and representation formed through Tamil cuisine; this involves understanding how it operates differently among the Tamils in Sri Lanka, an island nation, compared to Tamil Nadu, to identify how Sri Lankan Tamils have differentiated themselves from those in Tamil Nadu. The basic understanding that a person's food speaks not only about him but also about the place he belongs to, including the geographical and social contexts there, aims to understand the identity of food, the formation of food, and its state, especially concerning the Tamil Nadu and Sri Lankan Tamil areas where similar languages and customs are dealt with, particularly focusing on how ‘food identity’ functions in the Sri Lankan Tamil region. When examining Sri Lankan history, it can be seen that there are two types of Tamil descendants in Sri Lanka; one is the Sri Lankan Tamils, who arguing originated in Sri Lanka itself, and the second is the Indian Tamils, who came to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu (India) seeking various earning possibilities during the colonial period, mainly in plantation work (Nira Wickramasinghe, 2014). It can be observed that there are numerous similarities and differences between the two groups of Tamils. When examining Sri Lankan Tamil history, one cannot overlook the Tamil-Sinhala ethnic conflict that originated on Sri Lankan soil and its long-standing (1983-2009) civil war (K. M. De Silva, 2012).

The Sri Lankan Tamil identity has been shaped through various historical intersections, including events that occurred both before and during colonial rule, as well as afterwards. Primarily, it has emerged through confrontations with Sinhalese-Buddhist hegemony and by expressing resistance to various hegemonic practices imposed by the Sinhalese majority government, which made the formation of Tamil identity possible on Sri Lankan soil (Jayasundara-Smits, 2022). In this context, especially after a prolonged ethnic conflict and three decades of civil unrest, what is the identity of food in the current situation, often referred to as post-war? During the civil unrest, particularly in the final stages of the war, what is the food identity of the people of Kilinochchi, a region that recorded the highest losses? This is the investigative subject of this thesis, and it examines how people navigating through extremely troubled situations caused by displacement and marginalisation define the identity of their food. In the final stages of the war, the food called Mullivaikkal Kanji, which helps sustain the lives of most Sri Lankan Tamils, aims to understand the identity formed by preparing and distributing this food annually in remembrance of the war. Additionally, it attempts to analyse how much Sri Lankan Tamil identity is marked by food, particularly about the war and post-war life; how is the displacement-marginalisation period during and after the war shaped, how does the new community (imagined community) created by the war respond to it, what is the role of food in this, what is the identity of food that has formed and is forming during the war and survival period, and how does food represent their identity in the post-war period is the primary focus of this thesis.

The first chapter mainly works on the background of the formation of Mullivaikkal Kanji; in the background, it primarily refers to the factors that have led to ethnic conflict; it discusses how colonial rule shaped the Tamil-Sinhala ethnic conflict and its historical pathways. The language policy section narrates the language-related conflicts that emerged in Sri Lanka during colonial

rule and post-independence. In the second chapter, the Historical and Theoretical Perspectives deals with a historical and theoretical overview of the subject, and brings existing literature on the emergence of Mullivaikkal Kanji, and the third chapter deals with methodology and fieldwork, explaining the research methods used to collect data and to interview affected individuals, and the ethnography. In the fourth chapter, theoretical section, a focus has predominantly been placed on a theoretical undercurrent of Mullivaikkal Kanji that connects with displacement, war memory, and identity.

Chapter 01: Background

Colonial Influence

Ethnic diversity and its food identity in Sri Lanka are diverse (Jayatissa et al., 2014), and during the war and post-war, it is an important subject to analyse. The differences in Tamil-Sinhala cuisine in Sri Lanka can be seen alongside the over two centuries-old ethnic conflict to subjugate each other (Stirrat, 1990, p. 19). Meanwhile, the highly unique food culture that has emerged in Sri Lanka from various migrations, including South India in the colonial period (Jayatissa et al., 2014), creates multiple layers in the history of Sri Lankan Tamil food and ethnicity. At least for more than a thousand years, it is argued that the Tamil people have had dominance in Tamil majority areas (Stirrat, 1990, p. 20), which is why the food culture there has a historical depth of that duration, and that is why it is so distinct. Rice has been a part of the Sri Lankan people's diet for centuries (Jayatissa et al., 2014; Waisundara, 2020); It is Mullivaikkal Kanji, a ‘rice porridge’ that saved the lives of the Tamil people during wartime and later transformed into a symbol, reminding them of the war.

The history of Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict is intertwined with colonialism (Wickramasinghe, 2014), just as the history of food diversity has also been entangled with colonialism (Weerasekara et al., 2018; Liyanage, 2020). It was during the period when the Dutch, Portuguese, and British colonial powers ruled Sri Lanka that ethnic conflicts grew (Wickramasinghe, 2014, p. 119). Concurrently, it was also during this time that there was a significant influence on the food culture in Sri Lanka, which can be attributed not only to the influence of the colonial regime but also to the influences of Malay, Arabic, and South Indian culinary flavours and characteristics (Liyanage, 2020, p. 127) that shaped food culture both Tamil and Sinhala. The formation of Tamil-Sinhala identity and the ethnic conflict that can be said to be its continuation occurred to some extent during the colonial rule (Kingsbury, 2012; Jayasundara-Smits, 2022; Jani de Silva, 2023). However, colonial influence has existed beyond ethnic differences, extending to essential matters, including food. To say that there are ethnic differences means variations in matters such as food, and it can be seen that these differences carry both colonial marks and expressions (Weerasekara, 2018). In the four decades following the end of colonial rule, Sri Lanka has witnessed a long history of uprisings by the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples who lived differently based on differences, including language and culture, in a period marked by ethnic conflicts caused by a struggle for dominance (Kingsbury, 2012; Wickramasinghe, 2014; Jayasundara-Smits, 2022).

The colonial administration understood that the Tamil and Sinhala ethnicities differed significantly and emphasised their differences, which, as Mamdani (2020) points out, confined them within their customary laws, creating a 'political community' (p. 24) that would later experience significant upheavals. Sri Lanka, known as 'the land of aromatic spices', was famous for this. The Europeans who arrived for this reason and those who came for work and other purposes from India, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East (Withanachchi et al., 2024) have created a food culture

that catalyses Sri Lankan ethnic identities. When stating that the 500 years of colonial rule in Sri Lanka were filled with violence, it is also important to consider the ethnic differences that were formed and marked as a result, especially in the context where each ethnicity follows very distinct food cultures (Weerasekara, 2018). Suppose when combining the argument that post-colonialism should be seen as a continuation of colonisation (Weerasekara, 2018, p. 2) with the argument that conflict is a 'prolonged conflictual psychosocial process' (Sahadevan, 1997, p. 23), observe that conflict is a continuation of the colonial era and the differences that emerged between and the contradictions that shaped it.

Each ethnic group in Sri Lanka is distinguished by significantly different food patterns (Withanachchi, 2024), for example, Tamil cuisine in Jaffna prominently features mustard seeds, curry leaves, fenugreek, chilli powder, and tamarind, which distinguish it from other regional cuisines, and the distinct spicy mixtures in Jaffna cuisine not only define its culinary uniqueness but also reinforce the cultural identity of the Tamil community in the region. (p. 157). When saying that the current food culture in Sri Lanka is a continuation of the colonial era (Weerasekara, 2018), as Sahadevan argues, the causes of the 'intractability of conflicts' (Sahadevan, 1997, p. 23) must also be understood in the same way. Just as it is said that it is impossible to separate or distinguish aroma from food, the Tamil-Sinhala conflict must be considered to continue being unknown and uncontrollable due to its intractability. Jayasundara-Smist (2022) questions the conclusion that ethnic identity is the sole reason for conflicts. She attempts to portray the conflict in a 'messier picture' (p. 53), especially since its causes are, as Sahadevan says, intractable. De Silva (2011) argues that the long colonial rule of Sri Lanka is rare among South Asian countries, stating that this colonial rule is not only a history of the conflict created on Sri Lankan soil but also a history that has influenced the concepts of culture and nationalism. The argument that 'the intimate links

between food practices and the embodiment of identity between commensality and politics have made food a central arena for developing various colonial battles' (Weerasekara, 2018, p. 4) should also be read together. When examining the relationship between ethnic identity and colonialism, it is important to understand that it is not limited to Tamil-Sinhala ethnicities alone. The backgrounds of various ethnicities, such as Moors, Malays, Borahs, Parsees, Sindhis, and the Indigenous Vedda tribal community, are also part of the context of Sri Lankan ethnic identity (Jani De Silva, 2023). Additionally, consider the Tamil people's demand for a 'multi-ethnic, multi-religious secular state' (Sahadevan, 1997, p. 29), especially in the context of Sinhala nationalism permeated after independence, which was also influenced by European interventions (Gunawardana, 1990, p. 70).

Language policy

It is a fact that language is a key factor in exacerbating the Tamil-Sinhala conflict in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict (Nissan & Stirrat, 1990; Spencer, 1990; Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Holt, 2011; Kingsbury, 2012; Wickramasinghe, 2014). The Sinhalese argued that since they are the majority in the country, their language should be the national language (Nissan & Stirrat, 1990, p. 36). However, Holt (2011) discusses an event that sheds light on this: during British colonial rule, the Tamil minority received a 'disproportionate share of educational opportunities', leading to their dominance in various sectors, including education, law, medicine, and business (p. 1). Implementing the Sinhala national language policy by the post-independence Buddhist-Sinhala government continues this historical narrative. With Sinhalese being made the national language, the situation arose where minorities, including Tamils, could not get government jobs without knowledge of the Sinhalese language (Wickramasinghe, 2014, p. 195), which gradually sidelined them from the mainstream. Through English education, the colonial era implemented hegemony,

and similarly, the Sinhalese-Buddhist government attempted to establish hegemony through the Sinhala language (Brutt-Griffler, 2002); as argued by Spencer (1990), the linguistic issue was a significant reason behind the ethnic conflicts that arose in Sri Lanka after independence. The assertion that the Sinhala language is being made the official language has strongly fueled the ethnic conflict that has grown over the years, which is compelling (Kearney, 2011); this has subsequently led to the argument for a Tamil independent state (p. 491). Since language must be a significant element in conflicts and the wars that arise from them, the porridge formed as part of the war was named Mullaivaikkal Kanji, linking it to the name of the place where it was formed. That name represents the Tamil linguistic identity in that way.

Formation of the LTTE

With the shift of the administrative language from English to Sinhala, the Tamil population began to face issues regarding job opportunities, government-related transactions, and office requirements (Kearney, 2011, p. 496), and the formation of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is a continuation of the dissatisfaction and protests that arose among the Tamil population in response to this (Wilson, 2011). Starting as a mere group of thirty individuals, the LTTE transformed into an organisation that fought against the Sri Lankan army for thirty years, serving as a banner for various ideologies and dreams that resonated with Tamil identity (Biziouras, 2012; Mehta, 2022). According to Bizioursa (2012, p. 555), among the many organisations that emerged among the Tamil people against Sinhalese nationalism, the LTTE was formed as an extremely institutionalised organisation that supports Marxist ideology while advocating for Tamil nationalism. In parallel to this, as Wickremesinghe (2014) argues, the LTTE has succeeded in radicalising the Tamil diaspora: 'New rituals linked to the LTTE movement have been incorporated into the festivals of the diaspora Tamils: The Black Tigers Day, or Black July, and the birthday of

LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran is celebrated the world over' (p. 280). The LTTE, formed amidst Tamil-Sinhala ethnic conflicts, adopted its' commemoration practices', particularly during the war, as argued by Schonthal (2011). Through the 'war memorial' methods implemented during the war, the LTTE reinforced its dominance and gained greater acceptance among the Tamil population. The primary objective of the war memories led by the LTTE was to 'transform the memory and meaning of soldiers' deaths from something tragic into something inspiring' (p. 543). Schonthal (2011) argues that the LTTE sees the memories of those killed in the war as the seeds for the growth of the Tamil homeland (p. 543). Schonthal's arguments regarding the 'commemoration practices' are relevant, especially in the context of the war memories that the Tamil people observe yearly after the war. On the way to Mullivaikkal Kanji, the central point of war remembrance, it can be seen that they are transforming the tragic experiences they faced during the war into a symbol of survival in the post-war era.

Chapter: 02

Historical and Theoretical Perspectives

The narratives of Mullivaikkal Kanji are intertwined with the Tamil-Sinhala ethnic conflict in terms of language (Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Sabaratnam, 1987), culture, foodways, and many other factors. The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka can be seen as something that has existed for a long time (Stirrat, 1990), gaining strength during the colonial period and becoming acute after independence (Jayasundara-Smits, 2022); thereby, the resistance also has a long history. It must be understood as a highly complex issue with multiple layers and causes, as Gunther Schlee (2010) articulates ethnicity as something that cannot exist unless people know it; that is to say, ethnicity, the conflict formed thereby, is the knowledge of others and oneself. By saying that ethnicity originates in fixed definitions of oneself and others, Schlee also shapes the thinking about ethnic conflicts and the representations, like Mullivaikkal Kanji, that shape them. The idea of where the conflict is formed also leads to the thought of the formation of ethnic identity. The statement that nobody can have an ethnic affiliation that is unknown either to themselves or to others adds further light to this.

What is relevant is Schlee's argument that the question will be raised about what conflict is for beyond being ethnic. Various forms of internal marginal displacement have occurred in post-war Sri Lankan society. In ethnic conflicts, as Schlee says, ancient and deeply rooted oppositions erupt. When we go after the causes of ethnic conflict, a history of ancient wounds will emerge, and, as the author says, the seeds for it may be colonial or something else. By saying 'the border between 'us' – the 'we' – and the 'other' is constantly being renegotiated (p. 6), the author clearly describes the background of ethnic conflicts. To represent these conditions, including the memories and resistance of the war, the marginalised and thus underprivileged Sri Lankan Tamil community has only activities like collective cooking and eating of Mullivaikkal Kanji to commemorate the war.

Food, as a locus for historically constructed identity, should be considered in light of Holtzman's (2006) assertion that it acts as a socially charged marker representing epochal shifts (P. 364), and why are war memories important, or what is the place of memories related to food in the post-war society? The response provided by Sudkamp (2024) that 'memories are not made in a vacuum, but are made about society, which then often places a collective identity on individual memories (p. 1294)' is relevant in this context.

Conflict and Food

A notable aspect of studying the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is the dimensional change during the colonial period (Nissan & Stirrat, 1990). After that, it is clear when trying to understand it through Stuart Hall's (2023) idea of 'hybridised spaces', that is to say, Hall refers to the postcolonial space becoming the site of various conflicts (p. 244) between the multiple layers of dominance. Postcolonial is said to be, in effect, a construct internally differentiated by its intersections with other unfolding relations (p. 245); the seeds of various conflicts between different ethnic groups

can also be found in Sri Lanka. In the meantime, what does 'hybridised spaces' mean, not in post-colonial, war and post-war life? It raises the question of what kind of hybridised spaces are created by the memory of war. Here, Holtzman (2006) discusses food, and it is worth considering that it is primarily regarded 'as fuel, a symbol' (P. 372), especially if it carries the traumatic memories of those who survived the war. War is a memory of various absences, creating another hybrid space that means the memory of absences that provided home, food and security, even the absence of salt, sugar and oil in food, and many other things that cannot be easily articulated, especially when say “every Tamil is displaced” (Schrijvers, 2011, p. 524) in the war. The lack of salt in seemingly trivial food represents the major disasters that have occurred in life (Shepler, 2011, p. 44), as here in Sri Lanka, for some (those without salt), the unsalted Mullivaikkal Kanji metaphorically represents the war and serves as a medium to remember the war and its sufferings after the war (p. 47). Appadurai (1986) implies that all types of commodities have a social life through the statement ‘commodities, like persons, have social lives' (p. 3). Furthermore, the phrase 'social life is entwined' (Mitnz & Du Bosi, 2002) emphasises that social life is shaped through its production, consumption, and the determination of its place, meaning that social life is indeed intertwined.

What distinguishes post-war society from other societies is the scars of war that linger over that society and their depth and reverberation. The notion that the "end" of war is often no end (Brown et al., 2014); instead, it takes new forms and objects like Mullivaikkal Kanji, and is often enacted by newly empowered participants (p. 1). It is only when the end of the war is seen as a symbolic operation rather than as a material state of affairs, such as "peace," "truce," "defeat," or "victory" (p. 1), that it becomes clear how post-civil war society will react to these new forms that emerged, and that unifying war survivors through commenmoration. The potential for enquiries about "for whom the conflict ended? In the context of Sri Lankan Tamil soil, how does the "end" appear in

social practice, organisation, and subjectivity? (p. 1) suggests a novel, nuanced depiction. What happens to the violence of war once the conflict is over (p. 1) is the question in the Sri Lankan post-civil war context, and fifteen years after the war's end, post-war representations intertwined in several layers can be identified in individual and collective extent. By referring to the 'residue' of war in the post-war period and understanding that the post-war zone 'becomes the site of struggle' while also marking 'setting the stage for future conflicts' (p, 3), it can be said that this provides clarity to the contemporary Sri Lankan situation, which casts doubt on post-war representations of Tamil people and their efforts to remember the war. This is an indirect answer to why authority behaves with suspicion even towards relatively trivial matters like the distribution of Mullivaikkal Kanji. The post-war period opens up the possibility of being a time of violence more than the time of war (p. 4), revealing trends increasingly militarising the post-war Tamil regions, further problematising the representations of the war memorials.

The war and displacement that took place from 1983 to 2009 in Sri Lanka, as a continuation of long-term ethnic conflicts, have placed the Sri Lankan Tamil population in a highly vulnerable situation, further marginalising them. In this historical context, the post-war community that emerged, known as the marginal community—imagined community—along with their memorials and defence mechanisms, deserves special attention, including academically less attended tangible objects like Mullivaikkal Kanji. Each community carries the history of that community, just as the post-war society carries the memories of the war, being the bearers of its tragedies. In the post-war community, everyone experiences losses in some form, representing those memories and defending them in their own ways. In the ethnic war, Jeyasankar and Ganhewa (2018) concluded that 80 percent of women and children were displaced, and 90,000 women were widowed in the Northern Provinces of Sri Lanka alone (p 5). The people of this region have experienced extreme

devastation by way of lost and disappeared lives, injuries, displacements, destruction of natural landscapes, and loss of property, housing, land, and means of subsistence, amongst other losses (p 4).

From the arguments of Brinda Mehta (2022), it is clear that despite the constant exodus of people, the efforts to deal with conflict situations are intense, and many dimensions have emerged, especially as they highlight the survival prospects of women, war widows, the families of disappeared and generally war survivors. Sri Lankan Tamil war survivals, who tell their own war stories through food, are, according to Mehta, termed 'gastro-testimonials', turning the language of food into an emphasis of resistance, establishing their authority as cultural agents through everyday praxis, and articulating personal testimony through the medium of food and home cooking (p. 147). While food, and its taste, is a material that is capable of constantly transforming into a memory of the homeland, the safety of the home, and the presence of the mother, in the post-war society, the return and survival to the home and the protest against the widowhood stigma imposed by the patriarchal society (p. 148).

Memory of War and Food

The narratives of Thiranagama (2011) and Memories from Kilinochchi (2024), bearing the scars of the civil war, are tragic poems related to the displacements in Sri Lanka and the accompanying lack of food. A multi-layered homeless/foodless society was created as a result of war, and these war memories depict a society that was already marginalised, which was forced into an even more marginalised position in the years following the war. According to Thiranagama's (2011) preface, "the mass displacement of Tamils and Muslims has characterised their wartime life; displacement here is analysed not in terms of facts and figures of migration flows, but as a ground of sociality,

a new way of inhabiting the world" (p. 5). This makes it evident that the civil conflict in Sri Lanka has produced a sizable, dislocated society. The conflict and the uncertainty that followed caused the displacement that has profoundly impacted, as Thiranagama states, "Wartime also bears witness to the fact that material created and distributed in memory of those who died in the war remains a reality amid war and constant migrations" (p. 79). Numerous events are held in which food plays an important role to memorialise those who lost their lives in the conflict, such as giving food packages to beggars in remembrance of the dead (p. 96). As always, food serves as a link between the living and the dead.

Memories from Kilinochchi (2024) can be referred to as a "polyphony" of war, using Bakhtin's (1984) term, that is, the whole 'war' narrative, which is a synthesis of the experiences and stories of many people concerning the war, is presented. Bakhtin discusses voices created by different sounds that produce a variety of kinds of completion through the idea of polyphony. The war brings the memories of the conflict to light, and they flourish through various voices. The conflict at Kilinochchi is remembered through vast yet individual-centred accounts of food shortages and displacement. Rajaram explains 'what power looks like at the edges', raising questions about how marginal populations were forced to the periphery and managed to exist during the 'great events' of history. "Marginalised" refers to a continually evolving category; some are added, and others are removed. The population of a region, or occasionally a specific community, are abruptly relocated and marginalised during "big events" like civil wars; in these cases, the margins are an abstract concept continuously updated from centre to periphery. Vrabiescu and Kalir's (2018) concepts of Roma migrant women's marginality helped us understand how a "specific pattern of exclusion and marginalisation is applied" to a population that is already "vulnerable and racially marginalised" (p. 521) and displaced. It is argued by Mehta (2022) that "they use food to formalise

their survival narratives of resilience as they transition from invisibility to public disclosure by cooking "against war (p, 148)"; food like *'Mithivedi',* a landmine-shaped snack (p. 158), is a powerful defence for those who set out to solve a variety of crises and eliminate internalised migration and wounds. Mehta's arguments demonstrate that the Tamil war widows were among the civilian groups most severely affected both during and after the conflict (p 149), and she contends that women's most meaningful language in post-war social contexts is food (p. 154). It is important to recognise that Sri Lankan Tamil women are a severely underprivileged group, which is where the dialogue about food comes into play. The writings of female LTTE fighters, including Malaimagal, who joined the group in the 1990s and died in 2009, and the culinary moment of fantasy—a nostalgic recollection of comfort food from the past—are used by Sukumaran (2023) to analyse war and gender performance. These writings show that those struggling also yearned for the safety of the home and food, like the people during the struggles (p. 28). Aoyama (2017) argues that in the context of the Japanese experience, 'food operates as an important signifier of ordinariness amid extraordinary circumstances' (p. 33). The writings about wartime food, which can be referred to as extremely personal, have later become public property (p. 35), meaning that 'the public is intertwined with the private is evident in the wartime food situation; the private sphere cannot be separated from the public' (p. 35).

Most women lost the social consideration that was accessible to them while they had their spouses after being widowed during the war. However, as demonstrated by the situation of war widows, Vithanagama (2018) contends that social barriers almost vanished following the conflict (pp. 469-470). The war changed the lives of the war widows, even though it caused numerous adverse effects on their lives, including the loss of their spouses. More specifically, women who were considered "protected" before the war were transformed into "protectors" following the war,

serving as the family's primary provider for both themselves and their dependents (p. 468). As Carl Schmitt (1996) evaluates the enemy-friend dichotomy, it 'enemy-friend dichotomy will turn into war in the case of countries and, internally, a civil war (p. 32), turning the agent of resistance, Mullivaikkal Kanji into a territorial-language-based object, as Schmitt defines the enemy in ethnic conflict as 'one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity' (p. 28), giving a collective object to define the collective desire of Tamils, which cook and eat collectively. Then, beyond mere hostility, it is a continuation of the boundaryless opposition formed over a long period against the opposing group, which later transforms into hostility between ethnic groups that can be called two equal powers. It has also evolved into a civil war lasting nearly three decades in the Sri Lankan context, and another thing Schmitt mentions is that the 'friend-enemy grouping' formed during ethnic conflict later 'turns into empty and ghostlike abstractions' after the war (p. 30), which is significant. I argue that for a ‘ghostlike abstract’ atmosphere formed in this way, there must be appropriate representations, especially the representations of those living in highly vulnerable conditions, that is, Mullivaikkal Kanji, which may seem trivial at first glance but is firmly embedded in Tamil identity, in particular, the Tamil people transformed that 'object' which empowered them to resist and defeat war into a memorial to remember and forgetting horribility of war.

Mullivaikkal Kanji: Food and Identity

Mullivaikkal Kanji (rice porridge) is one of the most important objects that carry memories of the Sri Lankan ethnic war (Fernando, 2019; Venkataraman, 2022; Hewage, 2022; Pundir, 2024). During the last phase of the three-decade-long war, many families were left with only rice to make food for themselves. Many families have survived by cooking the rice with 10 times as much water as they have at a time, when there is no salt, and when there is not enough rice itself. People in the

North Region still cook and eat/drink "Mullivaikkaal Kanji" to remember the war (Fernando, 2019). Although the war ended on May 18, the people of the Northern Region have been making and distributing Mullivaikkal Kanji since early May. In this way, they preserve the memory of the war and keep the generations aware of its wretched condition, which is mirrored in the food. On May 18, the last day of the war, the day of remembrance is a 'day of lamentations' (Fernando, 2018), including collectively cooking and distributing. Things changed from a situation where the government and the military did not allow it to be distributed, and later, the state and the military responded sympathetically to War Memorial Day, which was commemorated extremely peacefully. In the early years, not a single candle could be lit (Hewage, 2022). The last years of the war were also when human beings died without food, water, and essential supplies, including medicines (Hewage, 2022). There, the Sri Lankan Tamil people felt the presence of Mullivaikkal Kanji, the lifesaver, even without salt. "I still remember the only thing he asked me before he died. However, there was no water there. The memory that people could not move an inch to get some water from the well (Hewage, 2022) is shared by a war survivor, and it is evident in the horrors of war and the absence of essential commodities in wartime, including food and water.

"The lives of people in the North and East regions are moving forward amidst various restrictions, survival remains problematic even in the post-war situation. The wells remain contaminated by chemicals from weapons used during the war. Because of this, fresh water is still scarce, (Hewage, 2022)" said war survivors, whose experience is still a direct testimony to the horrors that the people of the region are still experiencing. War survivors mainly commemorate the war by cooking and distributing the Mullivaikkal Kanji, which saved their lives during the war. Making symbolic sand tombs for those who do not have graves and offering flowers is also part of it (Fernando, 2018). Young people often did not attend war memorial ceremonies before because of the administration's

surveillance, which included intimidating collective cooking and eating practices that were so intense. The collective memorial event is in solidarity with those who have lost loved ones, and the observation that ceremonies, including the making and distributing of Mullivaikkal Kanji, will help restore ethnic-religious harmony is apparent. Cooking, eating and distributing Mullivaikkal Kanji is a prospect, to not only remember those killed in the war but also to share the concerns of relatives and loved ones about those who disappeared during the war. Cooking and eating together is also a political move beyond mere war memory. "Mullivaikkal Kanji is a symbol of what was left as food for the people of Mullivaikkal, who went through severe hardships during the last days of the war. It is a sign of survival and nutrition. Mullivaikkal Kanji is the main feature of Mullivaikkal Commemoration Day (Hewage, 2022), and as said Eswari, “[The kanji] symbolises the genocide of our people” (Pundir, 2024). In this statement, the depth of how saltless kanji became a symbol of post-war resistance in Sri Lankan Tamil regions is apparent.

Prateek (2023) argues that given the degree of repression against the Tamil community in Sri Lanka, people have resorted to various modes of remembrance. One of the most important of these is the cooking and distribution of Mullivaikkal kanji. “A porridge of rice and water was all we had. Women got together to make this watery porridge to survive the war's final days, when shelling happened every blink of an eye. The misery is represented in ways that show that this is what we were reduced to; our survival was just the porridge. However, at the heart of it, Mullivaikkal kanji represents us as a community coming together for each other" said one of the war survivors (Prateek, 2023). Mullivaikkal Kanji also represents the war memory of a marginalised society with no money to hold large parades and events to commemorate the war. With the possibility of Tamil separatism re-emerging, the state is not only increasing the military's presence in Tamil areas but is also hunting down even those who indulge in simple things like cooking Mullivaikkal Kanji

(Pundir, 2024). Considered a typical food in South Asian households, 'kanji, or rice gruel', has become the political weapon and defence of the post-war (Pundir, 2024) Sri Lankan Tamil people. At a period when the government's goal was to win the war by denying the Tamil people food, Mullivaikkal Kanji carried out its social objective (Pundir, 2024). It is also a political memory, a memory of the absence of food, which is done through collective cooking and eating saltless Kanji that saved lives in those times.

Chapter: 03

Methodology

This paper's interviews and archival collection, along with participant observation, were primarily conducted in April 2025, mainly in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka, and partially in Mullaitivu, Colombo, and Navalapitiya during fieldwork. Since my research topic concerns war-affected people and food identity, I rely more on a dialogue-oriented methodology (Bakhtin, 1984; Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995; Attinasi & Friedrich, 1995; Melbøe, 2013) along with structured or semi-structured interviews, archival research and participant observation. With those living with the scars of a long-term war, I adopted an approach where I could engage in 'dialogue' with them instead of asking them questions about their war experiences or their food-related memories and trauma. I

met the 'interlocutor' during a bus journey, which began a relationship that started with mere 'conversations' and later became a significant part of my fieldwork. That connection eventually led to a journey to their village, which became a quest for my research's important questions and answers.

The methodology was based on conversations with people encountered during trips in the outskirts of Kilinochchi city and surrounding villages. It was the practice to discuss my research topic in depth with the interlocutor, and they spoke to people on my behalf. I listened/recorded everything and took notes. However, I have also interacted using my basic Tamil knowledge. Although I identified people under the general category of war victims, among them were war widows and the families of the disappeared. Out of the hundred or so people we approached, I mainly spoke to about twenty who were willing to discuss my topic. In the early days of archival research conducted at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies in Colombo, various texts related to the Sri Lankan war and post-war conditions were explored. The questions and notes encompassing that information were the focus of conversations with war-affected individuals. The participant observation was utilised during visits to hotels where war-affected women are running and during New Year-Odiyal Kool food preparation sessions held at the homes of interlocutors.

The dialogue methodology has multiple layers. In particular, if there is any problem in the 'dialogue' between my local contact and the person s/he meet, I remind them of the central theme of the research again and then conduct another 'dialogue' on that topic. It is through this continuous dialogue that this methodology has developed.

While following the argument that 'dialogue is a more fundamental form of speech' (Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995), the field is also seen as a 'dialogical ground' that reveals what they experienced

in wartime, which would be produced, reproduced, and revised through dialogues (p. 2). Instead of prolonged conversations, I created 'dialogic relationships (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 5-45), especially when we speak with people who have struggled a lot with war, especially about the memory of war, still the wounds of war haunt them in the form of displacement, marginalisation and absence of food, which is the explanation for using dialogue as a methodology.

The idea that 'dialogue underlies even inner speech' (Tedlock & Mannheim, 1995, p. 7) highlights the importance of dialogue and the possibility of understanding certain matters, especially those like war memories, that can only be clarified through dialogue. It encompasses not just what is said but also how it is said, the gaps in communication, and the retrospections that emerge during wartime, elevating the notion of dialogue beyond mere conversation into realms that particularly resonate within the narrative of dialogue in post-war situations (Attinasi & Friedrich, 1995). The dialogue in the post-war spatial richness marks a 'liminal' space; for example, the wounds inflicted by the war are described as a continuity by the people of the Kilinochchi area, which means they attest that the war is continuing on many levels. More than the complete questions, the dialogue progressed through small inquiries such as 'What was the food during the war?' or 'Can you remember/tell me about the Mullivaikkal Kanji?'. The possibility of such dialogue was explored concerning how the Tamil people in rural Sri Lanka would respond to pre-prepared 'academic' questions.

Fieldwork

Food is a powerful cultural signifier of belonging and attachment and symbolises social binding (Arvela, 2013). However, at the same time, it is also true that food can be used to identify and differentiate 'us and the other' (p. 1). *'What do you want to eat?'* Wipula, my Sinhalese friend,

asked at the hotel. *'What are you going to eat? That's enough for me!'* I said. Wipula ordered porottas and curries. *'I am a vegetarian; generally, Sinhalese-Buddhist people are vegetarians, although occasionally there are those who eat non-veg',* Wipula (dialogue, 'Colombo', April 2025) said. Along with the porotta, lentils and jackfruit-masala curries were served. *'Since many people do not eat non-veg food, jackfruit, which is rich in protein, is a staple food in the Sinhalese regions,'* Wipula said. Stuart Hall (2018) states that the language of ethnic identity and its presentation before the world is a 'guarantee of authenticity' (p. 64), and beyond that, identity is 'spatially organised' (p. 64). This means 'ethnic' is intricately woven with 'place' and its various articulations. It is described as an individual's identity embedded within its many complexities. In response to the Sri Lankan Tamil food, while we were in a Tamil hotel on the roadside to a Buddhist temple, Colombo, Wipula said, *'I like Tamil vegetarian dishes'*. I noticed the hotel's name was written in Sinhala and English, and even the menu was in Sinhala; the food was purely Tamil. A hybrid nature was explicitly visible there, a Tamil hotel in a Sinhala-dominated area with a Sinhala board, as 're-invented, re-made and re-mixed as a site of struggle' (Arvela, 2013, p. 2). The ethnic conflict that evolved over centuries on Sri Lankan soil turned into a war lasting 26 years from 1983. There are various subjects behind these ethnic conflicts, starting with language. However, it became clear that those differences would be explicitly addressed in a way that 'food' has gained its own place.

In the Sri Lankan context, the war and its memories (Gunasekara, 2023) are intertwined with ethnicity (Mehta, 2022). Thus, the civil war is not a temporary crisis but a long-enduring feature (Korf & Silva, 2003), and its memory is just its ramifications. To the first question about the war, my local host Malathi (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025) in Kilinochchi, the most war-affected area in Sri Lanka, said, *'We don't have a war memorial; we only have a war memory.'* When I asked if she could elaborate, she replied, "*After destroying the war memorial we built, the Sri*

Lankan army constructed their memorial in the same place. They are not allowing us to construct our memorials. Thus, we have only memories of war." The depth of the oppression she faces is evident in both her speech and the silence in between. The Tamil identity is increasingly subjected to the intense surveillance of the state/military, and it is clear that this is not only through speech; instead, it is revealed through the silence among dialogues.

The memory of war victims often becomes the memory of a community, especially as the similarities of their experiential worlds transform their war experiences into collective memories (Gunasekara, 2023, p. 60), as Mayani articulated, emphasising the memory of war and food: *'The lack of food was the most difficult experience during the war,'* Mayani (dialogue, 'Vaddakkachchi', April 2025) starts talking about war experiences, *'and then losing my mother.' 'While the war was raging, we were displaced many times,' 'the absence of food for days', the tasteless porridge', 'on some days, we had to eat the sweet tender part of the Palmyra tree',* she continued. *'Memory of mother?'* First, a long silence answers my question, *'I learned cooking from my mother. I remember her every time I cook,'* she said, *'My mother loved all kinds of food. In every kind of food, there is my mother.' 'There were days when we drank tea without milk, and having meals thrice a day was reduced to two times, and later to just once,' 'leaving behind even the livestock, we travelled with only our clothes,' 'it was the custom at that time for the parents to feed the children without eating themselves,' 'there were days when we only ate Kanji (rice porridge).' 'However, in the last days, the rice porridge made from unpeeled rice (somehow half peeled by pounding) became known as the true 'Mullivaikkal Kanji,' which has also reached those days,'* she said.

It is significant that in a war or conflicting context, win and lose memories are the two types of memories (Gunasekara, 2023, p. 61). The defeated will have the song of the defeated and its memories; similarly, the songs of those living with the war wounds. For example, when it is said,

‘‘Ethnic foods are called into being in their encounter with the foodways of the other. They are defined by difference" (Arvela, 2013, p. 2); numerous layers of experiences that remind us of this difference must be revealed, specifically in the context of food and particularly against the backdrop of war experiences, as Mayani (dialogue, 'Vaddakkachchi', April 2025) commented, *'If there's salt, we add salt; if not, we eat 'saltless Kanji', we boil it with ten times of water and eat it at that time'. 'There have been times when we sat in the bunker for two days without eating', 'We have caught fish from the pond and shared it among four or five people', 'At those times, we would eat whatever we could get; there's no memory of our favourite food during wartime,'* she continues. *'The food we ate then is not being eaten now; it was only wartime food. It is impossible to make Kanji (porridge) with unpeeled rice; that was the condition during the war. It can only be eaten during wartime*."

An individual's memory, akin to a collective experience of war, becomes part of collective memory (Gunasekara, 2023, p. 61). At the same time, arguing that memory is a social process of 'collective remembering' (p. 72) is also significant in the post-war Sri Lankan context, especially war survivors like Selvi (dialogue, 'Vaddakkachchi', April 2025), who lost her husband in the war, began described the question about ' war and food' with the phrase *'a time with nothing to eat.'* She described the war period as when I only had *'Kanji (porridge) to eat, without salt, sourness, or chilli.' 'We tried to give the children what was available. What we had was very little,* she said, sitting in the yard filled with coconut trees.

War is not just a memory of the absence of food; it is a memory of displacement and trauma; it is a memory of internal conflict (Mehta, 2022), as accurately articulated by Renu Amma, (dialogue, ‘Kilinochchi’, April 2025), an 80-year-old woman who runs a shop near a temple in Kilinochchi, ‘‘*While living in the bunkers, it is even harder to prepare food. Each day passes amidst a scarcity*

of food. The situation is even worse for the children. It is difficult for them to understand what war is. They are the ones who suffer the most. It was painful to see their cries when they had no food'', and Eeshwari *(dialogue, 'Vaddakkachchi', April 2025)* articulated*: ''I will never forget Mullivaikkal Kanji. It is always in my memory. Mullivaikkal Kanji is like a family deity who saved our lives. Mullivaikkal rescues everyone, and Mullivaikkal Kanji has saved everyone.''*

The war stories from Tamil soil in Sri Lanka, particularly the women's version, are narratives about war, displacement, the absence of food, and the transformations that food undergoes, and beyond that, they are also stories of survival (Mehta, 2022). For instance, this is how the Maitreyi (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025), who was only eleven years old during the war (now 26 years old), relates to the war: *'In Mullivaykal, I was sell Sukhiyan (a snack), fried Roti, and Vada since I was a small child. So then, food was a means of earning a small income for my family,'* she said.

Mannur (2007) states that certain memories are remembered, while others are literally re-membered due to the exigencies of displacement and dislocation (p. 12). This means that memories return and persist in various ways; for instance, Karuna (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025) shares her wartime experiences and memories in this manner: *"During the war, food became our only means of sustenance, and at that time, we often had to take Kanji to keep themselves alive while finding refuge from the military"*. By saying, *''Due to the shortage of rice, we could only prepare and consume Kanji using rice and salt; there were times when we could not cook rice or prepare any food due to circumstances that prevented cooking along the way and in a short period, this porridge was consumed by many people",* Seethal (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025), articulating the war as a post-war narrative. *''We realise that food is essential for survival, and there were days when porridge was prepared without ingredients and sometimes without salt,''* Karuna (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025) continued.

Food is significant in its 'symbolic or semiotic' meanings and nostalgic narratives that negotiate the parameters of 'culinary citizenship.′ Moreover, what is achieved through food is a connection to the land and home *(Mannur, 2007).* For example, Maithri (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025) speaks about food and flavour during the war, as, *'During the war, we lived without any sense of taste because, at that time, it sufficed to survive without being concerned about taste or flavour, so we consumed food simply to stay alive.' ''Kanji is a blessing God gave us for the affected people because we have seen that food is a deity that saved our lives using only water and no other ingredients,''* Maithri (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025) continued. *''We have been remembering this until today, so that the memories of those people should be known to our future generations. Similarly, through this porridge, we share the memories of the sufferings and pains we experienced during the war. It can be said that this porridge, as a reminder of the war, will always transform into an activity that grows along the path of the Tamil people,''* said Seethal (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025).

The wounds inflicted by war do not end with war; instead, it is a continuation, a series of ongoing invasions of sufferings, as testified by the Kumari (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025): *'My family and I have suffered a lot in Mullivaykal, and it continues even now. During the war, we struggled a lot for food. It is still ongoing,'* said Kumari.

Chapter: 04

Manifestations of Mullivaikkal Kanji

Virginia Woolf's (1990) claim, 'I am rooted, but I flow' (p. 66), deserves special attention because rooting itself breaks boundaries and the grandeur of someone identifying as able to flow freely, especially in contexts like post-war, is remarkable. When roots penetrate the ground, they themselves break the boundaries, and they gain the strength to stand firm on a surface, but the branches flow like rivers without borders, making post-war life a ‘fluid identity’, as Hall (2019) argues that identity is a 'never completed, never finished' process, suggesting that ‘is always in the process of formation' (69). By grounding Bourdieu's (1984; 1991; 1997) 'field' in the soil to stand firm and relating it to Woolf's notion of 'flow' to expand and spread the 'game,' an individual experiences the sound and magnificence of that game, that grand flow, as they root themselves in

their soil/place, especially in a 'dynamic situation' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 94) that emerge, flowing broadly while trying to transcend boundaries.

What is meant by 'dynamic situation' (p. 94) as stated by Bourdieu (1984) needs to be examined in the Sri Lankan context, particularly against the backdrop of the 26-year-long civil war (1983-2009) (Wickramasinghe, 2014; De Silva, 2011; Jayasundara-Smist, 2022), especially in light of the observation that it is "a space of possibles or options given to participants in the field at any given moment (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 454). The subjects of consideration are also to understand what a field is, and the game that is possible in the field is for or created by the player within it. When things change in the field, they shape what is possible through the doors that enable it or push open the doors as a part of the 'game' that allows it. The various representations in the Sri Lankan post-war situation, including food, arise through these avenues, and it is simultaneously a continuity of war experiences and a rupture. It must be said that it simultaneously represents and resists the war. The justification given by Bourdieu (1984) for [(Habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (p. 101) highlights the relevance of the field, especially considering practice as a game. The field is clarified through Bourdieu's term, 'dynamic situation' (p. 94), and it becomes significant in the context of the changed circumstances in post-war Sri Lanka. The game played by the war-affected people is relevant and intriguing, particularly when representations such as the Mullivaikkal Kanji emerge as a byproduct of this game that is closely linked with the ‘field’ during and after war. As observed, Bourdieu views the Habitus as extremely malleable and structurally reformed anytime a shift in social position places it in new circumstances (p. 175). Based on Vithanagama's argument (2018), if war widows had transitioned from a "protected" to a "protector" (p. 468) condition after the war, it should be presumed that this change was solely brought through a fantastic and problematic

game they were played in the field, as Bourdieu argued. If, as Brinda (2022) argues, cooking against the war of war widows is a silent revolutionary activity, it can be seen as a political activity that can also be read as social positioning, expressly as stated by Bourdieu (1984), 'political choices lie in the fact that more than all other choices, much more than the obscure, deep-rooted choices of the habitus' (p. 454).

While the term 'field' refers to the 'space of possibilities or options given to participants in the field at any given moment' (Steinmetz, 2008, p. 591), and the observation that it also plays the role of a ‘gatekeeper who has set several conditions for entry’ (p. 595) complicates this further, especially when the field is in a post-war era and location. At the same time, the observation that 'fields are always populated by actors coming from elsewhere' (p. 597) suggests that it allows the field and its actors to perform according to their preferences, and the field is opens for games, which means that beyond the possibilities of playing, what opens up is the realm of becoming 'players' according to the player's preference (Hensell & Gerdes, 2017).

What stands out in the game is the player's ‘competence (habitus)’ (Crossley, 2001), which means the player's ability to understand the place and the playing field. This superiority defines a person as a great player and makes them unique. Here, relatively flimsier concepts like 'Mullivaikkal Kanji' represent how the Tamil people in the post-war period engaged in the game, revealing their understanding of their field. For them, the distribution of 'Mullivaikkal Kanji' (Fernando, 2019; Venkataraman, 2022; Hewage, 2022; Pundir, 2024) cannot be merely seen as a remembrance of the dead or a war memorial. Beyond that, it represents post-war life itself. It is a proclamation of those who have returned to life, about life itself, affirming that they are alive. Kanji, viewed in this

way, is a thread that pulls one from death into life, embodying the symphony of life and the trajectories of war. It is the sound of comfort for those who have narrowly escaped from the edge of death. The remembrance of the dead is also a memory for the living. There are countless interpretations of the idea that the living remember the dead. In those interpretations, the metaphor of gruel, 'Mullivaikkal Kanji', takes shape and fulfils its political purpose. Bourdieu (1991) describes the field as a multi-dimensional social space that, while relatively autonomous, possesses a structure that allows for various types of games by agents, ‘‘affecting its functioning and transformations’’ (p. 245). At the same time, it is noteworthy that Bourdieu also states that the field is ‘‘a place of struggle’’ (p. 242), especially as post-war societies navigate through various forms of struggles; moreover, ‘the civil war brings about abrupt, unexpected transformations in the relative value of capitals, inter-field relationships, and legitimate discourses’ (Baczko & Dorronsoro, 2022, p. 207) make Mullivaikkal Kanji a more prominent symbol of resistance and representation, especially in inter-field relationships amid ethnic conflicts.

As argued by Topper (2001), turning habitats into a complex idea ‘‘lies at the intersection of social structures and practical activity’’ (p. 38), means that the field and the activities, which can be referred to as games occurring within it, to some extent determine matters defined the identity of the player. While one can confidently say that the social conditions arising from changes in the field are behind the creation of 'Mullivaikkal Kanji', it must also be noted that its symbolic value is intertwined with the ethnic identity of the Sri Lankan Tamil people.

When viewed through the ideas of 'lines of flight', 'deterritorialization' and 'minoritarian becoming' (Deleuze, 1986; Deleuze, 1987; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Deleuze, 1995), the survival of the Sri

Lankan Tamil community during and after the war, the emergence of the food known as Mullivaikkal Kanji, and the politics being put forward through it, will clarify how a community has shaped its post-war, anti-war counter-narrative through this 'mere' porridge, and what the implications are. Minoritarian becoming, as Deleuze (1987) puts it, refers to a 'possibility' that could become anything; it describes an intrinsic force with a scope and expansive internal energy to invent ‘‘new forces or new weapons’’ (p. 5). To put it clearly, it reveals the contexts for calling to create a new language through the phrase 'define a minority usage of language' (p. 34). In response to the question of what this language is, Deleuze (1986) states that ‘‘a language is constructed within a major language’’ (p. 6). That is, rather than the creation of something entirely new, the argument is that a new language can emerge or be considered as a potentiality through the reproduction or revival of something existing, which is profoundly validated by the post-war representation of the wartime survival gruel, 'Mullivaikkal Kanji'. There is nothing new in that porridge; there is rice, and water, about ten times the amount of rice, and often there is not even salt. It is merely a porridge that can be called a 'wartime' transformation of the rice porridge that was part of the daily food habits (cooked with coconut milk and salt, eaten with curry during breakfast, lunch, and dinner) of Sri Lankan Tamils. However, its revival in post-war times is transforming into something much more influential, and its implications are extensive enough to instil fear in the administration.

In Deleuze's (1987) statement, 'A minority never exists ready-made; it is only formed on lines of flight, which are also its way of advancing and attacking' (p. 43), which portrays the voice of the Tamils' resistance and representation in Sri Lanka; through 'way of advancing and attacking,' there are reflective and insightful arguments about the various images formed in post-war Tamil land,

including in food, on several levels. It can be understood that this has emerged from the collective memory of a people that asserts it will not retreat, expressed through food in the post-war period and commemorating war memories through cooking and food distribution. What oppresses them, the resistance created against it, and how those who are oppressed escape from it are observed by Deleuze (1986) to be highly diverse and unpredictable, primarily through the phrase 'reaching up to the unlimited realm of the field' (p. 59). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) stated that the 'majority is never becoming, all becoming minoritarian' (p. 106) should also be considered here. Deleuze discusses the limitless realms they reach and the representations they use for this, and even what may seem trivial, like the 'images' resembling a Mullivaikkal Kanji, transform beyond visual perception into signs loaded with meaning, serving as a testament to a people affected by war, breaking through their constraints. An extremely vulnerable population is seen advancing 'on the unlimited line in the unlimited direction' (p. 64), according to the changes that have occurred in their field and by utilising its potential.

The civil war that lasted for twenty-six years brought to the Tamil people both boundless suffering and, through that, the capacity to break borders. In this way, as Deleuze (1986) argues, it enabled them "to take flight along the lines of escape or transformation" (p. 85). It can be seen that these lines of escape have been formed on multiple levels; women's groups coming together to start hotels, establish food processing companies, and enter workplaces where women had not ventured much before the war have made the transformation of women's communities in the post-war society possible. At the same time, in terms of people, some representations remind and perpetuate the war, like the Mullivaikkal Kanji and Mithivedi (Mehta, 2022, p. 158), a landmine-shaped snack, sold in shops that evoke memories of war, and thus, on many levels, the collective lines of

flight in this post-war period are made possible. The ethnic conflict, which lasted for 26 years, is made possible by the 'enemy-friend dichotomy' (p. 32), as argued by Schmitt (1996). In between, the Tamil population, who lost everything in the war, experienced defences that can even be described as abstract, and which, as Deleuze (1995) argues, "has no model, it's a becoming, a process" (p. 173), a place reached by those who have set out without assurance of where they would arrive. Deleuze's (1995) statement "Without a set of impossibilities, you won't have the line of flight" (p. 133) is worthy of consideration, especially when taking into account the mention of '[The Kanji] symbolizes the genocide of our people' (Pundir, 2024) in the context of war survival. The impossibilities that have taken shape in Sri Lanka can be seen as the basis for the line of flight of the Tamil people; these are undefinable affairs that have inspired the Tamil people to reach new levels of life and their representations. I argue, 'Mullivaikkal Kanji', which originated during the war, can be seen as representing the 'minoritarian becoming' of the Tamil people in the post-war period, and it nourishes each individual and the Tamil community with its seemingly watery and tasteless characteristics, uplifting and comforting them. The Tamil people are bringing their 'god', the 'saltless Kanji' that saved their lives in the war, alongside their life celebrations, in the shadow of the memories of hardship. Furthermore, 'Kanji' is a testament to their existence in a world where 'WE' continue to survive and reclaim themselves without being destroyed.

Through deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that it is not merely about losing territory but about creating new possibilities outside dominant frameworks. That is, rather than constructing a new language, it refers to a new construction within the existing language, and as said about minority languages, it can be understood as a new 'territory' within the existing land, a highly abstract construction of territory that breaks through existing borders. For example, Mehta

(2022) argues that in post-war Sri Lanka, 'cooking becomes a political symbol, and food has dimensions beyond being an object (p. 170).' In other words, the meaning of cooking is changing in post-war society; it has become a political symbol, and eating is also transforming into a political action. The statement by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that 'deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities (9)' refers to identities that are shaped by the new circumstances emerging in post-war society, whether they are adapted or created through struggle. It can be seen that while there are scars inflicted by war, remedies to heal those wounds also form a resistance. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that constant transformations occur in a way that 'Nomadic waves or flows of deterritorialization go from the central layer to the periphery (p. 53); it is through this journey that survival is made possible. These journeys create new circulations of identity and simultaneously hold life in their grip, facilitating their survival from new centres to their boundaries. By saying, ‘‘becoming minoritarian exists only in a deterritorialized medium and subject’’ (p. 292), or else it can be practical, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as 'becoming' - an idea that can be flipped back and forth to engage with crises, connecting it not only with locations but also with imaginative 'territories' beyond the mere 'idea.' This helps to understand the 'Kanji', which became a part of the everyday life of Tamils, formed in 'Mullivaikkal', where most Tamils were trapped during the final stages of the civil war, and later transformed into symbols of their war memories.

The idea of the nomadic subject put forward by Rosi Braidotti (1994) discusses the 'flow' of identity. When she speaks of 'seasonal patterns of movement through rather fixed routes' (p. 22), it pertains to the subject itself and the progressions it constantly undertakes. Here, if we consider the ethnic aspect as a subject, 'nomadism' is defined as 'capable of recreating home everywhere'

(p. 16). It is not homelessness; rather, it is a state where there is a home everywhere, where the place one travels becomes home, even movement transforms into home, and it is not just about eating but rather a state where whatever is consumed becomes food. The identity formed by this could be that of those constantly subjected to displacements during war times, rather than other circumstances, like Sri Lankan Tamils, which allows it to be distinctly identified. Braidotti mainly refers to 'a creative sort of becoming' (p. 6) with the term nomadic, specifically a 'performative metaphor', meaning it is an identity that discovers itself beyond localities and constraints. Such disasters that can be called multiplicitous and multifaceted are indeed the result of war. Through the phrase 'becoming that would lead them into unknown paths if they opted to follow it through' (p. 173), Deleuze (1995) reminds us about the openness of the post-war time it presents, about the new meanings of becoming, which is a new world, a world where meanings have changed; a time when the meaning of 'Kanji' that was consumed before the war has changed, the war-affected have moved into a new epoch where the representation of collective action has transformed. Looking at the argument that eating is a social action, food can be seen as a social object that goes beyond mere items necessary for human survival; it transforms into something that represents 'identity and difference' (Michael, 2007, p. 222). As a symbolic medium, the capacity of food to translate and convert the aspirations of a community renders it a vehicle of representation. By consuming 'Mullivaikkal kanji', which embodies the idea against war, the eater joins in a collective dialogue against war; in this sense, eating becomes a slogan, a proclamation, and a stance against war.

Foucault (1980) speaks of 'counter-memory' as an idea that deals with the reconstruction of memory, that is, the creation of a method to deconstruct history through memory. Create history within history, one that may be forgotten or erased, and it creates images that allow this history to be remembered by everyone. This is how 'counter-memory' becomes possible. Foucault further

clarifies his argument through the term 'effective' history (p. 153), stating, 'It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity' (p. 154). When examining the statement 'the notion of memory as an inherent bastion in the battle against political and social oppression' (Berlatsky, 2003, p. 104), the depth of the historical mission undertaken by the Sri Lankan people through their representations through memory becomes evident. Counter-memory, then, may be the reflection of an encounter that emerged and engulfed them; therefore, Mullivaikkal Kanji is not just a 'memorial notion' created by the Tamil people outside of their lives; it is something they embody, which can be seen in their bodies, and lives through it and on it, they create a post-memory as put forward by Marianne Hirsch (2024). The experience story unfolds through narration, and post-memory also takes shape as an experiential world for those who do not experience it. By telling their experiences, the experienced pass on the realm of those experiences to future generations. A means for this is 'Kanji' (rice porridge), and its collective cooking and distribution, which transforms into a practice over time, a ‘memorial ritual’. When viewed through the lens of 'culinary nationalism' (King, 2019), it is essential to examine various levels such as 'historical trajectories, social patterns, and behaviours shared across many sites' (p. 3) and to understand the places arrive at with clarity, because the identity related to 'food', 'nation', and 'nationality' along with its disjunctions is highly complex, as highlighted by King's term 'national table' where people sit together to eat (p. 9). On May 18, 2009, when the 26-year-long war came to an end, the Sinhalese government declared a special holiday and noted by Wickramasinghe (2014) that 'war-weary people' celebrated the end of the conflict by eating 'Kiribath (milk rice),' a traditional Sinhalese food, along with launching ‘rockets’-fireworks (p. 352). This means that before the Tamil people could even begin to recover from the depths of grief

of the war, and before 'Mullivaikkal Kanji' became symbolic, 'food' served as a representation, showing that the victors had their own 'symbol' on Sri Lankan soil.

According to Mamdani, ethnicity marked an internal difference 'as a political identity, whereas race signified an external difference' (2020, p. 231); this is relevant in the context of post-civil war Sri Lanka, especially as it relates to representations such as Mullivaikkal Kanji, which has become part of the resistance and resilience formed after the war. Roland Barthes (2018) stated that food is not merely "a collection of products but a system of communication, a body of images, and a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviours" (p. 14), implying that food has a mission to carry out beyond just satisfying hunger. Another critical point that Barthes mentions is that food "transmits a situation; it constitutes information; it signifies" (p. 14), which is a significant observation, especially regarding food that has become a representation of post-war conditions, like Mullivaikkal Kanji in a coconut shell. How 'Kanji' served in a coconut shell is used to recall wartime memories and those lost in the war, thereby transforming it into a resistance against war in the post-war period, particularly through the statement 'it signifies', which is elaborated by Barthes. Looking at it against the backdrop of Barthes's argument, Mullivaikkal Kanji is a symbol with unique characteristics that evokes the memories of the Sri Lankan Tamil people during the war, brings back the memories of those lost in war, exposes the horrors of war, and relates the hardships experienced during that time to contemporary contexts. It cannot be viewed without its historical formation or enduring function. By stating that "an entire 'world' (social environment) is present in and signified by food" (p. 17), Barthes is presenting the Mullivaikkal Kanji and the way it was formed, the politics it 'signifies', and the resistance that emerges from it, for example, by introducing the Mullivaikkal Kanji, which sustained life during wartime, as a symbol to remember the war, the Tamil people are indeed embodying a community that has triumphed over war,

problematizing, and symbolizing it (Almerico, 2014). 'When human beings convert some part of their environment into food, they create a peculiarly powerful semiotic device,' as Appadurai (1981, p. 494) points out, which refers to the politics involved in the exchange through food, which implicitly addresses other aspects without being stated through cooking and distribution. Its ability to convey many things without explicitly stating them transforms it into a 'semiotic device' and reconstructs it into a highly ‘condensed social fact’ (p. 494).

As King (2019) argues, "what is being cooked up is not individual dishes but the nation itself" (p. 1), foods that were part of the culinary identity, conflict, and contrast that occurred when they were also part of the war trauma became rebellious (Moore, 1957); otherwise, Mehta argues that cooking becomes a political symbol, and food has dimensions beyond being an object, and she commends women, even war widows, who have gained a social place as breadwinners, converting painful wartime memories into the joy of life with delectable food (p. 170). When say that 'food is often emblematic of local or national identity' (Monterescu & Handel, 2019), the concepts of terroir and territoriality (Monterescu, 2017; Monterescu & Handel, 2019; Monterescu & Handel, 2020) connect the times and places where food is produced, the people involved, and the 'boundaries' within which that food takes shape, thereby linking it to ethnic identity as a 'proof of primordial belonging' (2019, p. 315), at the same time, it represents a contradiction between terroir (as quality space) and territory (as political space) (2019, p. 316). Mullivaikkal Kanji, a dish that has developed in connection with the Mullivaikkal region where the Tamil people were trapped at the end of the war, and that 'terroir often traverses national territories, cultivating nature becomes a political statement' (Monterescu, 2017, p. 128) is significant.

However, what is eating? When encountering this question, the response given by Mol (2021) that 'king,' 'man,' or 'woman,' eating is not just a single thing (p. 23) is relevant, especially when

considering collective cooking and eating in a post-war society, particularly the eating of war survivors. Mol states, 'Eating comes in versions (p. 23), which means that all types of eating are not the same; they are diverse. The process of eating that reminds one of war is not the same as that of regular eating, as indicated here. In debates concerning eating, the ideas presented by Xu (2007) are highly relevant, especially in terms of how 'eating, cooking, and talking' contribute to the 'community's wholeness and continuation' (p. 19), as well as the argument that 'eating together' serves as a means to remember absences (p. 107), which is particularly thought-provoking, especially in the post-war context. The idea of 'elevating eating into a social ritual' can also be interpreted as collective eating against war becoming a social ritual against war, especially when paired with the deeply ‘constructionist notion of identity; eating takes on richer connotations than just food’ (p. 166). Food serves as a conduit both to the person consuming it and to the community s/he is part of, while also fulfilling missions beyond that, according to Abbots (2017), especially, statement 'we give meanings to it; involve it in ritual processes; perform with and through it' (p. 3) indicates that the missions carried out by food are significant and expressive, and food and eating act as a sign of 'social bonds and boundaries with it (p. 3).' Eating is thus a socially constructed activity, especially when the reasons for eating together and the context in which it occurs become more relevant than the 'food' itself. As Mol (2021) argues, 'situated eating, tied to particular sites and situations' (p. 49) problematizes both food and the activity of 'eating', transforming it into something that can be understood in greater depth; for instance, food and eating become more extensive as "a part of a complex socio-material practice" (p. 58). For example, through consuming 'Mullivaykkal Kanji', meanings can be interpreted beyond just eating the food, especially in the statement that ‘‘food can transform the person consuming it’’ (p. 71). For instance, Eeshwari states (dialogue 'Vaddakkachchi', April 2025) that 'Mullivaykkal Kanji' is their 'family deity', which

means that 'Kanji' transforms into something imprinted with meanings and nuances that extend beyond the food itself, the god, who saved lives becomes their food or vice versa.

Conclusion

Only when the weapons become silent at the end of the war does 'the war' continue; therefore, the term 'post-armed war' is prevalent in the Sri Lankan situation. This means that the 'war' is ongoing, without weapons; thus, the term 'post-conflict' is irrelevant when 'conflict' continues in various forms, making the 'Mullivaikkal Kanji' metaphor noteworthy. An ethnic conflict that had been silent for centuries, sometimes erupting into violence, entered a confrontation in 1983 and then evolved into a war that lasted for 26 years. This war dismantled the identity of the Sri Lankan Tamil people that had existed until then and transformed it into new dimensions. The long-standing internal conflict has traversed through various dimensions, for example, the repercussions and confusions created by the activities of organizations like the LTTE, which represented the Tamil

people on the one hand, and the brutal resistance carried out by the Sinhalese majority government and army on the other. Beyond that, the measures developed at multiple levels, including cutting off food supplies, created further repercussions. In this context, it can be generally said that the internal and external life of the Sri Lankan Tamil people took shape. Here, during the final phases of the war, the area of Mullivaikkal, where the majority of the Tamil people gathered, along with the 'Kanji' that was made for survival during that time, became a symbol of representation for the Tamil people in the post-war period, known as 'Mullivaikkal Kanji'.

Rice-based meal is simultaneously a common food for the Sri Lankan Tamil and Sinhalese people, but the cooking methods differ. Here, 'Kanji', made without ingredients, and even without salt during the war, symbolises post-war times. The amount of rice in the kanji was different before and during the war. Before the war, water was used only two or three times the amount of rice, while it rose to ten times during the war. This increase in water represents both scarcity and survival during war. After a protracted internal conflict, the Sri Lankan Tamil people, who have returned to an ethnically conflicted state, were not even granted permission by the Sinhalese government and military to build a war memorial; it should be noted here that Malathi stated, *'We have no war memorials, only memories of the war'* (dialogue, 'Kilinochchi', April 2025). Thus, for a people without a memorial, the Mullivaykkal Kanji has been shaped as a war memorial to remember war tragedies and commemorate the loved ones lost in war. When saying 'Kanji' has become a symbol of war, we have to say that the entire chain, from its cooking to its distribution, functions as a war memorial. It is not just sharing the memory of the war but also preserving it; this is done through collective cooking to translate it to a generation that has not directly experienced it.

By the changes that occurred in the ‘field', when the Tamil people, both as individuals and as a collective, are seen as an embodiment of resistance represented by 'Mullivaikkal Kanji', its notion of 'tasteless' is transforming into a historical artefact, something that can be described as a form of metamorphosis. This porridge marks the liminal space of the Tamil people in that sense; beyond that, 'Kanji' should be understood as something formed within a transforming society's geographical boundary. However, it has the power to transcend boundaries, particularly because the political imagination that is advanced through it is not entirely confined to geographical boundaries. In the area known as Mullivaykkal, amidst tens of thousands of people gathered, the 'Kanji' that formed in an uncountable number of kitchens is unparalleled. The 'Kanji', which has taken on various forms with and without salt, bears the mark of a struggle, which has now transformed into a symbol of those who have overcome that struggle. That 'Kanji' marks those who have spent time in Mullivaykkal, and later, the manifestations of that mark, the celebrations, are happening as the cooking and distribution of that kanji, which has become a place to share war stories as a war memorial, have been continually altered over the years. Thus, that 'place' which becomes a war memorial is an extraordinarily abstract space where cooking, serving, and eating all come together. In the area of Mullivaikkal, thousands were killed, mutilated, and went missing during the final days of the war. Cooking and eating were ongoing as part of efforts to sustain life amidst continuous shelling. Those who went to Mullivaikkal brought only the essential cooking supplies, while those who returned brought back Mullivaikkal Kanji.

Materialism can be considered as a definition of being human (Eagleton, 2017); it is through materials that humans often communicate, and hence, the phrase 'the social life of things' implies that materials have life similar to humans in this context. Speaking of 'material', referring to 'Mullivaykkal kanji' and presenting its social life is a very complex history; it is not just history

but also present and serves as a bridge between the past and present. When speaking through a 'material', whoever is behind it will start speaking on its behalf. It is not the speech of people but the communication of objects. While humans conceal meanings in words, silence, and expressions, objects are experts in revealing the worlds beyond them. Therefore, the communication of objects is unpredictable and precise. Whether that is ancient history, war, or post-war, 'materials' that conceal time and emerge with meanings will cross boundaries in ways that humans cannot and will communicate with anyone through their 'muted' language. At the same time, they personify their uniqueness in a style and fashion and thus amplify the voice that they represent. Here, the material known as Mullivaikkal Kanji is a food conceived as a practice where a group of people cook and serve it together and eat it collectively, through which it translates to being established as a war memorial. Its implications and depth are vast; what it presents is nothing less than a collective representation of a direct disaster.

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