



THE TAMIL ACADEMIC JOURNAL

A RESEARCH PLATFORM ON ISSUES REGARDING TAMIL PEOPLE



SPECIAL ISSUE:

Tamil Resistance in the Twenty-First Century

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FOREWORD

Vanakkam,



We are pleased to introduce to you the first issue of The Tamil Academic Journal. This special issue accompanies a conference that kicked off our inaugural theme of 'Tamil Resistance in the Twenty-First Century.' In this section, we will introduce the journal, provide the rationale behind our first theme and a synopsis of the articles in this issue.

About us

The Tamil Academic Journal was founded in February 2019 to promote original research that pertains to Tamil people globally. Although there is a plethora of academic research on issues concerning the Tamil people, there has not yet been an institution dedicated solely to producing such research. Moreover, the research that is produced is often dispersed, constrained within traditional rigid academic norms and procedures, and is usually often inaccessible for the people whom the research concerns. In this light, The Tamil Academic Journal strives to not only publish peer-reviewed academic papers, but it does also so with the aim of addressing these shortcomings.

Recognising that contemporary issues required comprehensive and interdisciplinary solutions, The Tamil Academic Journal welcomes research papers from all disciplines, including the Arts, Humanities, Social as well as Natural Sciences. Additionally, The Tamil Academic Journal encourages scholars from various fields to work together on papers without limiting themselves to their trained subject areas. Finally, in order to truly make the published papers accessible to the global wider Tamil audience population, all publications, including this one, will be open-access.

Each of the articles in this issue were single-blind peer-reviewed by two academics who are experts in the respective fields. Single-blind peer-reviewing was adopted because the papers were presented at the conference by the authors. The authors presented their papers at the conference to not only showcase their findings to an audience, but to incorporate the audience's feedback into their work before the peer-reviewing process began.

Theme for this issue: 'Tamil Resistance in the Twenty-First Century'

May 2019 marked the tenth-year anniversary of the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka where, according to the United Nations, an estimated 70,000 Tamil civilians were massacred in Mullivaikal (though other sources show the death toll could be well into the 100,000s). Moreover, more than 100,000 Tamils, mostly men, have been forcibly disappeared. With a decade of no truth, accountability or justice provided for the Tamil people, we chose a theme for the conference that would facilitate discussion and enable the Tamil community to reflect on what has happened since 2009. While the ten-year anniversary was the central focus of the conference, the call for papers was broadly interpretable and welcomed paper submissions on any topic or issue as long as the authors could justify how the paper fits in with our theme: 'Tamil Resistance in the Twenty-First Century.'

Starting off this issue, Dr Thamil Ananathavinyagan's article, 'The role of the Tamil Academic in times of academic resistance,' highlights the need for academics to be both political as well as academic organisers, so as to pave 'the way for resistance' from oppression. Ananathavinyagan's article provides a nuanced analysis of the history of Tamil academic resistance while placing it within a broader global context. Arguing for the necessity of education to warrant resistance, Ananathavinyagan calls on academics to play their part in ensuring critical, unbiased and genuine knowledge production and transfer.

Taking a more retrospective lens, in 'Memory and resistance in the London Tamil diaspora,' Dr Rachel Seoighe provides a reflection piece that illustrates an instance of the kind of Tamil resistance Ananathavinyagan esteems. In this piece, Rachel focuses upon the 'Tamils of Lanka' exhibition organised by the Tamil Information Centre, upholding as an 'act of resistance' against the State erasure of alternative narratives of the conflict. Seoighe explores the exhibition as a space in which participants could 'share stories and ideas, to remember atrocities and commend resilience, and to document and read history from a Tamil perspective.' The act of remembrance in itself marks an act of defiance, Rachel argues.

Ms. Davini Laksmi Jayagomar, our third and final author, explores resistance in the realm of linguistics and identity through her article 'The place of Tamil in the Linguistic Landscape of Singapore's Little India.' By evaluating the representation role that Tamil plays in Little India, Jayagomar analyses and evaluates the forces that constrain yet simultaneously shape the evolution of the Singaporean Tamil identity. Specifically, through a Linguistic Landscape and Nexus analysis, Jayagomar critically analyses 'the exoticisation of [the Tamil] language that is normalised in the tourist site of Little India' and questions whether 'the Singaporean Tamil identity [is represented] accurately.'

THE CONFERENCE



The Tamil Academic Journal hosted the first of its kind academic conference at Kingston University London on July 6th, 2019, from 9am to 5.30pm. The day encompassed interactive presentations, panel discussions, and networking opportunities.

In addition to the presentations of the papers from Ananthavinayagan, Seoighe and Jayagomar (mentioned above), the theme of resistance was explored further through three further presentations and two panel discussions at our conference.

Presentations:

Lavanya Sankaran

'Homeland' and 'host-land' identifications in the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

Probing the depths of 'homeland' and 'host-land' concepts, Lavanya Sankaran explored the complex ways in which the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora use spaces and reconstruct their identities.

Thanges Paramsothy

Oppressed Castes in Jaffna: Shifting from Collective Resistance to Multiple (in)visible Forms against Domination

Thanges Paramsothy shared his research on the complex acts of oppressed caste resistances against caste hegemony by sharing insights from data collected from long-term fieldwork in Jaffna and the Tamil diaspora.

Malcolm Rodgers

The victors and the spoils: militarisation and colonisation in contemporary North-east Sri Lanka

Malcolm Rodgers showcased the developments occurring in the North-eastern parts of Sri Lanka since the end of the war and its parallels with historical developments that initially led to the war.

Panel Discussions:

The Opportunities and Challenges of Bringing about Truth, Accountability, and Justice in the Island of Sri Lanka

Experts from different fields discussed past, present and potential future efforts to understand how meaningful transitional justice can be attained in Sri Lanka.

Moving Forward: Directions for Impact-Driven Academic Research and Publishing

The Tamil Academic Journal team held a roundtable-like discussion with the audience to gather views and insights on how to ensure that the journal's work and aims remain relevant going forward.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

About Dr. Tamil Ananthavinayagan

Dr. Tamil Venthan Ananthavinayagan, LL.M. (Maastricht University), PhD (NUI Galway) is a Teaching Associate at University of Nottingham. Before joining University of Nottingham, he worked as a Fellow and research assistant to the Irish Centre for Human Rights in Galway, Ireland from 2013-2017 and worked as Lecturer in International Law at Griffith College Dublin from 2017-2020. His doctoral research focused on the engagement of Sri Lanka with the United Nations human rights machinery, published as a book in 2019. He has a research interest in (post)-colonial studies, racism/fascism in international law, CRT, TWAIL and has widely published in these areas.

About Dr. Rachel Seioighe

Dr Rachel Seioighe is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the University of Kent and her work is concerned with state violence and resistance. Working from a decolonial, feminist perspective, her work has examined state crime and resistance, nationalistic authorship and violence in Sri Lanka since the end of the war. Her book 'War, denial and nation-building in Sri Lanka: after the end' was published by Palgrave in 2017. Dr Seioighe also writes, teaches and thinks about border criminologies, 'race' and racialisation, and social and transformative justice.

About Davini Ms. Laksmi Jayagomar

Ms. Davini Laksmi is a graduate from the National University of Singapore where she majored in English Language (Linguistics). Her article is a reworking of her Honours Thesis on 'The Place of Tamil in the Linguistic Landscape of Singapore's Little India'. She was inspired by linguistic landscape research during her student exchange programme at Lund University where she was tutored by Dr Francis M. Hult. Currently, she is working as a data analyst in Dow Jones and continues to learn about environmental sustainability while volunteering in biodiversity and reforestation efforts in Singapore.

OUR THANK YOUS

The Tamil Academic Journal, the conference and this issue will not have been realised without the help of many volunteers.

We would like to firstly thank all our authors and their respective peer-reviewers in this issue for co-producing the insightful articles we have published. Thank you also to all the other presenters and panellists for your contributions at the conference. Finally, thank you to all our volunteers for your hard work in setting up The Tamil Academic Journal, organising the conference, and for helping with publishing the papers. This project shows how a diverse group of people, united by a common goal, can come together and make a difference.

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WRITE FOR US

Building from our foundations, we are scaling up our operations and envision to publish many more original, insightful and high-quality research papers on issues relating to Tamil people.

We currently publish two streams of papers:

Non-thematic papers: these papers are collected on a rolling basis and there is no set time frame to submit manuscripts.

Thematic papers: these papers relate to a specific theme and there are strict timelines with each stage of the publishing process.

Please go to our website where you can find all the information with regards to publishing with us including our current call for papers for thematic and non-thematic issues.

If you are an academic or part of an academic institution and would like to get involved with our projects, please email us at: admin@tamilacademicjournal.org. We would love to hear from you.

The resistance won't be televised - the role of the Tamil Academic in Times of Academic Resistance



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Thamil Venthan Ananthavinayagan

Abstract

In times of populism, rising xenophobia and racism, it will be the duty of an academic to become political and an academic organiser willing to pave the way for resistance if oppression becomes the norm. This applies more so to Tamil academics in order for them to engage in debate, to inform, to educate and enlighten the intellectual substratum of the society. As will be outlined later, such activism is enabled by academic freedom, which helps in setting free those needed capacities for academic activism. Academic freedoms, however, are facing a populist onslaught worldwide, which limit such freedoms and the ideas that trigger activism. Tamil academics have had a long history of organising resistance, from the time of Rev. Dr. Xavier Stanislaus Thani Nayagam (1948-1970), who fired up young academics in the fight against Sinhala governmental oppression and their ban on import of Tamil literature from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka. The organisation of (Tamil) academic resistance by Dr. Thani Nayagam provided the fertile ground for an academic playground that ushered in notable doctoral dissertations of K Indrapala and S. Pathmatahan and different spaces of academic resistance, such as the International Conferences on Tamil Research.

To this end, this article concerns the following overarching questions: how does a Tamil academic devise strategy, stimulate change and accumulate sufficient native resistance to global inequalities? Flowing from this first question, how can the Tamil academic capitalise upon learnt experiences from Sri Lanka? In consequence, the article will pursue the last question: how can the Tamil academic make use of these learnt narratives which have shaped so many biographies in Sri Lanka/ diaspora communities and assist in a global fight for global justice, also assisting other academics of non-Tamil descent in similar situations of oppression?

Key words

academic freedom; resistance; counter-hegemony, colonialism; authoritarianism; nationalism; freedom; socio-economic rights

I. Introduction

Authoritarianism, racism and fascism are the constant companions under the reign of capitalism.¹ Fascism, to this end, is a certain type of class dictatorship with the vested idea of defending the interest of the capitalist reign in times of crises - when socialist revolutions loom, capitalism can only turn into a violent ideology.² Against this background, the differing opinions of academics and activists have troubled their relationship and heightened their divisions to encounter fascism, as 'a common theme in their words is the difficult process of defining and balancing the worlds of academia and activism as if each world is on a different side of a chasm that can't be breached.'³ In this vein, the division between academics and activists, whether real or perceived, serves as a distraction to the ways in which these groups can work together in service to social justice. As James suggested, academics and activists 'are interdependent' and are 'hybrids in effecting peace and social change.'⁴ And they are not isolated in the ivory tower of their existence; they are instrumental in contributing to resistance: in Turkey, academics who join and trigger change are arrested on a large scale.⁵ In Brazil, academics are facing increasing threats since the election of the far-right presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro as the country's president in October 2018. Here,

[i]n an unprecedented development since the country regained democracy in 1985, scientists and academics who work in Brazil feel less safe, and some have even started to leave the country. Female researchers especially appear to be targeted. In Nicaragua, onslaught on academic freedom becomes a fashionable tool to silence critical thought.⁶

In Hungary, prime minister Viktor Orban's government has severely curtailed the operations of the Central European University (CEU).⁷ In the Covid-19 pandemic, the shrinking space for freedoms is becoming more evident.⁸ In this light, the fight is

[a]bout the defense of democracy, open inquiry, and the pursuit of knowledge. These are at the heart of what a university can contribute to society, and why the academic freedom of CEU matters and must be defended.⁹

¹ MR Online. (2018). Racism and the logic of capitalism, A Fanonion reconsideration [online] available from <https://mronline.org/2018/08/02/racism-and-the-logic-of-capitalism/> [accessed 26 April 2020].

² Traverso, E. (2019), *The New Faces of Fascism*, 1st ed., London and New York: Verso Publishers.

³ Rose, B. (2017) Moving from Chasm to Convergence: Benefits and Barriers to Academic Activism for Social Justice and Equity, *Brock Education Journal*, 27(1), pp. 67-78.

⁴ James, J. (2003). Academia, Activism, and Imprisoned Intellectuals. *Social. Justice*, 30 (2), pp 3-7.

⁵ Deutsche Welle. (2019) *Turkey's Academics for Peace punished for anti-war protest* [online]. Available from: <https://www.dw.com/en/turkeys-academics-for-peace-punished-for-anti-war-protest/a-48540809> [accessed 13 June 2019].

⁶ Chemistry World. (2019) *Fears for academic freedom as Brazil's political climate deteriorate*. [online]. Available from: <https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/fears-for-academic-freedom-as-brazils-political-climate-deteriorates/3010315.article> [accessed 13 June 2019].

⁷ Die Zeit. (2019), *Hungary Is Lost* [online]. Available from: <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2019-04/european-union-hungary-democracy-viktor-orban-english>, [accessed 13 June 2019].

⁸ Irish Times. (2020) . *Orban wins power to rule by decree as Hungary fights Covid-19*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/orban-wins-power-to-rule-by-decree-as-hungary-fights-covid-19-1.4216128>, [accessed 13 June 2019].

⁹ Boston Globe. (2017). *Hungary's attack on academic freedom*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2017/04/03/hungary-attack-academic-freedom/sSYNAizjeoevcfqxZV176K/story.html>, [accessed 13 June 2019].

This is why this article argues that academic freedoms inform and actualise academic activism to a great extent, as examples from Palestine and Russia amplify as well.¹⁰ This threat which comes from authoritarian policymakers and their strategists, entail an attack -not only on the area of discipline as such but also an attack on their space which they have created for themselves through their academic positions for political agency. The University and College Union in the UK holds in a recent announcement:

[A]cademic freedom is also bound up with broader civil liberties and human rights. Higher and further education staff have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion, expression, association and assembly. Staff must not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights as citizens, including the right to contribute to social change through free expression of opinion on matters of public interest. We recognise that this may touch upon sensitive or controversial issues.¹¹

At this juncture, it is instrumental to turn to the experiences of Tamil academics, who are occupying various positions and are active in manifold disciplines in Sri Lanka and the diaspora communities, be it Germany, Canada or Singapore or wherever they are. The article wants to interrogate the strategies of Tamil academics and how they take part in the resistance and fend off the obvious problem for which innovative strategies are needed: governmental practices and policies which infringe upon academic freedom, freedom of thought and pursuit of truth. To be even more precise: the problem is ideological repression which does not accept the truth-seeking of academics as it contravenes the ideology. Academics have, in consequence, to devise counter-strategies which are flowing from their research, their teaching, their interdisciplinary collaborations, which need to extend to transnational collegiality and solidarity, exemplified by a statement of the City University of New York in light of the aggression against the students of the Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2020:

PSC-CUNY stands in solidarity with the students, faculty and staff of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi, India, in their struggle against state repression of political speech. We believe that the targeting of politically active youth at public universities reveals the broader program of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) to push its neoliberal attack on the poor, its discriminatory agenda against minorities, its promotion of a hawkish foreign policy, and its squelching of political dissent.¹²

¹⁰ see also: Shwaikh, M. and Gould, R.R. (2019). The Palestine Exception to Academic Freedom: Intertwined Stories from the Frontlines of UK-Based Palestine Activism, *University of Hawai'i Press*, 42:4, pp.752-773. ; Meduza, *Academic Freedom: The fight over political activism inside Moscow's Higher School of Economics*, [online]. Available from: <https://meduza.io/en/episodes/2020/02/14/academic-freedom-the-fight-over-political-activism-inside-moscow-s-higher-school-of-economics> [accessed 05 September 2020].

¹¹ UCU. (2020). *UCU statement on academic freedom*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/academicfreedom>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

¹² Statement of Solidarity with Jawaharlal Nehru University, India – by the Professional Staff Congress, the City University of New York faculty and staff union (PSC-CUNY), online at: https://www.psc-cuny.org/sites/default/files/Statement%20of%20Solidarity%20with%20Jawaharlal%20Nehru%20University_linenumbers.pdf, last visited 06.03.2021; against this background, look at the developments in Sri Lanka: '*[A]cademic freedom is generally respected, but there are occasional reports of politicization in universities, and a lack of tolerance for dissenting views by both*

In order to create and devise strategies, generate resistance from the academic truth-seeking process, this article will engage in a qualitative methodology and employ case studies and text analysis: by doing so, the article will gain insights on academic resistance on a global scale, but will identify the areas in which the 'Tamil experience' can contribute to for a more resilient aggregation of intellectual action.

Let us travel back in time and location: one may remember Tamil academic Dr. Rajani Thiranagama, who operated in a narrow space of tolerance, yet echoing her dissent.¹³ Dr. Rajani Thiranagama was not only a Tamil academic and feminist, but more so a symbol of the academic activist that this article envisages: she interconnected her academic position with human rights activism, leading to being one of the founders of University Teachers for Human Rights at the University of Jaffna.¹⁴ Her activism was informed by academic freedom: Thiranagama was eventually killed by a Tamil Tiger cadre, as she became critical and vocal of the narrow nationalism, the flagrant violations of human rights and the brutal elimination of dissidents.¹⁵ Shortly before her violent death in September 1989, she wrote the following lines in a letter:

[I] have lost count of the days I don't know the day or the date I know that it's more than a month. You want events, numbers case histories? Not now, my mind is strangled. I know it's strange, but that is what I feel. That is what we live. Pain, agony and fear – always fear.¹⁶

Her struggle for human rights and truth was remarkable on every level, as it was a yardstick to aspire for any young, particularly Tamil academics across the disciplines who are interested in the struggles involved in the proper exercise of justice, equality and truth-seeking. Academia has provided the fertile ground to discuss and inquire beyond its borders. Researchers in different disciplines engaged extensively in the pursuit of knowledge in others' communities and jurisdictions. Nowadays, '[m]illions of researchers and students move across the globe in the quest for knowledge acquisition and production. academic by informed is Activism¹⁷ freedom. To this end, UNESCO affirms that

professors and students, particularly for academics who study issues related to the Tamil minority.' online at: Freedom House. (2018). *Freedom in the World 2018 - Sri Lanka*, [online]. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5ad85789a.html>, [accessed 13 June 2019].

¹³ Daily Mirror. (2018). *In memory of Rajani: the mother, the wife and the revolutionary Keeping memories alive*, [online]. Available at: <http://www.dailymirror.lk/article/In-memory-of-Rajani-the-mother-the-wife-and-the-revolutionary-Keeping-memories-alive-146484.html>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

¹⁴ PBS. (2002). *A lonely warrior for human rights*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/srilanka/profile.html> [accessed 05 September 2020]. See also: Thiranagama, S. (2011), *In my Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*, 1st ed., Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Island. (2009). *The Legacy of A Courageous Woman, NOTEBOOK OF A NOBODY*, [online]. Available from: <http://www.island.lk/2009/10/03/features1.html> [accessed 05 September 2020].

¹⁷ University World Views. (2018). *In defence of critical enquiry by academics and others* [online]. Available from: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20181025104558513> [accessed 05 September 2020].

[t]he right to education, teaching and research can only be fully enjoyed in an atmosphere of academic freedom and autonomy for institutions of higher education and that the open communication of findings, hypotheses and opinions lies at the very heart of higher education and provides the strongest guarantee of the accuracy and objectivity of scholarship and research.¹⁸

The desire of academics to collectivise themselves to social and political issues is frequently seen as being at odds with academic notions of objectivity. While advocating for activism by university staff means discarding positivistic notions of research, it does not mean discarding a commitment to rigorous research. As noted by Jones and others 'the dissemination of knowledge requires academic freedom, and this in turn demands the highest standard of integrity. The requirement of integrity is crucial whether the dissemination of knowledge is within one's own discipline or into the public realm more broadly. of views radical ¹⁹ democracy may justify activism by those who teach and research in universities, but can social movements embrace these institutional actors? Social movements 'are defined as networks of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in political or cultural conflicts, on the basis of shared collective identities.'²⁰ Traditional approaches to collective action and politicisation suggest that empowerment is an important catalyst in politicisation and continuation of collective political engagement.²¹

Academic freedom is needed to create agency, advocacy and stir changes brought about by social movements, with academic activism as a vehicle for those movements. To this end, this article will consider these questions in sequence: how can the Tamil academic devise strategies, stimulate change and accumulate sufficient native resistance to global inequalities? Flowing from this first question, how can the Tamil academic capitalise upon learnt experiences from Sri Lanka? In consequence, the article will pursue the last question: how can the Tamil academic make use of these learnt narratives which have shaped so many biographies in Sri Lanka/ diaspora communities and assist in a global fight for global justice, also assisting other academics of non-Tamil descent in similar situations of oppression? In the following, the empirical analysis from various case studies will help to situate the role of the Tamil academic in global academic coherency.

II. Increasing populist climate

Recent popular votes, elections and authoritarian shifts were a long process in the making that has, now, resulted in feasible governance of the right-wing. Whether it is the FPÖ in Austria, the Lega in Italy, the Fidesz in Hungary or the AfD in Germany, the rise of Bolsonaro in Brazil or

¹⁸ UNESCO. (1997). *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* [online]. Available from: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html [accessed 05 September 2020].

¹⁹ Jones, D.G., Galvin, K. & Woodhouse, D. (2000). Universities as Critic and Conscience of Society: the role of academic freedom. *NZ Universities Academic Audit Unit*, 6, pp. 1-27

²⁰ see also: Diani, M. (1992). The Concept of Social Movement, *The Sociological Review*, 40:1, pp. 1-25.

²¹ Gülsem Acar, Y. and Coskan, C. (2020). Academic activism and its impact on individual-level mobilization, sources of learning, and the future of academia in Turkey, *Journal of Community and Applied Psychology*, 30:4, pp. 388-404.

Trump in the USA, the emergence of Modi in India or the popularity of Duterte in the Philippines: the far-right has highlighted the threats posed by immigration and globalisation, the Unbehagen towards international organs that promote internationalism and capitalism. Viktor Orban, the most prominent figure of the far-right in Europe, holds that:

[E]urope's shift to the right has continued: it has become clear that this is not just a Central European process. Let us think back to the results of the German federal election – or the Austrian and Italian elections, for that matter.²²

In fact, he attacks the “open society” when he argues that:

[I]n today's open-society Europe there are no borders; European people can be readily replaced with immigrants; the family has been transformed into an optional, fluid form of cohabitation; the nation, national identity and national pride are seen as negative and obsolete notions; and the state no longer guarantees security in Europe. In fact, in liberal Europe being European means nothing at all: it has no direction, and it is simply form devoid of content.²³

In fact, nationalist movements recruit their base, not from the active resources but the politically inactive, the disenfranchised who feel (mostly not incorrectly) to have no voice in the political establishment.²⁴ Once people feel that they are not included in a political debate, they become conducive to slogans, symbols and sensations like those of Trump, Salvini, Le Pen, Wilders and others: meanwhile, facts and arguments appear irrelevant.²⁵ When debate is absent, but only authority and obedience exist, the only connecting force is state power. It is in this vein that the United Nations Committee against Racial Discrimination (CERD) issued a scathing statement in the climate of nationalist rise in the United States of America by using its early warning procedure:

[A]larmed by the racist demonstrations, with overtly racist slogans, chants and salutes by individuals belonging to groups of white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and the Ku Klux Klan, promoting white supremacy and inciting racial discrimination and hatred; (...) ²⁶

And, therefore:

²² The Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. (2018). *Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp*, [online]. Available from: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-29th-balvanyos-summer-open-university-and-student-camp>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ The Guardian *Neoliberalism – the ideology at the root of all our problems*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ CERD: Ninety-third session 31 July - 25 August 2017, Decision 1 (93) United States of America.

[C]alls upon the Government of the United States of America, including the high-level politicians and public officials, not only to unequivocally and unconditionally reject and condemn racist hate speech and racist crimes in Charlottesville and throughout the country, but also to actively contribute to the promotion of understanding, tolerance, and diversity between ethnic groups, and acknowledge their contribution to the history and diversity of the United States of America;²⁷

It is the former Senior Advisor to Donald Trump, Steve Bannon, who had masterminded the nationalist dimension in the election campaign of Trump who, now, strives for an alliance with the far-right in Europe.²⁸ This is no coincidence, and it is not merely a marriage of convenience, but it finds its justification in a deeply entrenched nationalist ideology. His plan to unite the far-right movement to encounter international law and institutions is shaped by his world view that only strong nation-states can face the threats caused by globalisation.²⁹ In particular, he said at the Party Congress of the Front National that:

[W]hat I've learned [visiting Europe] is that you're part of a worldwide movement that is bigger than France, bigger than Italy, bigger than Hungary, bigger than all of it. (...) And history is on our side. The tide of history is with us and will compel us to victory after victory after victory! (...) Let them call you racist, let them call you xenophobes, let them call you nativists. Wear it like a badge of honour. Because every day we get stronger and they get weaker. (...) God Bless America. And vive la France.³⁰

Academic enquiry is based on the premise to search for knowledge and, produce truth/s. By doing so, this enquiry is resistance in nature: it challenges existing interests dogmas in every aspect that touches upon a society: be it culture, politics, economy, religion. A prominent academic objector who challenged the norms and dogmas was Galileo Galilei, with the allegedly famous last words 'Eppure si muove' - yet, it moves.³¹ Today, there are many others like Galileo Galilei, facing repression from the superior forces for their divergent views: in Turkey, academics are facing removal from universities and even arrest. In countries like China, visiting scholars have been denounced as potential spies. In light of the novel Covid-19 pandemic, they have been evicted and chastised, reduced in their 'otherness'.³² In Egypt, opposition and hostile environment for academics had translated to the death of a young

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Monthly Review. (2017). *Neofascism in the White House*, [online]. Available from: <https://monthlyreview.org/2017/04/01/neofascism-in-the-white-house/>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ France24. (2018). *Wear 'racist' like a badge of honour, Bannon tells French far-right summit*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.france24.com/en/20180311-france-usa-bannon-le-pen-national-front-racist-badge-honour-populist-pep-talk-lille-trump>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

³¹ Baretta, G. (1757). *The Italian Library. Containing An Account of the Lives and Works of the Most Valuable Authors of Italy. With a Preface, Exhibiting The Changes of the Tuscan Language, from the barbarous Ages to the present Time*. London: Strand.

³² Brookings. (2020). *COVID-19, Africans' hardships in China, and the future of Africa-China relations*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/04/17/covid-19-africans-hardships-in-china-and-the-future-of-africa-china-relations/> [accessed 05 September 2020]; Al Jazeera. (2020). African nationals 'mistreated, evicted' in China over coronavirus [online]. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/african-students-mistreated-evicted-china-coronavirus-200412100315200.html> [accessed 05 September 2020].

Italian academic with the name of Giulio Regeni, as he had spent his time in Egypt for this fieldwork.³³ Repression is the tool of the defiant ruler in times of diminishing sovereignty. In India, a fascist government sends its rioters, as mentioned briefly earlier in this article, to the famed Jawarahal Nehru University, an academic institution with a long and vibrant history of inclusiveness and defying the societal odds, amid the controversies around the Citizenship Amendment Act.³⁴ Against this background, it is necessary to understand the following comment:

[T]he Hindutva project currently under way in India is a modern, indigenised version of fascism, not yet complete or able to reject electoral democracy, but with an alertness to the West's current fetishisation of Muslims as a worthy enemy and an ability to de-democratise and subvert democratic processes under the guise of democracy. Hindutva fascism's various actors are not united by any means: but they are both shrewd and patient, and have been far more effective in fusing violent othering with an acceptable facade of participation, modernisation and democracy than religious nationalists in neighbouring nations.³⁵

The violence that is involved extends to the present, with all socio-political consequences. The leaders of the Third World refer to their validation points of boundaries and nation, the increasing 'racialisation of criminality in North and South, and in the troubling rise of nationhood as a mooring for identity on both the left and the right. sovereign, the ruler, The³⁶ resorts to means that justify his appeals for national interest and national security.³⁷ Fascism and racism, to this end, are not solely a trend that is prevalent in the Global North but also in the Global South. Rose Parfitt writes against this background that: 'Its ideological 'anti-globalism' notwithstanding, the far-right of the twenty-first century is, undeniably and self-consciously, a global phenomenon. were visions imperial the that is fact the of matter The³⁸ and are global visions, coming along with competitions and new creations.³⁹ The competition induced radicalisation and also strengthened the ties between old fascist empires, but ultimately new ones- which allowed them to commonly question the 'dominant 'liberal world order.⁴⁰ The fact is that in light of rising competition, the academic has to engage in

³³ Al Jazeera. (2017). *Giulio Regeni murder: 'It's not yet the time to grieve*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/01/killed-giulio-regeni-170129080239822.html> [accessed 05 September 2020].

³⁴ The Conversation. (2020). *JNU violence: Indian university's radical history has long scared country's rulers*, [online]. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/jnu-violence-indian-universitys-radical-history-has-long-scared-countrys-rulers-129488> [accessed 05 September 2020].

³⁵ Banaji, S. (2018). Vigilante publics: orientalism, modernity and Hindutva fascism in India. *Javnost - The Public Journal of the European Institute for Communication and Culture*, 25:4, pp.333-350.

³⁶ Patel R. and McMichael, P. (2004). Third Worldism and the lineages of global fascism: the regrouping of the global South in the neoliberal era, *Third World Quarterly*, 25:1, pp. 231-254.

³⁷ see also: Amnesty International. (2014). *Silenced, Expelled, Imprisoned*, Amnesty International. [online]. Available from: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/8000/mde130152014en.pdf> , [accessed 05 September 2020].

³⁸ TWAIRL,. (2019). Series Introduction – Fascism and the International: The Global South, the Far-Right and the International Legal Order, [online]. Available from: <https://twairl.com/series-introduction-fascism-and-the-international-the-global-south-the-far-right-and-the-international-legal-order/> [accessed 05 September 2020].

³⁹ Salvati, G. (2016). Axis Empires. Toward a Global History of Fascist Imperialism. *Fascism*, 5, pp. 89-94.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

[r]elentless delivery of cutting-edge research and innovative research products. One important criterion of assessment for career progression and grant application success is 'impact'. Scholars are hence encouraged to not just engage with academic outlets and peers, but also to publish in public and social media and to seek engagement with policymakers. This has led to a blurring of the lines between professions.⁴¹

Academics are entering the area of arts, photography, media, policy et al. to influence the intellectual substratum. But is this enough to be potential catalysts? We need to place universities in the context of imperialism, its colonial role and the reduction of freedom of thought and marketplace of ideas when the neoliberal pacing dictates the values of those thoughts. Indeed, academics could be the generators of innovation, cross-fertilising different sectors to trigger change in society. But a need for critical self-reflection is advised. Universities have been for too long ivory towers, detached from struggles on the ground. As Anan Kattarh writes:

Indeed, the university is an ivory tower in this sense. It is one of the institutions of class society and is instrumental in keeping up class divisions. It helps to select a future elite of managers, politicians, law makers and enforcers, lawyers, civil servants, educators, doctors, engineers, journalists, writers and media producers etc.—members of society with influence and money, the ruling class. As such, the ivory tower is an integral part of a society which is, as a whole, structured by many 'exclusive' spaces, from large entities like nation states with their border politics to class-based spaces of difference where access is regulated more indirectly but not less strictly. In this sense, the ivory tower and its inhabitants, its staff, as well as those who pass through it, its students, are an integral part of society, not removed from it. The division between academics and 'the general public' is rather a division between upper and lower classes, and this division, of course, characterises society at large.⁴²

To this end, then, what is the role of the Tamil academic?

III. The role of the Tamil academic

Rev. Father Xavier Thani Nayagam is a valiant example of Tamil academic resistance.⁴³ Not only did he organise a network of fellow Tamil academics and forge alliances for the enhancement of the Tamil language, but he also aimed to stir up the resistance of Tamils against oppression which they met in the areas of culture, education, labour and religion.⁴⁴ Access to these areas

⁴¹ *Supra* note 17, University World News.

⁴² Isles of the Left. (2018). *University—the Ivory Tower is Part of Society, Not Removed from It* [online]. Available from: <https://www.islesoftheleft.org/university-the-ivory-tower-is-part-of-society-not-removed-from-it/> [accessed 05 September 2020].

⁴³ The Island. (2010). *Making Tamil a classical language*, [online]. Available from: <http://pdfs.island.lk/2010/06/21/p12.pdf>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

⁴⁴ To this end, read: Pfaffenberger, B. (1984). Fourth world colonialism, indigenous minorities and Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 16:1, pp. 15-22; Lecamwasam, N.O., (2015). United we stand, divided we fall': a case

was limited, as majoritarian politics marginalised minorities, in particular, Tamils, to attain higher education employment and discriminated against their cultural identity in the public spaces.⁴⁵ Eelam Tamils, by our own descriptive and prescriptive historiography, have lived for the duration of postcolonial rule in an inferior condition. We, as Eelam Tamils, have never been truly free; we wanted to challenge the prescriptive parameters in which Tamils were navigating. Prior to postcolonial rule, Tamils were subjugated to colonial rule.⁴⁶ Education, however, has always been the catalyst for social enhancement, empowerment and enrichment.⁴⁷ “Tamilness”, then, is

[I]linked to a de-territorialised diaspora that is cemented and constantly recreated through artefacts, popular culture, and a shared imagery. With this moral, transnational Tamil identity, there are different levels of identification and it will have different implications, according to the national, social, economic or cultural differences, and to individual spirit. There are Tamils who proudly identify with this transnational Tamilness and others for whom instead national allegiances prevail.⁴⁸

The repressive forms of cultural and linguistic oppression have only metamorphosed from coloniality to post-coloniality.⁴⁹ In the case of Sri Lanka, the external coloniser has been replaced by an internal coloniser.⁵⁰ Eelam Tamils have been subjugated to oppression for far too long. The processes and impacts of British counterinsurgency tactics, geo-politics of imperialism, and structures of neoliberalisation have gravely marked the postcolonial fate of the Tamils. The British colonial techniques of oppression through emergency laws, laws of identity and division and elitist policy-crafting slowly metamorphosed into the postcolonial tools used by the Sinhala, resulting in state-aided colonisation, militarisation, and constitutional means of legalising violence against a target population through Executive Presidency and Emergency Regulations.⁵¹ The British aided in enhancing the Sri Lankan state’s military capacities in pursuing a military solution to the Tamil national question.⁵² Colonialism and its effects were at the centre of critical analysis well before postcolonialism, and de-coloniality became the focus of attention. Against this background, Sobande writes:

study of Sri Lankan youth in citizenship development, *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 20:4, pp. 442-456; Ananthavinayagan, T.V. (2018). Dum Vivimus Vivamus. The Tamils in Sri Lanka: a Right to External Self-determination?, *Peace Human Rights Governance*, 2(1), pp., 23-50. UNCERD, Concluding observations on the combined tenth to seventeenth periodic reports of Sri Lanka, CERD/C/LKA/CO/10-17.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ratnapalan, M. (2017). Another British World? Tamils, Empire and Mobility, *Britain and the World*. 10:1. p. 74-87.

⁴⁷ Somalingam, T. (2012). Tamil Diaspora Schools—Ethnic-National Education in a Transnational Space, *Transnational Social Review, A Social Work Journal*, 2:2, pp.33-39.

⁴⁸ Buergio, G. (2016). When Interculturality faces a Diaspora. The Transnational Tamil Identity, *Encyclopaedia*, XX (44), pp. 106-128.

⁴⁹ Nithiyandam, V.N. (2002), The Transformation of Tamilian Nationalism in Colonial Sri Lanka: A Socioeconomic Analysis, *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, 15:1, pp. 95-96.

⁵⁰ see also: Kuruppu, LP (1983), Colonialism and social change in Sri Lanka: implications of socio-economic differentiation for strategies of national development', PhD thesis, University of Tasmania.

⁵¹ see also: Ananthavinayagan, T.V. (2019). *Sri Lanka, Human Rights and the United Nations. A Scrutiny into the International Human Rights Engagement with a Third World State*, Singapore: Springer.

⁵² The Guardian. (2014). *Britain allowed ex-SAS officers to train Sri Lankans as Tamil Tigers rebelled*, [online]. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jan/16/former-sas-officers-training-sri-lanka>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

[T]ensions thrown into relief by pairing the words ‘accidental’ and ‘activism’, mirror friction regarding perceptions of educational institutions as being politically passive, versus beliefs they are a hotbed of power and politics, which informs who teaches what, to whom, and with what intention. Activism in academia can, and does, take many different forms. It may be in the design of a curriculum foregrounding scholars and critical thinkers, often overlooked. It may also be in an individual’s self-presentation in academic spaces, or their choice to participate in strike action.⁵³

The most common justification for university academics to be engaged in public debate is the legislated ‘critic and conscience’ function of universities. But fulfilling the role of critic and conscience is not the same as being an activist in a social movement. Activism involves deliberately and consciously dissenting against the conditioned parameters, against hegemonic discourses. It is a role centred on engendering substantive democracy in all spheres of society: ‘This asserts that in a free society a university has a moral purpose, combining an intellectual purpose of free and open inquiry and a social purpose as a source of social criticism independent of political authority and economic power’.⁵⁴ As it is written by Gills and Gray:

[T]he world is changing. One world order is passing away, imploding, declining, while another, yet inchoate, is inexorably emerging, making its forces felt across the social landscape of the world. History stops for no one, and for no empire or ideology. It is certainly therefore no coincidence that the ‘spirit of 1968’, the spirit of rebellion and liberation, is renewing itself globally today in acts of resistance around the world. This is happening in the time of ‘the crisis of globalisation’, which is a crisis of globalised, financialised and oligarchic capitalism and, at the same time, a profound world-historical and civilisational crisis, in which the environmental limits of ‘limitless growth’ are fast approaching. A new mode of life and a new philosophy to propel it are now arguably matters of historical necessity and urgency. The paradox of neoliberal economic globalisation is indeed that it both weakens and simultaneously activates the social forces of resistance.⁵⁵

An academic must be one of the pillars of that larger civil society, even go that far to undergo a process of mediatisation under the public call for resistance and being part of a counter-hegemonic approach. The great Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci discussed the role of the academic with the society. He elaborated that intellectual guidance is sterile and pedantic unless it is embedded in the concerns and ‘worldview’ of the popular classes. He stated: ‘The popular element’, he writes, “‘feels” but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element “knows” but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel’.

⁵³ Sobande, F. (2018). Accidental Academic Activism – Intersectional And (Un)Intentional Feminist Resistance, 1:2 Journal of Applied Social Theory.

⁵⁴ Bridgman, T. (2007). Reconstituting Relevance: Exploring Possibilities for Management Educators' Critical Engagement with the Public. *Management Learning*. 38:4, pp. 425-439.

⁵⁵ Gills, B.K. & Gray, K. (2012). People Power in the Era of Global Crisis: rebellion, resistance, and liberation, *Third World Quarterly*, 33:2, pp.205-224.

To this end, creative political imagination can be seen as an ability to remodel world power, to conceptualise reality in new and original ways and to reformulate the structure of the public agent and the accepted form of governance. Consequently, creative imagination is an indispensable ingredient for a successful commitment in the public arena, and through it, intellectuals contribute to the democratic project with the creation in their specific fields and with their democratic sensibility and their imagination, thus stimulating their knowledge of a given area and also their democratic values. The engagement of academics with community issues depends upon their civic concern with justice and other matters of human importance and upon their democratic imagination, which filters new information about politics and the social world around them and increases their repertoire of strategies and their respective political judgment. Their specialised knowledge endorses their involvement in the public sphere as concerned citizens as well as their decisions to get implicated, and on what side, choosing the risk and uncertainty of the public arena over the security and safety of their professional fields.

IV. Conclusion

Academic activism and resistance is a vital currency in times of rising authoritarianism. Despite an inferior position, Tamils have lost a physical battle, but not the intellectual war. In fact, the Tamil diaspora community turned their anger of forced migration into a virtue by building and investing into the education of future generations, as Antony Jeevarathnam Mayuran holds: '(...) education is paramount. They see education as fundamental to efforts to rehabilitate and empower the refugee community, and believe that an educated community will be better prepared to rebuild a peaceful and prosperous society upon return to Sri Lanka.'⁵⁶

Education becomes a powerful tool and feeds their resilience. Eelam Tamils are striving for universal ideals of humanity and the material and human interlinkages between oppressed peoples and nations and the moral legitimacy of the struggle for equality, self-determination, and sovereignty. Martin Niemoeller, a German resistance fighter against the Nazi regime, coined once that:

[F]irst they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.⁵⁷

It is true that oppression and resistance are an outcome of complex processes. An oppressing force of sovereign people is taken into account the geopolitical, strategic, military or economic factors for the sustainability of oppressive tactics. The White Rose, a group of young students and academics during the Third Reich in Germany, brought into action what academic

⁵⁶ Forced Migration Review. (2017). The power of education in refugees 'lives: Sri Lankan refugees in India [online]. Available from: <https://www.fmreview.org/shelter/mayuran>, [accessed 05 September 2020].

⁵⁷ Gerlach, W. (2000). *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Jews*. Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press.

resistance is: disseminating the vigour and passion among the society. In their Third Leaflet, they famously wrote:

Many, perhaps most, of the readers of these leaflets do not see clearly how they can practice an effective opposition. They do not see any avenues open to them. We want to try to show them that everyone is in a position to contribute to the overthrow of this system. It is not possible through solitary withdrawal, in the manner of embittered hermits, to prepare the ground for the overturn of this "government" or bring about the revolution at the earliest possible moment. No, it can be done only by the cooperation of many convinced, energetic people - people who are agreed as to the means they must use to attain their goal. We have no great number of choices as to these means. The only one available is *passive resistance*. The meaning and the goal of passive resistance is to topple National Socialism, and in this struggle we must not recoil from any course, any action, whatever its nature.⁵⁸

The realms of the oppressed should be tied together by a conscious act of solidarity, so the wretched of the earth no longer shall face their respective destiny in isolation from the struggles and comradeship of the oppressed people and progressive forces of the world. In the end, Tamil academic resistance is about speaking truth to power but also empowering the global community.

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⁵⁸ The White Rose, Third Leaflet, [online]. Available from: http://www.whiterosesociety.org/WRS_pamphets_third.html, [accessed 05 September 2020].

Memory and resistance in the London Tamil diaspora: reflections from the 'Tamils of Lanka: a timeless heritage' exhibition



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Abstract

This paper explores memory work in the London Tamil diaspora ten years since the end of the war, reflecting on the 'Tamils of Lanka: a timeless heritage' exhibition, organised by London's Tamil Information Centre. Examining the exhibition narrative, content and format, I argue that building spaces of shared and co-produced knowledge can be considered an act of resistance: coming together to share stories and ideas, to remember atrocity and resilience, and to document history from the Tamil perspective. Engaging with the exhibition as a space to remember - and for some in the diaspora, to encounter - the political potential of Eelam, the exhibition acknowledges the importance of such initiatives in reclaiming historical narratives and actively shaping the emerging narrative of the community.

Key words

Tamil diaspora, memory, commemoration, state violence, resistance, exhibition, community, materiality

Introduction: remembering Mullivaikkal

Ten years can pass quickly. 18 May 2019 came around with a jarring suddenness. For the Tamil community in Sri Lanka/Ilankai and globally, it marked ten years spent mourning and reflecting, organising, agitating for justice, and shaping a new politics in the wake of the mass atrocity perpetrated at Mullivaikkal. More than ten years on, Tamil knowledge production and the sharing of stories, histories and memories are part of a wider process of Tamil socio-political engagement that acknowledges the importance of reclaiming historical narratives and actively shaping the emerging narrative of the community as one defined by resilience. A recent example – which is the focus of this paper and particular to London’s Tamil diaspora – is the ‘Tamils of Lanka: a timeless heritage’ exhibition, organised by London’s Tamil Information Centre (TIC) to mark the ten-year anniversary of Mullivaikkal. This paper aims to offer reflections on the memory work conducted through this exhibition, exploring how one small non-governmental organisation worked to prompt the wider Tamil community – a complex and heterogenous community – to resist the Sri Lankan state’s erasure of the violence committed against Tamils, and perhaps, to resist forgetting. Reflecting on this work – which I observed while assisting with the exhibition – I argue that this small section of the London Tamil community, brought together by TIC, constructed a space of shared and co-produced knowledge which constituted an act of resistance. Through the exhibition, TIC brought together thousands of diaspora Tamils – largely London-based but with international participation – to share stories and ideas, to remember atrocity, commend resilience, and to document and read history from a Tamil perspective.

The conflict memory authored and promoted by the Sri Lankan state is designed to deny atrocity, to avoid accountability for war crimes and genocidal violence, and to denigrate the Tamil separatist movement as brutal, illegitimate, and apolitical (Seoighe 2017, 2016, 2016b). States often have the power to author the dominant narrative of conflict and to write the script and historical record in their own favour. This is particularly the case in situations where war ends with “a crushing victory by one side” (Reiff 2016: 12), as was the case in Sri Lanka. Victory “confers the power unilaterally to shape the collective memory of the conflict” (Reiff 2016: 12). As Schramm (2011: 12) tells us, however, oppositional voices can counter official representations of the past, “working against the smooth unfolding of a singular narrative of triumph.” Memory work has the potential to reframe the Tamil community not only as victims of state violence but also as a community defined, in part, by resilience and resistance.

By focusing on the ‘Tamils of Lanka’ exhibition as a centralised and explicit process of memorialisation and meaning-making here, I aim to document and theorise memory work in this specific part of the London Tamil diaspora, at this specific time, as an effort to mobilise broader collective resistance to Sri Lankan state violence and erasure. What I offer here is some context for understanding London Tamil diaspora dynamics and a brief, non-comprehensive description of the content of the exhibition, accompanied by photographs. This is followed by some reflections on the relationship between memory and resistance, drawing on academic insights that shaped my engagement with this memory work. I focus, in the latter part of the article, on the section of the exhibition that depicted the existence of a ‘de facto’ Tamil state in

the Northeast of the country. Finally, I offer some reflections on the relationship between memory, resistance, and hope.

The Tamil Information Centre's memory work: a community-led exhibition

In London, the Tamil Information Centre (TIC) hosted an exhibition and programme of events on 18-19 May 2019 called 'The Tamils of Lanka: a Timeless Heritage.' TIC is a small, longstanding human rights organisation based in South London. The importance of the exhibition became even more poignant following the sudden death of the much-loved and respected executive director of TIC, Mr. V. Varadakumar, two months before the exhibition. Varadakumar was TIC's sole paid member of staff before his death, and he relied heavily on volunteers to produce human rights research, which was mobilised to inform struggles for peace and justice and to inform asylum policy and processes in the UK. TIC was founded for this purpose, and to support the local Tamil-speaking community, to promote Tamil history and culture, and to organise community events and conferences.⁵⁹ TIC's inclusive language of the 'Tamil-speaking people' indicates efforts made over the years to reach out to, support and work alongside plantation Tamils, Muslims, and other Tamil-speaking people in Sri Lanka and abroad. TIC advocates for the self-determination for the Tamil-speaking people in the Northeastern 'homeland' of Tamil Eelam and centres human rights and freedom from oppression as its core principles. In terms of the vexed issue of support for the armed separatist movement led by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), TIC's approach was nuanced, historically-informed and critical: the movement mobilised in response to the Sri Lankan state's discrimination and genocidal violence and enjoyed wide support among the Tamil-speaking people, but the human rights implications of the war ought not to be ignored (TIC 1986, 2017). Working quietly and behind the scenes, Varadakumar's willingness to engage with all parties to the complicated conflict brought admiration from some and condemnation and suspicion from others.

Varadakumar's legacy as a central figure of diaspora meaning-making was manifest in the drive to honour his legacy and vision for the 'Tamils of Lanka' exhibition that energised TIC volunteers and exhibition contributors.⁶⁰ The exhibition's organising team, coming together in grief and with a commitment to delivering a project in line with his vision, was made up of mostly second-generation Tamils, with support from the older generation whose involvement with TIC was more longstanding. The legacy of a respected elder can promote, galvanise and significantly shape memory work. At the exhibition, a sari hung from the ceiling, painted with A. Sivanandan's words: 'when memory dies, a people die.' Until his death in 2018, Sivanandan was an important figure in London's anti-racist political and research circles and the emeritus director of the Institute of Race Relations. As a Tamil intellectual, he was immensely important to young, politicised Tamils. His novel – *When Memory Dies* – and his wider academic work warned of the erasure and re-writing of history, by the state and by the community itself (Sivanandan 2010, 1997, 1984). This focus on information – careful research and the avoidance of distortions – speaks to one of TIC's core aims: to empower people and improve lives through access to knowledge. The organisation of the 'Tamils of Lanka' exhibition was pursued in line

⁵⁹ See the TIC website for more details of this organisation's work and principles: <https://ticonline.org/index.php>.

⁶⁰ For more information about Varadakumar see the obituaries written by Thiagarajah (2019) and Miller (2019).

with TIC's mission to "[d]isseminate information and works of creative imagination in order to increase public knowledge on Tamil history, culture and contemporary politics" and to do this through community activities, in a community setting. The exhibition was entirely volunteer-run: dozens of activists, researchers, artists and community groups contributed by creating the exhibition content and leading and participating in the days' events.

According to the TIC, the aims of the Tamils of Lanka exhibition were:

"amplifying political and social struggles and raising awareness of and advocating justice for the decades-long list of human rights abuses throughout the island...to create awareness of the coordinated and planned actions of the Sri Lankan state - and its global backers - intended to destroy the essential foundations of the Tamil nation: personal security, health and dignity of the Tamil people; their political and social institutions; their culture, language, religion, and economy" (TIC press release, 30 May 2019).

The exhibition's aim with this memory work was explicitly evidentiary. It aimed to document and educate wider society about the catalogue of persecutions suffered by Tamils and to contribute to ongoing accountability and justice struggles. The use of the phrase 'intended to destroy' echoes the legalistic language of genocide. The Tamil nation is immediately foregrounded as a vehicle of hope and aspiration: a place where the rights listed as under threat by Sri Lankan state violence would be protected. The documentation of Tamil histories and stories in the exhibition was memory work committed to resisting state erasure and destruction. It included original research by TIC volunteers, documentation and analysis work by the Jaffna-based Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research and the International Truth and Justice Project, memory projects such as Tamil Survival Stories, and artwork reflecting on the impact of the war.⁶¹ The exhibition was a deliberate shaping of Tamil memory as counter-memory: memory work resisting the dominant conflict narrative that the state has tried to impose – a narrative of war heroes and terrorists, of a 'humanitarian operation,' and peace achieved through war (Hyndman and Amarasingam 2014; Keen 2014; Kleinfeld 2003; Seoighe 2017). The conflict memory authored and promoted by the state is in the service of denying atrocity. Violence against the Tamil people is consistently embedded in state narratives of counter-terrorism and humanitarian action to make it seem legitimate, even necessary (Seoighe 2017).

I have been associated with TIC through research and activism since the end of the war. My relationship with Varadakumar was a formative one (Seoighe 2019). This piece, conceived as a reflection on the exhibition and its place in London Tamil diaspora memory work, is indebted to autoethnographical approaches and activist-scholarship. I write from my experience of time spent with the Tamil community, particularly those associated with TIC, taking part in human rights activism, research, and community solidarity. I work from a feminist ethics of care and centralise practices such as reflexivity and collaboration in my research (Lorde 2007 [1984];

61 See the web presence of these initiatives and organisations: <http://adayaalam.org/>; <https://itjpsl.com/>; <https://www.instagram.com/tamilssurvivalstories/>.

Ahmed 2017; Ellis 1999; Ellis and Bochner 2000). In line with broad definitions of activist-scholarship, I aim to produce “politically engaged scholarship which aims at furthering justice and equality,” attentive to power dynamics in knowledge production and aiming to “bridge the divide between theory and practice and researcher and the researched subject” (Lennox and Yildiz 2020). Drawing on the insights of Coleman (2011: 264), careful activist-scholarship seeks to “unsettle attempts to read resistance through available theories, categories, and scholarly problematics” and to embrace what she calls “a critical ethos—akin to what Foucault once called an “ethic of discomfort” (1994 [1979]). This work informs my positionality between solidarity and academic writing. Writing from a place of solidarity and care, but attentive to the varied and complex histories, politics and ideological positions of the Tamil diaspora, my activist-scholarship is shaped by the embrace of complexity, messiness and discomfort in coming to understand the justice struggle. The goal, for me, is to write “meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and might make a difference” and to write from an ethic of care (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 742). Behar’s claim that social science “that doesn’t break your heart just isn’t worth doing” (1996, cited in Ellis 1999: 675) seems particularly resonant in relation to research with a persecuted and displaced community.

Diaspora politics and the role of memory

It is not an easy thing, in the wake of mass atrocity, to maintain resilience and struggle for justice, or simply just to live on. The Tamil diaspora in London is a complex community of established and recently arrived migrants and refugees. The community’s politics and worldview are not homogenous or fixed, either in terms of local UK party politics or Tamil-specific issues such as support for separatism or the militant Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Many fled state-perpetrated ethnic persecution throughout the war and many recent arrivals survived the final period of catastrophic violence known as Mullivaikkal.⁶² Others in the diaspora watched the war unfold from a distance: the scale of the violence at Mullivaikkal mobilised a younger generation of Tamils who were born or spent their formative years outside of Sri Lanka, purportedly with little attachment to the country (Kandiah forthcoming). Mullivaikkal generated radically different political patterns in the diaspora. While Tamil diaspora politics were traditionally dominated by first-generation males, or those who were born in Sri Lanka and fled or migrated as adults, Mullivaikkal prompted a younger generation of women and men to stage resistance and take ownership of the Tamil liberation struggle by leading and organising marches, demonstrations and campaigns (Kandiah forthcoming; Rasaratnam 2011: 10; Amarasingam 2015).

For Tamils in Sri Lanka, the brutal realities of violence and discrimination brought high levels of politicisation (Daniel 1996). The 1983 anti-Tamil riots, for example, brought enormous community coherence in the face of persecution: Daniel (1996: 170) argues that Tamils all over the island became “brothers and sisters under the trauma of persecution, arrests, torture and death”. This violence – up to 3000 Tamils were killed and many more were injured, displaced and fled the country in ‘Black July’ – brought explicit and undeniable recognition of shared

⁶² As most readers will know, Mullivaikkal is the name of the area where Tamil civilians were trapped between the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Sri Lankan state forces in the final military offensive by the state forces, which killed an estimated 70,000 Tamils in a period of six months (see ITJP, nd.).

vulnerability associated with the simple fact of Tamil identity. Of course, that recognition did not automatically generate straightforward support for the armed struggle led by the LTTE, though the majority of the Tamil population supported or sympathised with the LTTE (Wilson 2000: 131). The LTTE's role in much of Tamil life in Sri Lanka was complicated and experienced in a range of ways. Thiranagama (2012) describes and problematises how the organisation fashioned itself as the core of Tamil identity and ingrained itself in every aspect of community life. Black July and other incidents of mass atrocity against Tamils, however, inevitably shaped Tamil politics in Sri Lanka and the internationalisation of the conflict. The violence of Mullivaikkal in 2009 had a significant impact on diaspora engagement with Sri Lanka, particularly in terms of organising for accountability for war crimes and a newly energised separatist and nationalist sentiment (Kandiah forthcoming; Rasaratnam 2011). While conceptions of (and contestations over) 'long-distance nationalism' amongst Tamils in London are not new (Fuglerud 1999; Brun and van Hear 2012; Vimalarajah and Cheran 2010; Wayland 2004), Mullivaikkal significantly altered the parameters, shape, modes and scale of Tamil diaspora engagement (Rasaratnam 2011). As memory practices in the diaspora evolve, there are new signs of a transformed conflict script – of persecution, Tamil nationhood and decolonial liberation struggle – and challenges to Sri Lankan and international narratives of 'terrorist' Tamils both in Sri Lanka and abroad (Nadarajah, 2018; Nadarajah and Sentas, 2013; Kandiah forthcoming).

Pradeep Jeganathan's (1999) notion of living in the 'shadow of violence' is an evocative description of the aftermath of mass atrocity, where life goes on with a new awareness of the state's potential for violence. This is the environment in which the Tamil community in Sri Lanka pursue accountability processes, shape a new politics and new forms of agency without the LTTE, live everyday lives and try to recover. Mullivaikkal made clear the devaluation of Tamil life in Sri Lanka; for many it was indisputable evidence of genocidal violence. For the Tamil diaspora, the direct violence is more distant, the memories largely second-hand, but those memories are also marked by grief and trauma, anger, and horror, often coupled with the guilt of the survivor, the saved, the refugee. As Orjuela (2019: 1-2) notes, "mourners across the globe...mourn not only their loved ones who fell victim to atrocities but often also their own loss of home, motherland and life as it used to be." The stories being told by Tamils in Sri Lanka and the diaspora since Mullivaikkal make clear that violence continues, though less explicit and transformed: the state is committed to suppressing and annihilating Tamil politics and cultural life and dominating Tamil land (Seoighe 2017; Adayaalam 2017; ITJP 2018). Documentation of atrocities at the end of the war and persisting into the present represent not only evidence for anticipated accountability processes but also a powerful historical archive. As lived realities become memories with the passing of time, the field of memory studies can offer some guidance on the value of this archive as 'counter-memory' and a form of resistance to state violence. In this short piece, to integrate some insights from memory studies into understandings of atrocity and diaspora politics, I focus on TIC's effort to drive the London Tamil community's investment in memorialisation and documentation as a form of resistance to Sri Lanka's conflict narrative.

The ‘Tamils of Lanka: a timeless heritage’ exhibition

Memory work is always selective: “all policies for conservation and memory, by selecting which artefacts and traces to preserve, conserve or commemorate, have an implicit will to forget” (Jelin 2003: 18). Memory workers are those who orchestrate memory practices, who try to generate a consistent narrative about the past and create rituals to embed that narrative. This can form the centre of community life and shape understandings of politics and history. The LTTE shaped the narrative of loss, grief and aspiration among Tamils for decades. The ‘Tamils of Lanka’ exhibition – as a collective, community activity informed by dozens of individuals and organisations – appeared to leave space for nuance, for the reconstruction of memory, and the multiplicity of histories and interpretations of the past. Perhaps this was due to TIC’s Varadakumar and his spectre in the organisational process. Varadakumar, from my observations of his practice, was an unusually inclusive thinker, rare in his ability to pass knowledge on without the weight of grievance that attaches itself to history. The volunteer organisers remembered conversations with Varadakumar as guiding principles – channelling his judgment, decisions were made based on his inclusive politics and his careful navigation of the traps of narrative and grievance.⁶³ The principles he embodied energised a new generation of memory makers. Before he died, the sections of the exhibition were defined in dialogue with invited academics, researchers, artists, activists and organisers, many of whom met monthly from mid-2018 to consider the objectives, principles and scope of the exhibition and to discuss progress. Before he died, Varadakumar bore the weight of coordinating the planning of the exhibition: identifying and communicating with contributors, exploring venue options and logistics, producing documents, and mobilising volunteers to assist with the project. The project was delivered by TIC volunteers after his death, making every effort to identify and pursue all the work he began.

⁶³ In a forthcoming article, I explore the narratives of the central organising team, in order to trace Varadakumar’s legacy in the process of organising the exhibition.



Fig. 1. Photo: TIC volunteer

On entering the exhibition space, the first section of the exhibition was dedicated to the ‘ancient history’ of Ilankai Tamils, from geology to development to cultural practices, informed by Dr. Siva Thiagarajah’s (2019) book which also gave the exhibition its name. This section also included an alternative history of Sri Lanka, centralising anti-caste violence, by political geographer Sinthujan Varatharajah.⁶⁴ The history of the conflict was told through political cartoons gathered and selected by volunteers from Tamil, English and Sinhalese media. A section was also dedicated to the plantation or ‘hill country’ Tamils, their distinct history and plight (fig. 1). Walking deeper into the hall, a section on Tamil political resistance was made up of content created by TIC volunteer researchers and contributions by research and activist organisations. The history of the emergence of the armed movement was carefully explored in a detailed and referenced display, created by TIC volunteers. This display sets a narrative of discrimination against Tamils, initial peaceful resistance and political engagement, which, in the face of state repression and violence, developed into an armed youth movement led by the LTTE. Another display presented academic research into second-generation Tamil diaspora protests and political mobilisation in response to the horrors of 2009. Journalist and film-maker Nalini Sivathasan prepared a display on the use of the Tamil drum – the parai – as a form of

⁶⁴ Varatharajah’s Instagram account beautifully explores Tamil and diaspora Tamil histories, lived experience and analysis: <https://www.instagram.com/varathas/?hl=en>.

resistance by Tamil refugees.⁶⁵ Research organisations Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research and PEARL created displays documenting ongoing accountability efforts and resistance to state violence: the ongoing protests by the families of the disappeared and the ongoing militarisation and displacement in traditionally Tamil areas (ACPR 2017, 2018; ACPR and PEARL 2017).



Fig. 2 Image: Tamil Survival Stories

From this section, walking past tables displaying a range of books from a personal collection related to Tamil culture, heritage and the conflict, visitors next found themselves in a section relating to the various consequences of the conflict. Memory projects of various type were presented here: Tamil Survival Stories, which gathers oral histories and beautiful photographs of diaspora Tamils, offering an insight into migratory histories, cultural transformation and political beliefs across continents, age, gender and experience (fig. 2). A volunteer research project into Tamil immigration to the UK culminated in images and stories of individuals in the London diaspora – including some public figures such as A. Sivanandan, complete with mock-ups of the British passports granted to them (fig. 3).

⁶⁵ Watch an associated film, 'Parai: the beat to freedom' here: <https://vimeo.com/321322460>.



Fig 3. Photo: Ahila Rupan

A series of documentaries created for the exhibition by TIC volunteers in Sri Lanka and London played on borrowed televisions. Some explored little-known histories of Tamil massacres perpetrated across the decades of war. Another, accompanied by an informative display, captured the experiences of conflict-affected women struggling to survive in the Northeast in the aftermath of the war. Other displays documented the destruction of sacred sites over the years of war, the displacement of Tamils, and the militarisation of the Northeast (PEARL and ACPR 2017), which Tamil activists and academics argue form part of a process of ‘Sinhalisation’ (Fernando 2013; Seoghe 2016, 2017). Researcher Phil Miller contributed a display of photographs and Foreign Office archival documents telling the story of a British mercenary company which worked for the Sri Lankan state in the 1980s, a story which intended to prompt visitors to think critically about the relationship between Britain and Sri Lanka. Miller’s book *‘Keenie Meenie: The British Mercenaries Who Got Away with War Crimes’* (2020) has since been released, and the trailer for the forthcoming documentary on the subject was played at the exhibition.



Fig. 4. Image: Tamil Guardian

In the corner of the big hall, a section was built as a reconstruction of the de facto state (fig. 4), discussed further below. The layout of the hall meant that visitors came to this section – documenting nascent Tamil nationhood – after exploring varied histories and stories of violence. The de facto state, in this historical narrative, was arrived upon by visitors as a space of hope and resistance to genocidal violence. This moment of reprieve, however – documenting the construction of a nascent state during the years of ceasefire in the early 2000s – channelled visitors towards the ‘Mullivaikkal room.’ This was a separate space in the exhibition dedicated to highlighting the massacre of tens of thousands of Tamils at the end of the war in 2009. In this room, dozens of original photographs were displayed, taken by a photographer⁶⁶ who experienced Mullivaikkal and captured the violence experienced by the Tamils at that time (fig. 5).

⁶⁶ The photographer will not be named here to preserve her anonymity.



Fig. 5. Image: TIC volunteer

Artistic responses to the horrors of this time were also displayed, alongside information of accountability projects such as the International Truth and Justice Project's 'Counting the Dead' initiative, which aims to arrive at a final number of deaths from that time – a contested and much-debated issue. Space was allocated for reconstructions of make-shift tents that people lived in, while being pushed towards the final scene of violence: the beach at Mullivaikkal (fig. 6). These displays were put together by Tamil refugee volunteers who experienced this period first-hand. To bring visitors closer to understanding the experience, a group of these volunteers cooked *kanji* – a basic rice dish that was one of the only sources of nutrition for Tamils at that time (fig. 7).



Fig 6. Image: TIC volunteer



Fig. 7. Image: TIC volunteer

In a separate room, artistic content was carefully curated alongside material objects and informative displays detailing aspects of Tamil culture, focusing on food and traditional modes of cooking, Tamil architecture and its historical development across the island, musical instruments, and traditional activities such as chariot-racing (fig. 8). Photographer Sabes Sugunasabesan curated the space and included some of his work, which addresses themes of diaspora engagement with the violence of the war (fig. 9). In an article advertising the exhibition (TIC 2019), Sugunasabesan is quoted: “Despite the distance, the war affected me profoundly. My work is about connecting with the people from this distance.”



Fig 8. Image: Sabes Sugunasabesan

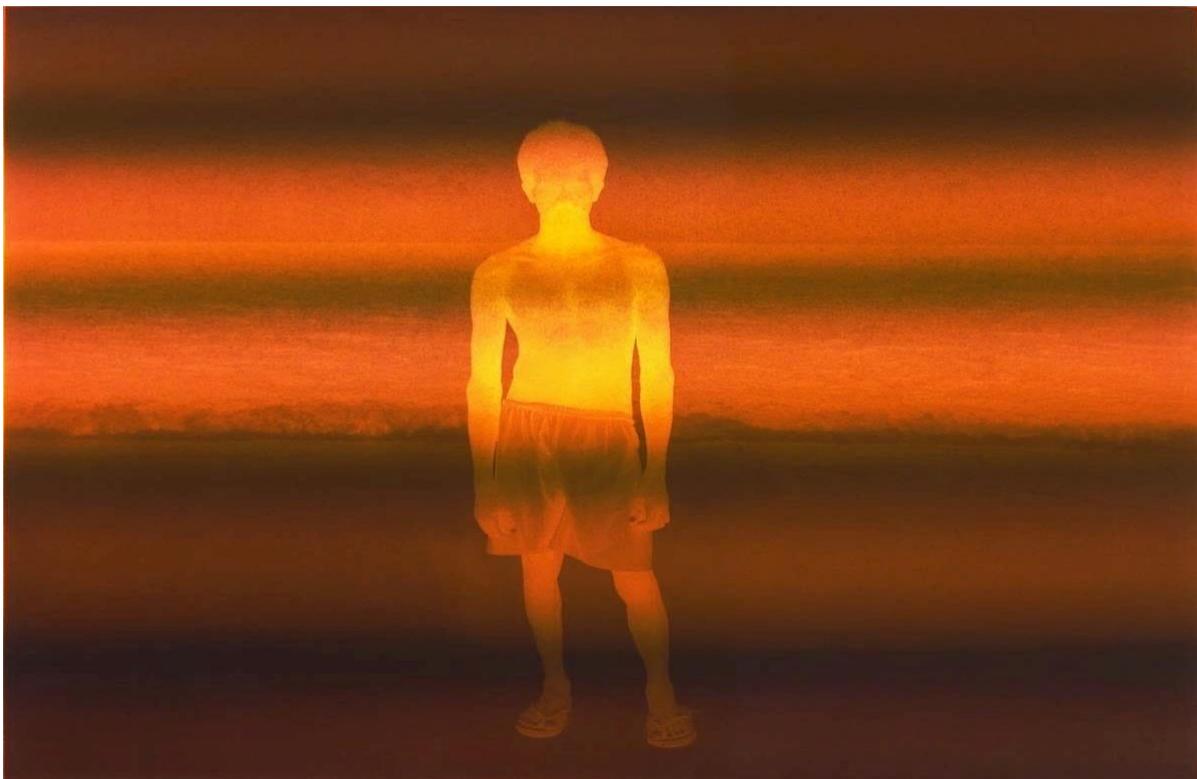


Fig. 9 Image: Sabes Sugunasabesan 'Last walk to the beach'

South Korean artist Yeni Kim, a student at Kingston University, close to the TIC offices, contributed beautiful illustrations, drawing on her interviews about memories of home with London-based Tamils (fig. 10). Kim also ran workshops with visitors about their memories of Sri Lanka as home. Back in the main hall, volunteers also ran art workshops with children, using collage and other creative methods to explore ideas of home, identity and understandings of the conflict. Some were taken home and others were hung on the wall to form part of the exhibition (fig. 11).



Fig. 10. Image: Yeni Kim



Fig 11: Image: Ahila Rupan

Memory and resistance: community memory work

From the academic literature on memory, it is clear that memory, commemoration and resistance have a close relationship. Studies of resistance have articulated the intricate and complex entanglements of power and resistance (Nadarajah and Sentas 2013; Baaz et al 2017) and, more recently and useful for our purposes here, resistance “at the crossroad of affects and emotions,” which have rarely been centralised in research, though they have been silently inherent to theories of resistance (Baaz et al 2017: 127; Scott 1990). Commemoration in its various forms – history-telling, public events and ceremonies, sites and symbols such as monuments, clothing and iconography – are often established and maintained as markers of national and other identities (Olick and Robbins 1998: 124). They can work to proffer strategies

of cohesion and struggle, and visions of nationhood: “remembered” events come to constitute a shared basis of peoplehood (Khalili 2007: 3). Collective memories, shaped and shared in ritual and commemorative practice, provide a context for identity and are powerful meaning-making tools for individuals and communities (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997: 18). Those practices, signs, discourses and material entities are bound up with emotions, which are often interrelated or intra-act with resistance (Baaz et al 2017: 128). Halbwachs (1992) describes collective memory as the active past that forms our identities, a shared memory that is collectively recalled, recognised, localised and reconstructed in a social process. Where political and social space is available, collective memory is formed as a dynamic social and psychological endeavour, a continuous conversation among affected individuals (Pennebaker and Banasik 1997: 4). This conversation is informed by both the needs and desires of the community in the present and by the identity they inhabit. Drawing on Deleuze (2000), Curti (2008: 107) understands memory as “not that of a past that ‘represent[s] something that has been, but something that is and that coexists with itself in the present.’” For Bellah et al (1985), identity is an active project constituted and maintained by social practices, based on narratives of the past that have been accepted by a community as its ‘constitutive narrative.’ I have argued elsewhere that the catastrophic events at Mullivaikkal have entered and informed the Tamil community’s constitutive narrative, both in Sri Lanka and the among the Tamil diaspora, producing new iterations of nationalism and identity (Seoighe 2017, 2016b). In line with the Foucauldian model of ‘counter-memory’ (Seoighe 2017), but also attuned to the links between emotion, affect and resistance, we can perhaps situate this exhibition as a cultural, political and social articulation of resistance which challenges the dominant official script set by the Sri Lankan state. Following Baaz et al (2017: 128), it seems important to acknowledge how “emotions make resistance possible, but also how emotions orient, embody, construct, or are the product of, resistance.”

For the Tamil community, political resistance has always been intimately linked to memorialisation, loss, and grief, particularly the commemoration of lost lives of resistance fighters, the LTTE’s *maaveerar* (Seoighe 2017; de Silva 1995; Natali 2008). The annual performance of rituals commemorating *Maaveerar Naal* (Great Heroes’ Day) on 27 November spread emotive nationalistic sentiment amongst the diaspora, creating a “transnational martial community” based on martyrdom (de Mel 2007: 18). And of course, many families in the diaspora are “maaveerar families” (Orjuela, 2019: 8), whose personal losses are collectively grieved. For the diaspora, commemorative activities enacting “performatives that keep the histories of oppression and martial success alive” have centered on the deaths of martyrs (de Mel 2007, p.18).

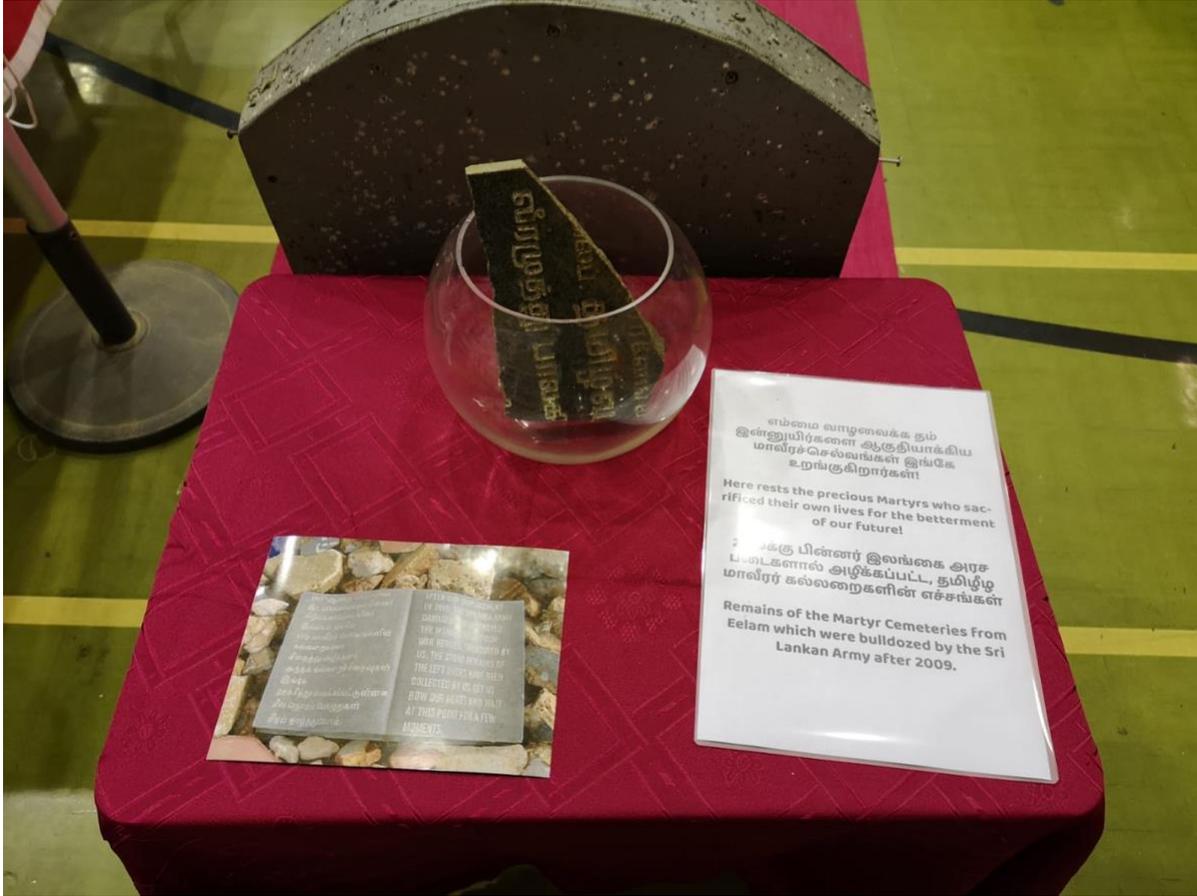


Fig. 12 Image: TIC volunteer

This practice was observed at the Tamils of Lanka exhibition, where a *maaveerar* gravestone was constructed in the centre of the section recreated to represent the de facto state (fig. 12). It symbolised the centrality of loss, death, and sacrifice to the project of the separate state, a powerful emotive encounter with the materiality of loss. A piece of gravestone from a *maaveerar* graveyard – one of many destroyed by the Sri Lankan state after the war (Seoighe 2015, 2016, 2017; Perera 2012) – was displayed as evidence of the state’s efforts to destroy not only Tamil lives but the Tamil nation and its constituent memory practices (fig. 13). This destruction forms an important part of claims of state-perpetrated genocide for many Tamils and “[r]eenacting the cemeteries in diasporic spaces can thus be seen as resistance against a still ongoing genocide” (Orjuela, 2019: 9). As “an engine of resistance,” the emotional bonds formed by grief, loss and collective mourning demonstrate here how emotions create communities of resistance (Baaz et al 2017: 129).



Fig. 13. Image: TIC volunteer

Tamils in the Northeast have long demonstrated that reclaiming the narrative of conflict and agitating for justice is bound up with mourning and memorialising the dead and holding on to rituals developed for this purpose. The ongoing collective memory practices of *maaveerar naal* have made that clear. Despite being denigrated and threatened as terrorists or terrorist sympathisers, and despite the destruction of graveyards, people in the Northeast of Sri Lanka and across the diaspora light candles in reconstructed spaces on this commemorative day (see Tamil Guardian 2018, 2019). The Sri Lankan state's destruction of places of mourning and memory is symbolic and highly emotive. The state knows that collective commemoration is dangerous, that it challenges its story, that it feeds justice struggles, creating communities of resistance that refuse to be quietened. Since the end of the war in 2009, this has been demonstrated by the state's concern with authoring the conflict – in discourse and physical constructions such as military installations and monuments that tell stories of heroism, victory, and nationalistic pride. These acts of 'Sinhalaisation' – depicted in the exhibition content – are perceived by the Tamil people of the Northeast, whose loved ones were killed, injured, displaced and exiled by the state forces, as a harmful, cruel communication of power (Seoighe 2016, 2017).

The Tamils of Lanka exhibition took the theme of resilience as its central theme – hoping to emphasise that victims are also survivors and resisters, and that the community's culture and heritage has survived and transformed despite its traumatic history of persecution. Held on the ten-year anniversary of Mullivaikkal, the exhibition was conceived as a collective effort to make sense of this particular moment in time by listening to the horrors of the past, taking the time to revisit painful images through photographs and installations, and to learn about continuing practices of torture, displacement, and militarisation (ITJP, 2018; Adayaalam 2017). It seems that resistance is tightly bound up with, and takes the shape of, documentation, memory work, and affective and cultural memory practices, including the commitment to collectively honouring the dead. The exhibition also, as mentioned above, platformed ongoing practices of resistance by Tamil communities in Sri Lanka, for example the ongoing protests of the Families of the Disappeared. The families are calling for information on, and the return of, their loved ones who are missing or forcibly disappeared as a result of the war. As Kate Cronin-Furman (2018, n.p.) argues, the "injunction against memory is...[an] insidious silencing." The state, through "harassment and occasional violence inflicted on the protesters" attempts to suppress these emotional appeals, "warning them that their perseverance is dangerous." By raising awareness of these protests and the state repression (and physical conditions) suffered by protestors, visitors were prompted to reflect on the resilience of those pursuing justice in the local context. The exhibition demonstrated the imperative of activist memory work as a tool to pursue accountability, a form of resistance against the silencing of justice claims.

Memories of Tamil Eelam: the de facto state

Ten years since Mullivaikkal, the exhibition aimed to prompt reflection on what impact the passing of time has not only on the memory of atrocity and the ongoing struggle for accountability, but also the memory of nascent Tamil statehood. As the movement for a separate state of Tamil Eelam – its rationale, its perceived necessity, and its army and

institutions – becomes a movement to be historicised, collective memory practices are likely to shape that history. Baaz et al (2017: 130) note that “enthusiasm and devotion for ‘alternative’ or ‘prefigurative’ social institutions” can be read as emotional investments in resistance, which can orient the direction of struggle. In the case of the ‘de facto state’ of Tamil Eelam, this emotional enthusiasm was teamed with martial determination and came into tentative existence for a short time. As a counter to the state narrative of Tamil terrorism, the TIC exhibition explicitly situated the struggle to establish the separate state of Tamil Eelam in a history of resistance and a narrative of decolonial liberation. The ‘de facto state’ section of the ‘Tamils of Lanka’ exhibition was dedicated to this history and displayed rare photographs and documentation contributed by volunteers, many of whom were previously members of the LTTE. Photographs and text displays detailed the range and sophistication of state-like institutions – the courts, the police, the various welfare institutions and, of course, the expansive military machinery. Visitors were prompted, in a non-explicit way, to reflect on and acknowledge the destruction of statehood as a discrete political and emotional loss. As articulated in a TIC press release after the exhibition:

“The purpose of this section was to establish the truth that the war that ended in 2009 was not a war against ‘terrorism’, but a war against Tamil civilians and, above all, a war to destroy a fully functioning Tamil nation. This was presented not as a nostalgic relic but to preserve histories and emotions that are at risk of being forgotten and erased” (TIC press release, 30 May 2019).

As Malathy (2013) notes, the Tamil population had, and still has, an intricate relationship with the LTTE. Most people would have known a family member, friend or neighbour who was part of the movement, and it staffed the various governance structures of the de facto state (Malathy 2013). Despite its complex and violent history of power-building – described by some as “a homogenising, constraining and oppressive process” (Jeganathan and Ismail 1995) – the LTTE was largely recognised by the community as resistance fighters, the Tamil community’s “undisciplined army” (cited in Seoighe 2017) in a war against a genocidal Sri Lankan state. Recruitment to the LTTE often rose significantly in response to incidents of state violence perpetrated against Tamils (Richards 2014). Particularly in the latter years of war, the LTTE also insisted that every household give a son or daughter to the struggle (Orjuela, 2019: 8; Malathy, 2012; UTHR-J, 2007: 17:2; Richards, 2014: 32). Joining the movement was for most a means of avenging the deaths of loved ones and working towards the goal of a separate state, where Tamils could be liberated from state violence. That goal reached an unimaginable and perhaps internationally underacknowledged level of success in the de facto state (Malathy 2013).

Parasram’s (2012: 905) discussion of the efforts by the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state to territorialise Tamil Eelam – “a process of ‘writing space’ that inscribes socio-political meaning to physical geography” – argues for a postcolonial reading of this process. Relying on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of ‘de/re territorialisation,’ he persuasively argues for a reading of territory as being in a perpetual state of ‘becoming’ rather than as something static, particularly in relation to postcolonial liberation and nation-building projects. This helps us to acknowledge not only the real and lived potential of the project of Tamil Eelam, the interplay of power and

resistance and complex emotional investments in the achievement or defeat of the project, but also how the particular geopolitics and discourses of the 'war on terror' and legalistic interpretations of state-based sovereignty rendered Tamil Eelam 'illegitimate' and secured the nation for the Sri Lanka state (Parasram, 2012). For our purposes here, the exhibition hoped to create an embodied, affective interaction with the 'becoming' of Tamil Eelam – its temporary existence as a real possibility, a hopeful and secure future – in order to shape London Tamils' memories of conflict.

For the diaspora, remembering the de facto state has the potential to evoke powerful feelings of longing, loss, and disappointment for what might have been, where the community's emotional relationship to the 'homeland' is defined by exile. Orjuela (2019: 9) understands such material reconstructions of spaces of Tamil national symbolism as "[a]ttempts to materially connect homeland and new country through memorialization." Feelings of deracination, forced displacement from the homeland and memories (whether personal or collective) of statehood inform a longing for Tamil Eelam in the present, felt and presented by the TIC volunteers. Spinoza's (1996) description of longing is useful here:

"a desire, or appetite, to possess something which is encouraged by the memory of that thing, and at the same time restrained by the memory of other things which exclude the existence of the thing wanted" (cited in Curti 2008: 114).

A sense of longing for the de facto state might arise from the co-implication of memory and emotion in relation to space, place, and identity that Curti (2008) describes: "memory and emotion, their forces and trans-formations, cannot be treated as particular, disjointed drives or events...one is always a symptom of the other" (Curti 2008: 116). Drawing on Till (2005), he notes that memory is a political project that contributes to the construction and transformation of place, a project which is always sustained by emotion. Further, emotions are embodied and lived in an everyday sense, with and through others: identities are formed, and collective selves shaped through the mutually reflexive nature of embodied emotions and memories (Curti, 2008: 107). At the 'Tamils of Lanka' exhibition, visitors collectively experienced the de facto state, in a condensed but intensely informative and visual way. Surrounded by dozens of images of structures, institutions, LTTE leaders and cadres, with the grave of a *maaveerar* and the Tamil Eelam flag at the centre of the small space, visitors were transported to a moment in time, to a state that was felt to exist, even for a "fleeting moment" (Malathy 2013). Orjuela (2019: 9), in her research on the materiality of Tamil diaspora memorialisation, noted that physical sites such as this one "could be seen as an (imagined and partial) answer to the desperation of a people that had lost their struggle for a separate state, been dispersed across the globe and lacked access to a grave to mourn their loved ones." The practice of remembering through rituals and national symbols developed by the LTTE, might heal "the sores of their unfulfilled longings" and allow for a feeling of belonging to the Tamil nation (Bruland, 2015: 93–94, cited in Orjuela, 2019: 9). For second generation Tamils, who did not experience life in the de facto state, the material dimensions of the space perhaps represented a way of forging connections with this history, and between those with lived experience of the Tamil nation in its nascent state and those without.

In line with Orjuela's findings in relation to Tamil diaspora memorialisation, the violence of the LTTE in pursuit of its national goals was largely absent from the histories presented in the exhibition:

“The narrative of these events highlights the self-less sacrifice of the martyrs and brave struggle of the Tamils, while assigning blame to the Sri Lankan state perpetrating the killings and the international community which failed – and continues to fail – the Tamil people. There is, not unexpectedly, a complete silence about the numerous victims – many of them Tamil – of LTTE violence” (Orjuela, 2019: 8).

In a forthcoming article, I explore the narratives of the exhibition organisers, engaging (among other topics) with the dialogues that informed this decision not to include details of LTTE violence. It is too complicated a picture to summarise here but, briefly, volunteers were divided on the issue. Many volunteers felt ill-equipped and unwilling to contend with the contestation that would inevitably come, but uncomfortable with the selectivity of the narrative. Others were insistent that such violence should not be discussed, and that effective resistance should only emphasise the violence inflicted by the genocidal state. The exhibition did, however, open dynamic and ongoing conversations among TIC volunteers about the need to explore and acknowledge the complex, messy history of the Tamil struggle, including discussions about LTTE violence and its narrativisation.⁶⁷ As an example of memory work, the exhibition has worked in various ways to prompt more honest and complex conversations among the organisers, the visitors, and the wider Tamil community.

Conclusion: memory, resistance and hope

Reflecting on the achievements of the exhibition, we could ask whether memory, while certainly sustaining resistance and creating communities bound together emotionally, can also lead us towards hope. The Tamil community in Sri Lanka are still suffering conditions of marginalisation, dispossession, and repression in the wake of explicit violence. The possibility of accountability and justice for war crimes perpetrated at Mullivaikkal and throughout the war seems as distant as ever. But there are elements of hope. Resistance was newly articulated through memories expressed and brought to life in the work exhibited at the ‘Tamil of Lanka’ exhibition. The various ways in which Tamils resist and have historically resisted state violence were displayed and explored, offering new ways of conceptualising and remembering identity, persecution, survival, and statehood. It represented an active, intergenerational community space, where exhibition content and conversations forged connections between those with very diverse experiences of conflict, atrocity, and exile. The exhibition itself, led by young diaspora Tamils, can be considered as an act of resistance – an effort to resist erasure and the rewriting of history, and an effort to channel emotionally-laden memories into resilience and collectivity, rather than narratives of suffering and victimisation (Seoighe 2016). TIC's deceased

⁶⁷ In forthcoming work, I explore how the exhibition – and Varadakumar's legacy – prompted discussions within this London Tamil diaspora community on how the LTTE should be remembered, including conversations about the relationship between the LTTE, notions of nationhood and representations of nationhood, including the Eelam flag. The process of the exhibition prompted conversations that are now being pursued in popular, dynamic discussion groups.

executive director Varadakumar – whose vision shaped the exhibition – was concerned with educating the second and third generation of diaspora Tamils; implicit in this initiative was a plea to the wider diaspora community not to forget. This exhibition can be understood as one small organisation’s effort to undertake memory work, within its specific context, as a means of generating wider community mobilisation towards justice. It seems that a new politics is taking shape, and memory work as a form of resistance is at the centre of that politics.

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The place of Tamil in the Linguistic Landscape of Singapore's Little India



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the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

As an official mother tongue and a heritage language, Tamil occupies a special place in the linguistic landscape (LL) of Singapore's Little India. Using Landry and Bourhis' (1997) LL approach, a LL refers to the geographical territory of a language community marked by languages on public and commercial signs. Resistance against the use of this minority language (Tamil) by the wider Singapore community is evident in its low visibility in the nation's wider LL. In contrast, Tamil is featured most prominently in Singapore's 'Indian' ethnic enclave and tourist attraction of Little India – where 'Indian' used in this paper refers to the 'Indian' component of the Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others ethnic policy of Singapore. This article aims to examine how the Singaporean Tamil identity is preserved and re-created through Tamil language representation in Little India's LL.

A two-pronged methodology was used to study the representation of the Tamil language - a LL analysis of a 272-image corpus of shop signs in Little India, and a nexus analysis conducted through a scene survey of 63 ethnically 'Indian' youth participants. While the LL analysis quantitatively evaluates translated and transliterated Tamil on shop signs (signage at shop entrances) the scene survey qualitatively investigates the relationship of the 'Indian' youth with the Tamil language and their ideologies surrounding Tamil identity in Little India.

The findings demonstrate how the Tamil identity in Singapore is preserved through Tamil translations and re-created through practices of transliteration of Tamil on signs. Firstly, the instrumental use of Tamil translations in a space characterised by the 'Indian' ethnicity perpetuates the preservation of the 'Indian' identity as exclusively Tamil. Secondly, the symbolic use of the Tamil script and English transliterations of Tamil on signs reveal a fetishization of the Tamil identity in the tourist context of Little India. Consequentially, this article posits that the Tamil language is manipulated to preserve a specific Singaporean Tamil identity, and reimagine an authentic brand identity of Tamil that appeals to the tourist gaze, thus, resisting the representation of the evolving Tamil identity in Singapore.

Keywords

Tamil, Singapore, Linguistic Landscape, Nexus Analysis, shop signs, identity

Introduction

Originating from the seminal work of Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23), the linguistic landscape (LL) refers to 'the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs'. The ethnolinguistic vitality of a language is a socio-structural factor. This factor depends on the LL for the survivability and growth of the language and identity of the ethnolinguistic group in multilingual settings (Landry & Bourhis 1997). The low visibility of the Tamil language in the wider LL of Singapore's public spaces, mark its weakened ethnolinguistic vitality (Shang & Guo 2017; Tang 2018). This is an indication of resistance against the Tamil language in Singapore. In contrast, less resistance toward the language is reflected in the high visibility of Tamil signs concentrated in the ethnic enclave of Little India.

Singapore's multilingual landscape forms an arena for contested language use and representation among the four official languages: English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil. Little India is branded as an 'Indian' ethnic neighbourhood and a tourist attraction where the 'Indian' identity is celebrated and represented by an overwhelming use of the Tamil language (see section 2.2.2). The commercial site is painted as a shopping district where one can purchase affordable goods and services such as food, textiles and jewellery that are traditionally 'Indian'. While almost all Hindus are 'Indians' and though not all 'Indians' are Hindu, Little India is the main 'Indian' space celebrating Hindu festivities such as the festival of lights, Deepavali. Unlike foreign enclaves such as Little Burma and Little Thailand which formed naturally without intervention from the authorities, Little India is an officially assigned ethnic enclave which represents the minority ethnic Tamil population in Singapore (see section 2.2.2). Hence, Little India has a special place for Tamil where one would expect the language to reflect the area's vibrant 'Indian' heritage.

In light of Little India representing the Tamil ethnicity, a few questions on the representation of Tamil as a minority language are in order. How is the Singaporean Tamil identity represented and resisted in Little India's LL? In what ways would the presentation of Tamil on shop signs mark Little India as 'Indian'? How does the representation of the Tamil language in Little India's LL preserve and re-create the Tamil identity in Singapore? The research aims of this study can thus be constructed as seen below:

- 1) To examine the representation of Tamil on shop signs through translation and transliteration practices.
- 2) To analyse how Tamil identity is preserved and recreated through Tamil language representation.

Through LL analysis, this paper will detail how the Tamil identity is represented through the Tamil language in Little India. This study will also use nexus analysis to offer an ethnographic perspective of LL through the responses of research participants to a scene survey that will uncover the relationship of the 'Indian' youth with the Tamil language and identity in the context of little India.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Global LL Research on Tourist Contexts

Ample research on the LL of tourism have brought to surface the commodification of minority languages, which are represented symbolically, to index the authenticity of a space for tourists, which turn these dynamic spaces into stabilised, distinct places (Pietikäinen, et al. 2011; Moriarty 2014; Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow 2014). As distinguished by De Certeau (1984) and Higgins (2017), *places* refer to the fixed and orderly configurations of physical elements, while *spaces* constitutes an unstable and changing intersection of activities. While the LL frames fluid spaces as static places, performing an authenticity that is shaped by national ideologies and the tourist gaze, there lies a tension between the economic need to capitalise on languages by accessing the global market for tourism and the need to claim ‘authenticity, ownership and legitimacy’ of these languages (Heller, Jaworski & Thurlow 2014, p. 426). The branding and differentiation of tourist attractions strategically convert cultural and linguistic capital into symbolic and economic capital (Heller, Pujolar & Duchêne 2014). Thereby, obscuring issues of language and evolving identity. An underlying factor to such linguistic commodification is the linguistic fetishization of languages which are used for their symbolic rather than communicative value, which is based on the cultural stereotype of the ethnic group’s associated language (Kelly-Holmes 2000, 2014). Following the research trend of commodified and fetishized languages in the tourist context, this study aims to highlight how the LL of Little India positions Tamil in a similar light.

2.2 Singapore’s Linguistic Landscape

b2.2.1 Singapore’s Linguistic Tension

Significant research reflects linguistic tensions in Singapore’s LL. Due to the national language policy of four official languages, linguistic tensions arise with difficulties in representing these languages equally (Tan 2011, 2014). While English is most frequently spoken at home by 36.9% of the total population, Mandarin is the second most frequent at 34.9%, leaving Malay at 10.7% and Tamil at 3.3% of the total population (Department of Statistics Singapore 2019). The state’s conflicting interests of internationalising the LL through the predominant use of English – which also serves as a lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication – and the need for mother tongue representation to preserve local cultural identities, also presents an instability in Singapore’s LL (Tang 2018).

2.2.2 Essentialism between Language and Ethnic Identity

The state’s essentialising attitude which associates English with neutrality – as an inter-ethnic lingua franca – and the mother tongues with cultural heritage – aiding intra-ethnic communication – is testament to the compartmentalisation of languages in Singapore’s LL (Tan, 2014; Rappa & Wee, 2006). Such proclivity to assign languages based on ethnic identities rests on the state’s interest in racial harmony despite the evolving demographic blurring ethnic and linguistic lines. Research trends highlight the homogenising effect of the state’s bilingual policy and Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) ethnic policy on the ‘Indian’ ethnic group and

ethnolinguistic communities throughout Singapore's history (Mani 2006; Jain & Wee 2019; PuruShotam 2016). The CMIO model; developed for over 50 years since Singapore's independence to institutionalise and make common-sense of Singapore's multiracial and multi-ethnic character, has reinforced the 'I' component of the model – standing for 'Indian' – as a common term to refer to the average Singaporean 'Indian' born and raised in Singapore as 'South' Indian, Tamil speaking, Hindu and middle class; a bias that is based on the core clientele of Singapore's Little India (PuruShotam 2016). However, contemporary Singapore has since embraced immigrants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and a global diaspora that previously constituted British India – a process which has markedly reconfigured the 'Indian' label which is not reflected in the CMIO model that continues to reproduce the Singaporean historical context of being and acting 'Indian' (PuruShotam 2016). This paper uses the term 'Indian' to refer to residents in Singapore who have been classified under the CMIO model, highlighting the current diversity of the 'I' component, despite its limited definition in the model.

In reality, the 'Indian' ethnic group is the most linguistically diverse (Mani & Gopinathan 1983; Jain & Wee 2019), with 45.7% literate in English and Tamil only, 14% in English and Malay only and 23.8% in other languages (Department of Statistics Singapore 2019), including non-Tamil Indian languages (NTIL) such as Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi and Urdu (Jain & Wee 2019). Tan (2011, 2014) pointed out that a significant number of 'Indians' in Singapore come from non-Tamil areas, illustrating that a Tamil signboard in Little India targeted at South Asian foreign workers assumes that all workers frequenting the area understand Tamil. Such reductive categorisation of major ethnic groups to a singular language erases intra-ethnic linguistic diversity, which Rappa and Wee (2006) identify as impeding the state's interest in uniting different ethnicities for nation-building. Hence, while the LL is strategically used to influence public acceptance of the state's mother tongue language policies, it conceals linguistic complexities of Singapore's ethnolinguistic population (Tan 2011, 2014).

The imposition of the Tamil mother tongue onto the 'Indian' ethnic group has always proved problematic and irrelevant to non-Tamil Indians. The 'Indian' ethnic group constitutes 9.0% of the total population in Singapore and numerically, Tamil language users dominate the 'Indian' community, followed by Malayalees and Punjabis – with 51.1% of 'Indians' in Singapore literate in Tamil while 23.8% are literate in NTIL (Mani 2006; Department of Statistics Singapore 2019). Without shared linguistic commonalities between South Indian Dravidian languages and North Indian Indo-European languages (Saravanan 1993), Tamil did not play a role as an intra-ethnic lingua franca (Mani & Gopinathan 1983). Despite the hierarchy of Tamil over NTIL, English still functions as the intra-ethnic lingua franca among Tamil and Non-Tamil 'Indians' (Mani & Gopinathan 1983). Thus, assigning Tamil as the language of the 'Indian' majority not only diminishes intra-ethnic diversity, but also marginalises NTIL and other Indian languages that have not been granted the NTIL status.

2.3 Tamil in Singapore's Linguistic Landscape

2.3.1 Low visibility of Tamil

According to previous research on Singapore's LL, Tamil occupies a very limited space in the local LL despite its status as an official language (Shang & Guo 2017; Tang 2018). Tamil featured on 3.6% of shop signs in neighbourhood shopping centres in other parts of Singapore located outside the Little India district (Shang & Zhao 2017; Shang & Guo 2017). Moreover, the font sizes of Tamil on shop signs are relatively small and Tamil occupies the final position in the four-language formulaic sign in MRT stations (Shang & Guo, 2017; Tang, 2018). Tan (2011, 2014) noted the replacement of Tamil with Japanese on white-on-brown signboards by the Singapore Tourism Board and white-on-green signboards by National Parks Board. Additionally, the mixed treatment of Tamil names on signs are evident, where some are translated and others transliterated from English and Malay (Tan 2014). While official signs display Tamil most frequently, corporations and private companies rarely display them (Tang 2018). Such inconsistent representation of Tamil, or rather, the lack thereof, reflects its weakening position in Singapore's LL (Tan 2011).

2.3.2 Reasons for Lack of Tamil Representation

The main reasons for the lack of Tamil representation are twofold – language shift and language maintenance. Research trends show a decline in Tamil language use among Singaporeans (Mani & Gopinathan 1983). According to the General Household Survey 2015, there is an increasing shift toward English among the Tamil ethnic group as English is the most frequently spoken language in 'Indian' households (Department of Statistics Singapore 2019). This language shift to English is prevalent among Tamils who face social and economic pressures to assimilate to an English dominant society and end up dissociating their ethnic identity from their linguistic identity (Saravanan 1993). Though Tamil is a highly diglossic language with a high variety of literary Tamil and low variety of spoken Tamil (Schiffman, 2003), Vaish (2007) classifies Singapore's Tamil-English bilingual community as non-diglossic, where the language of power (English) obscures the different Tamil varieties and displaces Tamil. Additionally, Schiffman (2003) attributes this language shift to the lack of language maintenance caused by the state's hyperpuristic language planning, where the high variety of hyperarchaic literary Tamil is promoted while shunning the low variety of colloquial Tamil. Though colloquial Tamil is a more direct translation of English, the literary variety prescriptively taught as 'pure' Tamil lacks communicative value (Schiffman 2003; Mani & Gopinathan 1983; Saravanan 1993). Hence, such hyperpuristic language planning only serves to widen the gap between prescriptivism and actual use, which resultantly builds a resistance toward Tamil language usage among Tamil youth in Singapore.

2.3.3 High visibility of Tamil in Little India

Little India is set up as a tourist attraction where its LL has been manipulated to enhance the 'Indian' ethnic identity by accentuating the symbolic function of Tamil. This has turned the LL into a site of ethnic commodification and linguistic instrumentalism which reflects the state's language ideologies (Hult & Kelly-Holmes 2019; Tan 2014). The geographical space of Little

India is an area where the 'Indian' of the CMIO paradigm is markedly visible. It is a powerful symbol for the 'Indian' in the Singaporean model of multiracialism where 'Indian' makes up one of the nation's major 'races' (PuruShotam 2016). Correspondingly, Little India exemplifies the imposition of the Tamil mother tongue onto the 'Indian' ethnic group through the high visibility of Tamil in the area. Since the 1990s, the influx of Tamil and Bengali speaking foreign workers who immigrate from Bangladesh and present-day Indian states such as Tamil Nadu and Bengal, reflect the shifting demographics of Little India (PuruShotam 2016). Tamil's dual role as a local minority language and a less internationalised language globally marks it as a more distinctive reminder of location, leading to its ethnically commodified usage as a token of authenticity (Tan 2011, 2014). Hence, the unique position of Tamil as a heritage and minority language renders it commodifiable only in cultural contexts where the 'Indian' identity narrative is reimagined to market the context as authentic.

Accordingly, this study will address the research gap on the ideological struggle between language, identity and culture in the context of Singapore's Little India through a linguistic analysis of the Tamil language on shop signs and an ethnographic analysis on the 'Indian' youth's reactions to Tamil representation in Little India. In line with the tourist discourse circulating in Little India, this study anticipates the preservation of the Tamil identity through the heightened representation of Tamil language in the LL and the renovation of the Tamil identity through linguistic fetishization of the language.

LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE METHODOLOGY AND NEXUS ANALYSIS

3.1 Linguistic Landscape Analysis

Landry and Bourhis (1997) define the LL as a 'marker of geographical territory occupied by distinctive language communities within multilingual settings' (p. 24). LL research, which principally relies on the photography of signage, have been developed to analyse the positions of minority languages in multilingual settings (Cenoz & Gorter 2006; Pietikäinen et al. 2011). Landry and Bourhis' (1997) concept of the dualistic informational and symbolic functions of LL informs this study on the representation of Tamil translations and transliterations. As previously mentioned, the state identifies language as the most salient part of ethnic identity. Accordingly, the inclusion of a heritage language in an ethnic enclave's LL accords the language symbolic value and status which builds upon the positive social identity of the language group (Landry & Bourhis 1997).

3.1.1 Place Semiotic Analysis

Drawing upon Scollon and Scollon's (2003) work on visual semiotics, this study analyses languages on shop signs, through the visual representation of the interaction order on signs, and the influence of the placement of visual symbols on the interpretation of signs. The interaction order on signs is evident in the code preferences on signs. As an extension of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) information value systems, Scollon and Scollon's (2003) code preference system analyses how the placement of linguistic codes signifies the social relationships between languages in the LL. In the case of multiple language codes within a shop sign, the preferred code is on the top, on the left or in the centre. Whereas the secondary codes

are on the bottom, on the right or in the periphery (Scollon & Scollon 2003). Singapore's multilingual context warrants code preference a salient analytical tool for shop signs where there are two or more languages used. The languages used in shop signs, index the language group and can symbolise ideas about the marketed product brand, that are not necessarily connected to the targeted language groups.

Borrowing Scollon and Scollon's (2003) inscription framework, the salience of languages on shop signs are analysed according to the typeface used, including font size and colour. The stylisation of fonts according to the brands of particular shops, produce different effects with regard to the aesthetic interpretation of the shop's identity situated within the particular LL. Figure 1. below illustrates a typical sign of an 'Indian' restaurant in Little India where the preferred code in English is placed above the secondary code in Tamil. The bolded red fonts of the English code contrasts with the bright yellow background more than the green fonts of the Tamil code. The non-central element of the restaurant's year of establishment is placed on the peripheral right-hand corner of the sign. Despite cultural differences in encoding information, shop signs generally follow these systematic arrangements to communicate their brands in a universally understood manner.

3.1.2 Image Data Collection

Serangoon Road in Little India was chosen as the site for LL analysis as it is corroborated by PuruShotam (2016) for its abundance of shops characterised by the Hindu-'Indian' ethnicity. Figure 2. illustrates Little India's main area of commercial activity along Serangoon Road spanning 1.5 kilometres. It runs from the junction of Bukit Timah Road and Sungei Road to the intersection between Balestier Road and Lavender Street (Street Directory n.d.).



Figure 1: A typical bilingual Tamil and English shop sign in Little India.

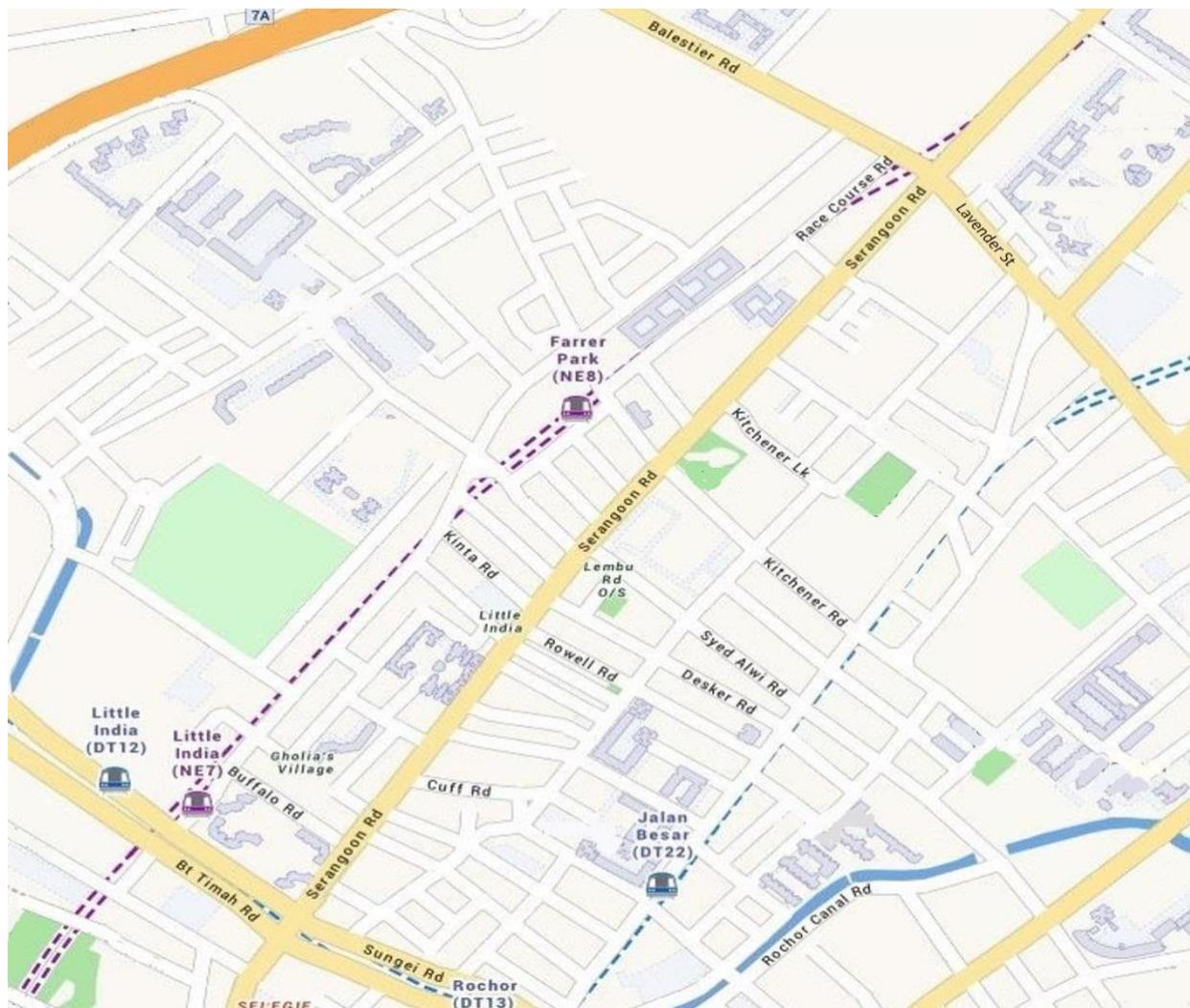


Figure 2: Map of Serangoon Road.

Clear photographic images of all physical shop signs visible on both sides of Serangoon Road were captured using a mobile camera of 23 mega pixels as illustrated by Figure 2. A total of 272 images were collected from 259 shops. The images were coded numerically, and the contents of the image data were classified according to the total number of shop signs using each specific language. Transliteration and translation practices of the shop names and descriptions were enumerated to track the trends in language representation via another language.

3.2 Nexus Analysis

As an extension of LL research, LL practitioners such as Hult (2009, 2014) and Pietikäinen et al. (2011) have developed Scollon and Scollon's (2004) nexus analysis approach to supplement Landry and Bourhis' (1997) LL analysis. This ethnographic approach studies language use on signs in relation to individuals who occupy the LL and their social actions which construct LL, strategically informing the microanalysis of an LL with a broader socio-political cultural analysis (Hult 2009; Scollon & Scollon 2004). Individual interpretation of language use on signs complement the visual analysis of LL as their discourse contextualises this study in contemporary society more comprehensively.

Nexus analysis examines the relationship between the LL discourse and social actions in a threefold manner – through discourses in place, the interaction order and the historical body (Hult 2009). Firstly, discourses in place include state ideologies about the intersections between ethnicity and language, and discourses about language and identity which are reflected on shop signs. Secondly, LL can be analysed through the interaction order which involve social norms about language choice on signs. Such norms are informed by the intended audience of the signs, the type of shop sign, language policies controlling language use in public spaces and relationships between language users and their languages (Hult 2009). Thirdly, LL can be analysed through the historical body which comprises 'internalised habits' of individuals, including a history of personal beliefs and experiences that influence their responses to the social circumstances of an LL (Scollon & Scollon 2004; Hult 2009).

This study aims to bridge the gap in existing LL research by informing the LL analysis of Singapore's Little India, with the stimulated reactions of 'Indian' youth in Singapore, towards the representation of Tamil on shop signs. The survey responses will thus be used in the nexus analysis, which will provide rich insights into the discourse of Singapore's Tamil identity.

3.2.1 Survey Data Collection

Nexus analysis can be conducted through a scene survey with specific questions that concretises the study by locating and identifying the participants of the LL, their interaction order with other individuals in that LL and the discourses circulating that LL (Scollon & Scollon 2004). As such, a scene survey was conducted with a focus group of 'Indian' youth in Singapore that elicited their insights, informed by existing discourses on Little India.

Though the participants of Little India's LL involve different ethnic groups, this study selects the 'Indian' ethnic group – as indicated by the CMIO model in Singapore – to participate in the scene survey, as their experience of belonging to this ethnic category constitutes a historical body necessary to this nexus analysis. The participants include Singaporeans and mixed-raced individuals whose race is classified as 'Indian' on their Singaporean National Registration Identity Card, and citizens from South Asian countries living in Singapore. These participants are selected based on whether they use or have learnt Indian language(s) (see section 4.2.1). This sample size of 63 participants is representative of the contemporary age of cosmopolitan Singapore where there is a rise of South Asian immigrants and an increase in racial intermarriages. The participants chosen are from the age group of 21 to 30 years old as the

younger generation of 'Indians' are more linguistically diverse. Therefore, this sample size is specific to the research aims of this study; which is to investigate the evolving relationship with the Tamil language among 'Indian' youth in contemporary Singapore.

The participants were chosen based on their willingness to respond to 15 questions in an online Google survey lasting 15 minutes (see Appendix). They were recruited anonymously through social media. The questions were kept open-ended so that the participants could formulate honest responses without being influenced by preconceived categories.

This study chose this scene survey method to perform a nexus analysis-inspired investigation as it is a faster and more sensible approach to provide a snapshot of Little India's LL situation. In contrast to studies by Hult (2009, 2014), and Pietikäinen et al. (2011), which thoroughly follows nexus analysis by closely considering the interaction order and involving private signs in data collection, this study develops the approach by enhancing the historical body through the scene survey with stimulated response questions to images inserted in the survey that engender a new discourse in place about Little India's LL in an academic context (F Hult 2019, pers. comm., 21 January). The next section will detail the results of both LL analysis and nexus analysis.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The results from the data collection are organised into the image data analysis (section 4.1) and survey data analysis (section 4.2). Section 4.1 quantitatively analyses the translation and transliteration practices of Tamil. Section 4.2 details the survey participants' ethnic and linguistic background, salient discussion points from their responses including the association of Tamil with Little India, and translation and transliteration practices.

4.1 Image Data Analysis

4.1.1 Quantitative Representation of Tamil language

The languages represented and the percentage of each language represented on all photographed shop signs are recorded in Figure 3. English is the ambient language of Little India as it is included on most signs. In line with previous research, while Tamil is more apparent in Little India than in Singapore's other public spaces, it is less visible than English and Mandarin.

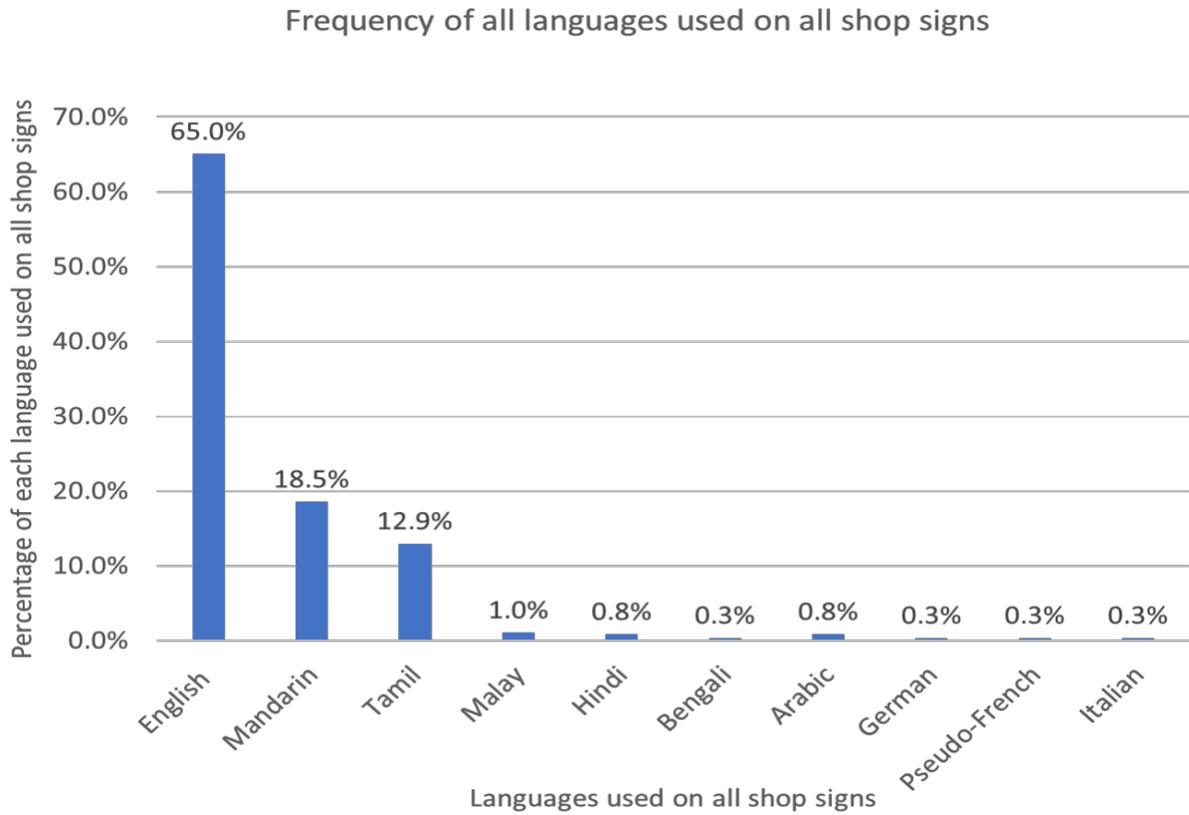


Figure 3: Languages used and percentage of each language used on all shop signs.

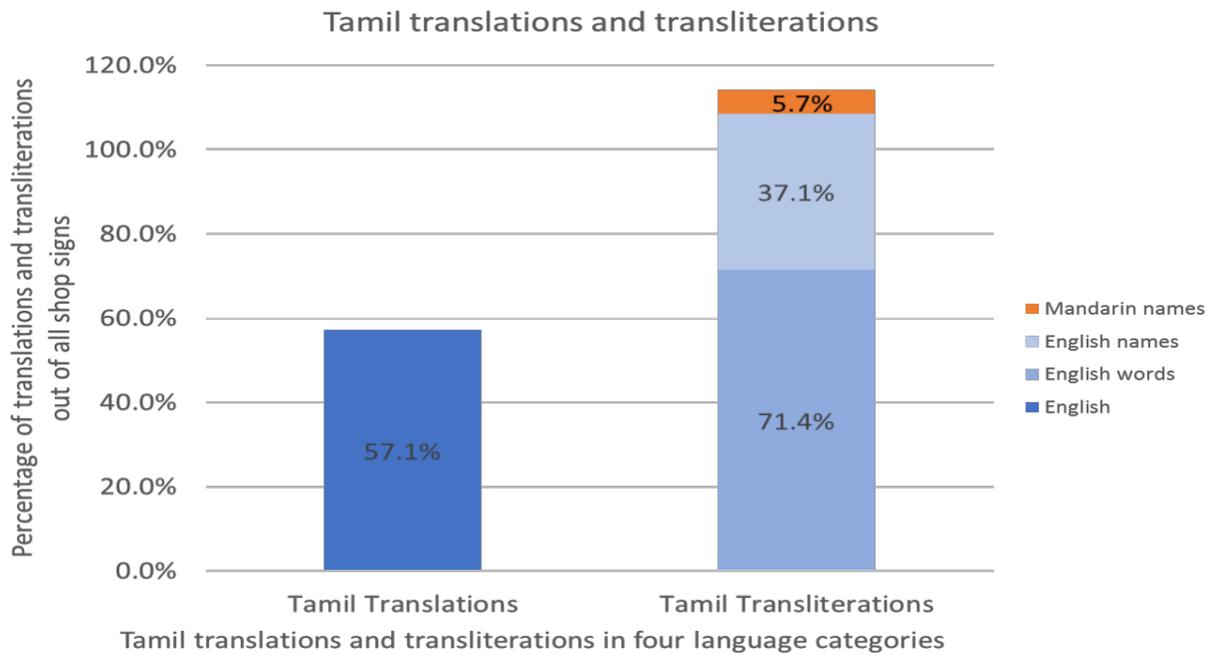


Figure 4: Tamil translations of English and Tamil transliterations of English and Mandarin.

Figure 4 depicts that out of the 12.9% of all signs containing the Tamil language, Tamil translations of English and Tamil transliterations of English and Mandarin were found to overlap on most signs. There are more Tamil transliterations of English and Mandarin than Tamil translations of English. 57.1% of all Tamil signs contain Tamil translations of English. The Tamil transliterations of English words amount to 71.4%, English names 37.1% and Mandarin names 5.7% of all Tamil signs.

4.1.2 Code Preference

It is interesting to note the order of the languages on the multilingual signs where the language in the first position indicates its preference. The language order of the multilingual signs are classified according to the languages that begin first in the Appendix. Out of all 259 signs, bilingual Mandarin to English signs are the most frequently occurring at 43.5%, followed by English to Tamil signs at 18.5% as the second most frequent patterning. There are almost twice as many English to Tamil signs as there are Tamil to English signs. The English to Tamil signs predominantly follow a top to bottom orientation, where English is written on top 80% of the time. While Tamil occupies the first position in two thirds of trilingual signs, it occupies the last position in the only quadrilingual sign. Hence, while Mandarin is the preferred code in bilingual English and Mandarin signs, English is the preferred code in bilingual English and Tamil signs.



Figure 5: Tamil language used on Malayalee clinic.

The high vitality of Tamil and relatively lower vitality of NTIL and other Indian languages not granted NTIL status such as Malayalam and Bengali, reveal the imposition of Tamil onto these Indian languages. Figure 5, pointed out by a survey response, illustrates the higher rank of Tamil over other Indian languages not accorded the NTIL status. The absence of Malayalam from a shop sign characterised as a Malayalee Ayurvedic clinic, paired with the use of Tamil instead, spotlights the powerful role of Tamil in representing the non-Tamil Malayalee language group, which inadvertently erases Malayalam from Little India's LL.

Additionally, the large number of foreign workers who frequently visit Little India that do not belong to the Tamil language group, but understand other languages such as Bengali, are backgrounded in Little India. Despite the existence of the lesser-known Little Bangladesh which formed along Desker Road nestled within the larger Little India (Raffles Press 2020), Bengali appeared on 0.77% of all signs along Serangoon Road, Little India's main thoroughfare. Figure 6 below evince the backgrounding of Bengali on an advertising text placed along the periphery of its monolingual English sign of a telecommunication retail shop selling mobile data plans that are in high demand among the foreign worker population. The code preference for the Tamil placed on the left of Bengali underlines the stratified social relationships between the Tamil and

Bengali language groups. Here, Bengali is subordinated, despite its significance in this context, where the demand for such telecommunication services among foreign workers is expected to be high.



Figure 6: Bengali used in a shop advertisement placed in front of an electronic shop sign in English.

Such reversal in the position of Tamil in the Indian language context reflects the relations between 'Indian'-Tamils as in-group members and non-Tamil Indians as out-group members of this constitutionally imposed ethnolinguistic group. Thus, though the position of Tamil is diminished by its subordinate placement to other majority languages, it appears more powerful when placed with NTIL and other Indian languages on shop signs.

4.1.2 Tamil Translations of English

Of the 57.1% of the Tamil translations of English, 96% of them appeared on jewellery and pawn shops. Figures 7 and 8 demonstrate the Tamil translation of 'jewellery shop' into 'தங்கநகைக்கடை' and 'pawn shop' into 'அடகுக்கடை' which are consistent across most jewellery and pawn shops.



Figure 7: Tamil translation on jewellery shop.



Figure 8: Tamil translation on pawn shop.



Figure 9: Spelling variation of Tamil translation of 'pawn shop'.

Though there are minor spelling variations in the translation of jewellery and pawn shops which sometimes exclude the connecting letter 'க்' as in 'அடகு கடை', this colloquial variety of Tamil is more prevalent as it is widely understood by Tamil users.

4.1.3 Tamil Transliterations

Tamil transliterations of English words and names abound on most shop signs containing Tamil. Figure 10 and the corresponding phonetic gloss⁶⁸ illustrates how the Tamil transliteration of the English shop name 'GRT Jewellers' is transposed onto the Tamil scripts. The aspirated 't' in 'GRT' and approximant 'w' in 'jewellers' in the original name have been replaced with the retroflex 'ḍ' and fricative 'v' sounds in the Tamil transliteration.

ஜி ஆர் டி ஜாவெல்லர்ஸ்
gi ar ḍ juvellers
GRT Jewellers



Figure 10: Tamil transliteration of English on an 'Indian' jewellery shop.



Figure 11: Stylisation of letter 'R'.

⁶⁸ The Roman alphabet and some special characters from IPA extensions are used to gloss the Tamil transliteration of English words. This simplified Tamil to English glossary system is borrowed from Asher and Annamalai's (2002, p.275) *Colloquial Tamil*.

As shown in Figure 11, the stylisation of the English letter 'R' is also transposed onto the 'R' equivalent of the Tamil transliterated script, thereby shaping the transliterated name with the aesthetic of the English lettering.



Figure 12: Tamil transliteration of English on textile shop.

டைலரிங் டிசைனிங்
deilering dīsaining
Tailoring Designing

Figure 12 and the phonetic gloss above depict a frequent Tamil transliteration of English words such as 'tailoring' and 'designing' that is uncommon in the colloquial Tamil variety of Singapore. Interestingly, the inclusion of the ampersand, '&', into the Tamil transliteration – which is ungrammatical in standard Tamil where addition is inflected morphologically only – masks the transliterated name as English. The transliteration and use of the ampersand also conveys sophistication and a more globalised sense to the shop name, as English is the main language for commerce in Singapore.



Figure 13: Tamil transliteration of an English name.

பிரைவேட் லிமிட்டெட்
piraived limided
Private Limited



Figure 14: Tamil transliteration of a Mandarin name.

While the Tamil transliterations of the English name 'Merlin' (see Figure 13), and the Mandarin name 'Soon Huat' (see Figure 14), demonstrate the regularity in the Tamil transliteration practice, the transliteration of the English words 'private limited' is inconsistent. The initial Tamil letters of each transliterated word in the phonetic gloss above are taken to represent the whole word, as shown in Figure 14, which is an inconsistent convention to transliterate 'private limited'. Hence, the interaction order – which involve social norms about language choice on signs – reflects that the Tamil transliterations of English and Mandarin words and names reconfigure the Tamil language as adaptable to the original shop names in the non-Tamil languages without translating them directly.

4.1.4 English transliterations of Tamil

English transliterations of Tamil words appear in 19.5% of all shop signs containing English throughout Little India. Figure 15 portrays the English transliteration of the Tamil words 'பொடி' (podi) referring to 'spiced powder' and 'பொறியல்' (poriyal) referring to the infinitive of 'frying' which are unique to South 'Indian' cuisine.

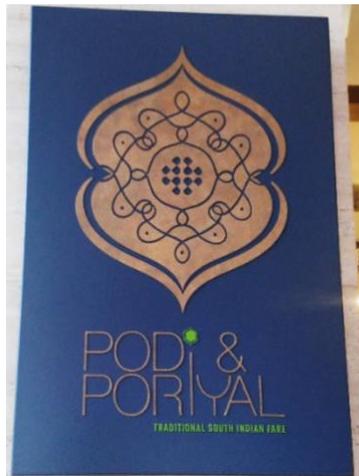


Figure 15: English transliteration of Tamil on an 'Indian' restaurant sign.



Figure 16: English transliteration of a Tamil name.

The English transliteration of Tamil names include the phonetic spelling of Tamil names on shop signs as exhibited in Figure 16. Though the Tamil name is transliterated using the voiceless plosive 'k' in 'Kuna', the name would be more accurately transliterated as 'Guna' in English using the voiced plosive 'g' according to the phonological pattern of the Tamil name. The pronunciation of 'Guna' also sounds more anglicised than 'Kuna' – of which the latter is the accurate pronunciation in Tamil. Additionally, the apostrophe 's' is used in the Tamil name, following the English rather than Tamil grammar. Thus, the English transliteration practice of Tamil words and names tends to influence the Tamil language representation largely through the phonological and grammatical lens of the English language.

4.2 Survey Data Analysis

4.2.1 Characteristics of Survey Participants

The list of questions addressing the historical body in the scene survey categorized: the type of 'Indian' ethnicity, linguistic affiliation(s) of Indian languages and familiarity with Singapore's Little India among all 63 research participants. Figure 17 details the distribution of participants' ethnicities into 18 different sub-ethnic groups which are identified by the participants themselves in a fill-in-the-blank question to 'What is your ethnicity'. A majority of 62% of the participants self-identified as "ethnic Tamils", including "Indian"⁶⁹, while 38% identified as non-Tamils.

⁶⁹ The 'Indian' category was chosen by some participants as a general category that assumes the mainstream 'Tamil' ethnicity.

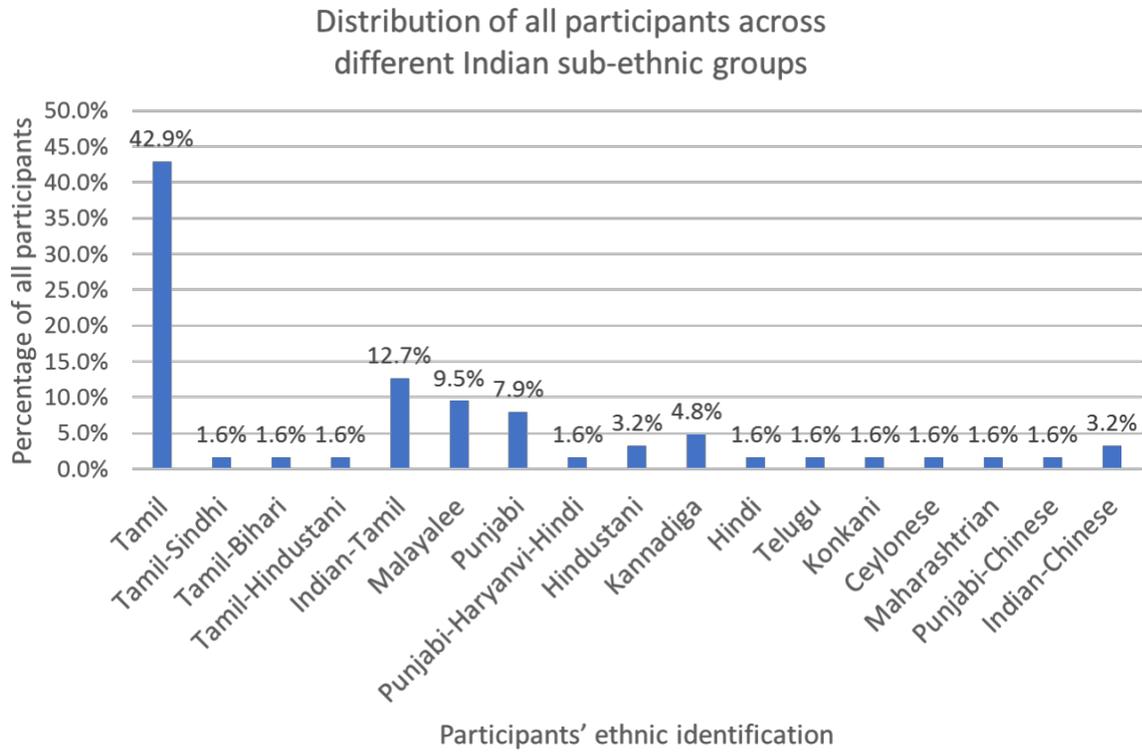


Figure 17: Distribution of participants' ethnicities.

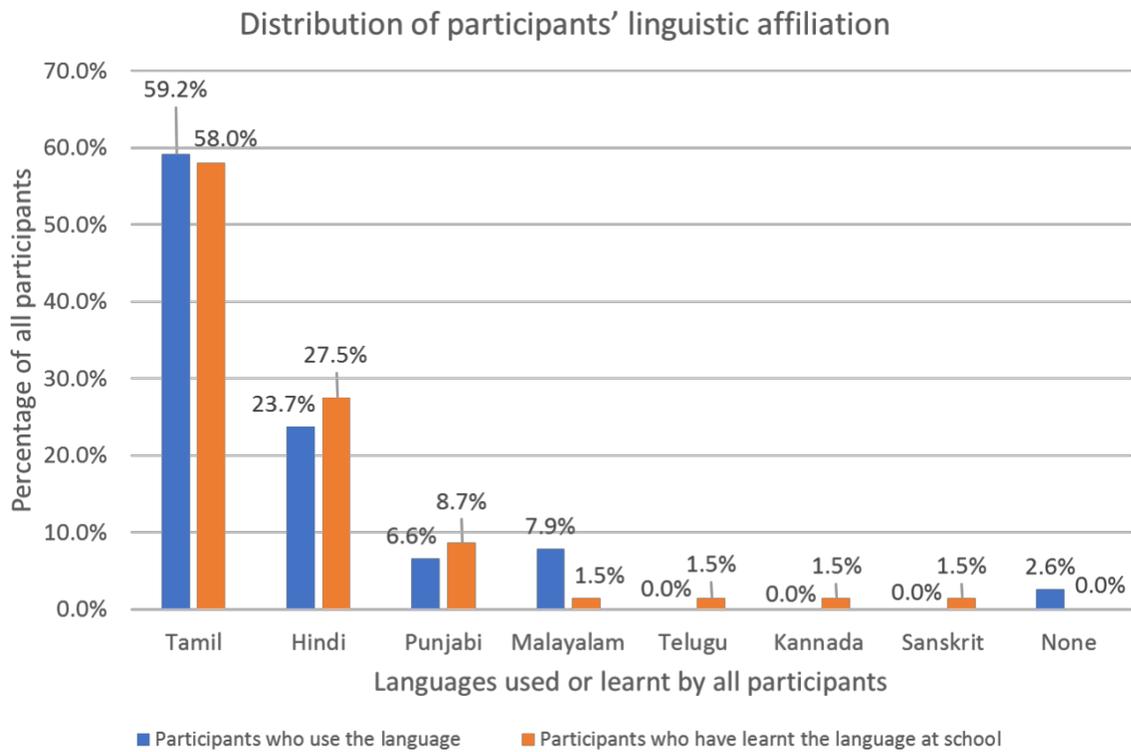


Figure 18: Indian languages used and learnt by participants.

The Indian languages used and learnt were predominantly Tamil, with a significant percentage of Hindi users and small percentages of Punjabi and Malayalam users, as shown in Figure 18. A large majority of 71% of the participants lived in Singapore since birth, whereas only 19% had immigrated, having lived in Singapore for 8 to 18 years. Thus, the lived experiences of the 'Indian' youth reflect the shifting demographic of 'Indian' Singaporeans from 'Indian'-Tamil to a wider range of 'Indian' sub-ethnicities.

4.2.2 Reactions to Tamil in Little India

The responses to Tamil language representation among 'Indian' youth varies according to how the Tamil identity is preserved and re-created through the encoding of Tamil language on shop signs. These evaluated responses are in answer to the questions designed for discussing discourses in place, which include state ideologies about the intersections between ethnicity and language, discourses about language and identity, and the interaction order which involves social norms about language choice on signs. While the participants' positive relationship with Tamil as their mother tongue and their reflection on their essentialist notions between language and identity – where English is the assigned neutral inter-ethnic lingua franca and Tamil the cultural tongue of the 'Indian' ethnic group – highlight the preservation of the Tamil ethnolinguistic identity, they expressed concerns regarding the relevance of Tamil translations. Similarly, participants' insights into the reconstruction of the Tamil identity through the transliteration practices were rife with anxieties about the comprehensibility of shop signs, revealing their internalised weak relationship with the Tamil language and the LL's lack of representativeness of the 'Indian' community in Singapore.

Firstly, the participants' ideologies about the essentialism between the 'Indian' ethnicity and the Tamil language position Little India's 'Indian' identity as largely Tamil. Of all, 36.5% describe the Tamil language representation as 'appropriate' and 'unsurprising' due to their three-way equation of the language with the Tamil ethnicity and Little India: 'many signs in Singapore usually have English and Chinese and being in Little India I would expect them to have Tamil'. Their identification of Tamil shop signs belonging to shops selling 'traditional Indian goods and services' reinforce their expectations of Little India's preservation of an authentic Tamil identity through the language.

Unsurprisingly, of all participants, 38.1% remarked on the ironic lack of Tamil representation on shop signs which aligned with their expectations of the lack of minority language representation in Singapore, despite Little India's status as an 'Indian' heritage area. One respondent found it 'surprising that most of these famous shops with Tamil backgrounds do not use Tamil as the main language on the sign boards at Little India'. Another participant was also 'surprised by those who don't include the Indian languages, especially because it's Little India and it should reflect its heritage and the place's identity'. In particular, two of the responses indicated surprise toward the shop signs featured in the survey. They noted the dominance of English through the larger number of monolingual English signs, the larger font size of English than Tamil on bilingual signs, and the anglicised representation of Tamil through the English transliteration of Tamil names on shops selling traditional 'Indian' goods such as 'Gokulam' (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: English transliteration of a Tamil shop selling 'Indian' goods.

While the use of the cursive English transliteration appeals to tourists and other Singaporeans, the backgrounding of the Tamil language on these signs is ironic as it surfaces the effacement of Tamil language representation in Little India. Hence, the code preference for English and the small font size of the Tamil translation of this shop name as pointed out by the participant reflect the normalisation of Tamil as a subordinated language in the broader LL in Singapore. Little India's preservation of the Tamil identity is also supported by 22.2% of all participants who expressed a comforting sense of belonging to the local Tamil community when they identified Tamil as their mother tongue:

'Since Little India is a place that represents Indians in Singapore, Indian languages should be given more importance in order to make the Indians feel that this place is part of their identity. Signboards do play an important role in this, as it gives people the sense of belonging when Indian languages are used.'

Interestingly, in response to question 14, 30.1% of all participants highlighted that because they themselves associate Little India with Tamil, they admit their narrow perspective of the exclusivity of the area to the Tamil identity and the lack of representativeness of NTIL groups: 'I associate Little India with Tamilness so it doesn't seem very representative of the whole [Indian] community [in Singapore]'. The survey generated a discourse which resists a wholly "Tamil" labelling of the 'Indian' ethnicity. From the responses across all questions, Tamil was identified in relation to other Indian languages by 54% of all participants, who remarked on the lack of representation of NTIL and other Indian languages to cater to non-Tamil users: 'The Indian community in Singapore is extremely diverse (...) but the signs do not reflect that'. Their identification of the non-Tamil population such as 'Bangladeshi migrant workers', 'non-English educated Indians' and 'Indian expatriates' indicate their changing ideologies about the linguistic diversity of Little India's inhabitants. Hence, the participants' responses displayed a resistance toward the South-'Indian' Tamil profile that the CMIO policy has perpetuated.

Despite a general appreciation for Tamil translations among all participants, 6.3% found certain Tamil translations strange as the shop names are encoded in literary Tamil, which they perceive to obfuscate meaning:

'Some of these words are hard to translate, i.e. Joyalukas. Some of these shops lose their meaning and branding in translation i.e. Indian Jewellers becomes இந்திய(ர்) நகைக்காரர்கள். Ultimately, for business owners the branding is important.'

For instance, Figure 20 illustrates the formal usage of the literary Tamil word 'முடிதிருத்தகம்' referring to 'hair salon' and the verbatim translation of 'new star' into 'புதிய நட்சத்திர' which 2 participants found unusual, citing that 'It's just the first time I saw "Mudi thiruththagam" used for saloon' and that 'I do get amused by the translation of the shop. New Star sounds fine but the Tamil translation puthiya nakshatram sounds kind of weird'.



Figure 20: Formal Tamil translation of a hair saloon sign.

Though the preservation of the Tamil language on signs reinforces participants' positive relationship with their Tamil identity, the use of literary Tamil on shop signs confuses them as this archaic variety is uncommon in their everyday speech.

Secondly, the participants' negative reactions to the Tamil transliterations of English indicates their difficulty in embracing the reconstruction of the Tamil identity through the transliteration practice. As the participants use English rather than Tamil as a lingua franca among Tamils and non-Tamils, they preferred signs using the English or Tamil directly instead of Tamil transliterations: 'It would also help if ppl [sic] were to give their shops Tamil names or translate it rather than transliterate. It wouldn't [sic] look weird in other languages then.'



Figure 21: Tamil transliteration of English on an 'Indian' jewellery shop sign.

For instance, 'gold' is transliterated into 'கோல்டு' in the Tamil script and pronounced as 'goldu' in English as Figure 21 demonstrates. Among the participants, 9.5% who noted living in Singapore since birth and being literate in both Tamil and English, found such Tamil transliterations of English less readable by Tamil speakers. These participants noted that they would 'rather have English on the signs because [they] read English faster than Tamil', hence relying on the English script instead of the Tamil for meaning. The Tamil transliterated form 'goldu' does not directly convey the meaning in English as it is merely a form of pronunciation of the English word 'gold' in the Tamil accent that adds the syllable 'du' at the end of the word.

Hence, those who found it difficult to read and understand the Tamil transliterations offered the suggestion that 'Tamil signs can be more informative' through the use of 'proper Tamil word[s]' instead.

Furthermore, 17.4% of all respondents noted that the dominance of English in the anglicised representation of Tamil through the English transliteration of Tamil names on shops selling religious 'Indian' goods such as 'Gokulam' in Figure 22.

'There are signs in Tamil and their English translation, which is okay. But there are some with Tamil words that are phonetically written out in English, which seems very unnecessary. (...) That to me really seems like a whitewashing of Indian culture and makes it seem really inauthentic and commercial.'



Figure 22: English transliteration of the Tamil name of a shop selling Hindu religious goods.

The symbolic use of Tamil is also apparent in the symbolic patterns of colourful fonts and cursive typeface. These are characteristics of 'Indian' shop signs in Little India, as well as the country itself, that index the 'Indian' ethnicity. Most survey responses surfaced their met expectations of the bright contrasting font colours and cursive orthography of English fonts that are reminiscent of the cursive Tamil script.



Figure 23: English transliteration of Tamil on an 'Indian' jewellery shop sign.

However, 2 participants welcome the English transliterations due to their usefulness to non-Tamils who can learn to articulate Tamil words syllabically in English, explaining that '[the transliterations show non-Tamil speakers how the words are pronounced, which is interesting to some non-Tamils]'. For instance, the English transliteration 'Arthesdam' in Figure 23 above helps non-Tamil users to enunciate the original Tamil word, 'அதிர்ஷ்டம்', more accurately pronounced as 'Athirshdam'. They highlighted that this particular transliteration practice increases the accessibility to the Tamil language among non-Tamil users, thereby recreating the Tamil identity as more 'open' and inclusive of non-Tamils.

Therefore, through nexus analysis, the reactions to the shop signs among 'Indian' youth reflect: their awareness of the interaction order involving the social norms of Tamil language

representation choices on signs, their internalised habits of associating Little India with the Tamil language due to their history of personal beliefs and experiences that influence their responses to the social circumstances of the LL, and their changing ideologies of the 'Indian' ethnicity being represented by Tamil. The next section will discuss findings from the image data and the survey data collectively.

DISCUSSION

5.1 Manipulation of the Tamil Identity through Tamil Translations

The incongruence between the low vitality of Tamil in Singapore's wider LL and its high vitality in Little India's LL – as confirmed by both the LL and nexus analyses – signal the manipulation of Tamil identity through Tamil translations that construct and identify ever-changing spaces as static and institutionalised 'Indian'-Tamil places. The stereotype of Little India as distinctly Tamil is exemplified by the survey's findings about the appropriateness of Tamil language representation as the majority language of 'Indian' Singaporeans. Such normalisation of the Tamil language in Little India's LL reinforces the essentialism between language and ethnic identity, where the Tamil language is instrumentally used to preserve an imagined concept of a homogenous 'Indian' identity. The Tamil language is accordingly assigned the 'Indian'-Tamil ethnic identity, which is presented as filling the 'Indian' position of the 'CMIO' classification of Singapore's ethnic demographic. This is problematic as it simplifies the diversity of this evolving community, confirming PuruShotam's (2016) argument about the preservation of Little India as distinctly South 'Indian' Tamil, perpetuating the stereotype of all 'Indians' being exclusively Tamil. Hence, the greater Tamil language representation in Little India's LL freezes the 'Indian' identity as entirely Tamil and vice versa.

Building upon the maintenance of a specific Tamil identity, the preservation of Tamil translations in the literary variety reinforces the Singaporean Tamil community's valorisation of the literary Tamil – vis-à-vis Tamil transliterations of English – as the bona fide variety that shapes an imagined, true Tamil identity. In contrast, the nexus analysis of the survey responses indicates an opposition to this archaic variety. The survey responses highlight the variety lacking communicative value in today's commercial marketing and stunting the informational function of Tamil. Nevertheless, the conservation of the literary Tamil translations in the historic shopping district sustains the linguistic origins of Singapore's Tamil identity symbolically to serve Little India's claim to ethnic authenticity.

Strikingly, the position of Tamil shifts from being a minority language in Singapore's wider LL to a majority language among Indian languages in Little India's LL, as demonstrated by the LL analysis. The hierarchical dominance of Tamil over other Indian languages erases the diversity of contemporary 'Indian' society in Singapore, and resists the image of a heterogenous 'Indian' community. Through the dominance of the Tamil language onto a space characterised by a diversified 'Indian' identity, the role of Tamil as a conservation language presents a sweeping representation of the Singaporean 'Indian' identity as a specifically 'Indian'-Tamil one. While literary Tamil translations frozen on signs keeps alive Little India's historical Tamil identity and 'Indian'-Tamil youths' nostalgic relationship with the written Tamil variety taught in school, the nexus analysis reveal that the relevance of the literary translations to the ordinary Singaporean

Tamil who uses colloquial Tamil is obsolete. Hence, while the LL analysis quantitatively displays how Tamil is represented in the LL, the nexus analysis verifies the findings and adds a more qualitative understanding to how the Tamil identity is manipulated and is perceived in the current sociolinguistic context. Consequently, the Tamil language continues to serve as a figurehead for Singapore's 'Indian' identity, despite perpetuating an antiquated Tamil identity that displaces 'Indian'-Tamil youth.

5.2 Rebranding the Tamil Identity through Transliteration Practices

Although the Tamil identity in Little India is frozen in Singapore's national ideologies, it is re-created differently through transliteration practices. On one hand, the nexus analysis testifies to how the Tamil transliterations of English shop names and descriptions re-creates the Tamil identity as an Englishized Tamil version of an international lingua franca with access to the global market. On the other hand, the Tamil transliteration practice subordinates the Tamil language into a dependent relationship with English, as the Tamil word is stripped off from its original meaning and relies on the English word for meaning. To this end, the Tamil identity is redefined phonetically, grammatically and graphologically through the lens of the English language, despite superficially indexing the Tamil identity on shops to attract the tourist gaze. This transliteration practice is problematic to the Singaporean Tamil identity as Singaporean Tamils dissociate the Tamil pronunciation of English words. Not only is this discouraged in the prescriptivist educational setting, but is also a negative stereotype in Singapore's multilingual setting.

The exoticisation of the Tamil language through the lack of informative value accorded to Tamil on shop signs and the exploitation of its symbolic function exemplify the fetishisation of the Tamil language and by extension, Tamil ethnicity in Little India's LL. Tamil transliterations of English do not serve their informative function but are symbolically used to convey an 'Indian'-Tamil ambient setting of Little India. Despite the decorative use of Tamil transliterations of English shop names, which lends rhetorical and semiotic meaning to non-Tamils and tourists frequenting Little India, these transliterations reduce the informational value of the Tamil language and diminishes the role of the Tamil identity in the LL. The decorative use of the Tamil script evident in the LL analysis of the English transliteration of Tamil and the semiotic patterning of the presentation of Tamil on shop signs, also reinforce the accentuation of the symbolic function of Tamil exploited for its cultural capital that intrigues and attracts the tourist gaze. The economic need to access the global market by using Tamil instrumentally without meaning, conflicts with a commitment to a genuine representation of Tamil that would legitimise its role in the landscape.

Moreover, results from the nexus analysis debunks the popular belief that the Tamil language can be understood by all Tamil Singaporeans. The difficulty of reading Tamil transliterations among participants who identified as Tamil and having lived in Singapore since birth, reflect that their linguistic identities of Tamil and English are mutually exclusive as they prefer to directly use the English word rather than its Tamil transliteration. Their shift away from Tamil transliterations not only reflect their internalisation of the bilingual education that perpetuates distinct linguistic identities, but also underscores their difficulties in embracing this evolving

Tamil identity. At the same time, the nexus analysis validates that Tamil transliterations of English positively expands the Tamil lexicon to include more English words which legitimises Tamil's status as a growing language which can survive in a multilingual setting. However, perceptions of Tamil transliterations as impure versions of Tamil propagated by the prescriptivist education system perpetuates the rejection of the evolution of Tamil, stunting growth opportunities of the Singaporean Tamil identity.

In comparison, the nexus analysis signals that the English transliterations of Tamil, through romanised spelling, reinvents Tamil as an inclusive language accessible to non-Tamils who can pronounce Tamil words through English. The English transliterations of Tamil might also exemplify the shift among Singaporean Tamils from Tamil to English. Yet, the absence of the Tamil script, as evident from the LL analysis, undermines the construction of a seemingly inclusive Tamil identity as the Tamil language meaning is used without its script. In effect, the Tamil language is exploited for its informational and symbolic function separately to strategically accommodate the tourist gaze and reach a wider consumer market, thereby erasing the original Tamil language identity from the LL.

Through the transliteration practices, the Tamil identity is rebranded to enhance its cultural capital that promotes a touristic imagination of the Tamil ethnicity. The economic need to access the global market by using Tamil instrumentally and without meaning, conflicts with a commitment to a genuine representation of the language that would legitimise its role in the landscape. While the tourist context of Little India revives the legitimacy of the Tamil identity, it simultaneously replaces it with an exoticised identity that is fetishized for its cultural entrenchments without accurately and comprehensively representing the evolving Singaporean Tamil identity that represents a creolized diaspora. The reinforcing interactions between both LL and nexus analyses therefore informs the research aims of how Tamil is represented via transliterations and translations and in doing so, how the Tamil identity preserved and recreated.

Conclusion

The position Tamil occupies in a LL distinctly marked by the 'Indian' ethnicity is clearly disputed along linguistic lines. As proposed in the introduction, a few questions consider the place of Tamil in Little India as special. How does Tamil mark Little India as more 'Indian'? How is the Tamil identity sustained and remodelled by the Tamil language in the LL? Several conclusions from the LL and nexus analyses answer these questions and the research aims of this study. This study has shown that the exclusivity of greater Tamil representation to Little India, and the area's role as a conservation site of the 'Indian' heritage, mark an essentialism between the Tamil language and the 'Indian' ethnicity; preserving and simplifying the 'Indian' identity as exclusively Tamil. While the historic Tamil identity is frozen through archaic Tamil translations which displace contemporary Singaporean Tamils, the language is instrumentally manipulated as an object to index the area as more 'Indian', specifically 'Indian'-Tamil.

Even though the remodelling of the Tamil identity through Tamil transliterations of English both dilutes and reinvents the Tamil identity through English, the Tamil language is exploited for its

symbolic value, to index the 'Indian' component of the CMIO model in place of its informational function. The instrumental use of the Tamil script to accentuate the Tamil branding of Little India for the tourist gaze undermines the genuineness in representing the Singaporean Tamil identity accurately. Though the English transliteration practice refreshes the Tamil identity to accommodate non-Tamils, the exoticisation of this minority language that is normalised in the tourist site of Little India exemplify the ethnic and linguistic commodification of the Tamil identity. Hence, the resistance among Singaporean Tamils toward this evolution of Tamil language stagnates the growth of the Singaporean Tamil identity that represents a diasporic creolization.

Perhaps a more descriptive as opposed to prescriptive view toward the evolving Tamil language in Singapore would pave the way for the growth of the language via its mixture with other languages, and by extension, the Tamil identity. The evolving 'Indian' demographic of Singapore and their linguistic experiences clearly point to the disconnect between language, people and identity. These suggest a need to move away from state ideologies positing essentialised notions of language, ethnic identity and the territorialisation of language to facilitate the evolution of the Tamil identity, rather than attempting to stabilise the inherently unstable identity.

From the above, it is clear that the LL and nexus analysis perspectives are useful in mapping the representation of the Tamil language, how the 'Indian' culture is marketed in Singapore, and the evolving Tamil identity. Informed by discourse generated by 'Indian' youth in Singapore, this LL study acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between Little India, the Tamil language and Tamil identity.

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APPENDIX

Question Type	Survey Questions
Historical Body	<p>What is your ethnicity?</p> <p>What Indian languages do you use?</p> <p>What Indian languages have you learnt?</p> <p>How many years have you lived in Singapore?</p> <p>How often do you visit Little India?</p> <p>Have you noticed the shop signs in Little India?</p>
Interaction Order	<p>What kind of people do you think frequent Little India and what languages do they speak?</p>
Discourse in Place	<p>What are your impressions of the language(s) used on the shop signs?</p> <p>What language(s) do you think are used on shop signs in Little India in general?</p> <p>Here 10 images of popular shop signs along Serangoon Road in Little India. Scroll down to answer question 10.</p> <p>After looking at these images, are you surprised by how the language(s) are represented in these signs? Why or why not?</p> <p>Here are 10 images of less popular shop signs along Serangoon Road in Little India. Scroll down to answer question 11.</p> <p>After looking at these images, are you surprised by how the language(s) are represented in these signs? Why or why not?</p> <p>In terms of readability and informative value, how do the language(s) used in the shop signs affect your experience of Little India?</p> <p>In terms of the (1) typeface, (2) layout, (3) font colours and (4) font size, how else do the language(s) on the shop signs affect your experience of Little India?</p> <p>How representative do you feel the Indian language(s) on Little India's shop signs are of the Indian community in Singapore?</p> <p>How do you think the shop signs can be edited to improve your experience of Little India?</p>

Table 1: Survey question categories

Language order	Number of signs	Orientation of language ordering	
		Top to bottom	Left to right
English-Mandarin	14	9	5
English-Tamil	20	16	4
English-Malay	1	0	1
English-Hindi	1	1	0
English-Mandarin-Malay-Tamil	1	0	1
English-Malay-Tamil-Mandarin	1	1	0

Mandarin-English	47	41	6
Mandarin-Tamil	1	1	0
Mandarin-Hindi	1	0	1
Mandarin-English-Tamil	2	2	0
Tamil-English	9	7	2
Tamil-Mandarin	3	1	2
Tamil-Bengali	1	0	1
Tamil-Hindi-English	1	0	1
Tamil-English-Malay	1	0	1
Tamil-English-Mandarin	2	1	1
Arabic-English	2	0	2
Bengali-English	1	1	0

Table 2: Language order and orientation used in multilingual signs.

