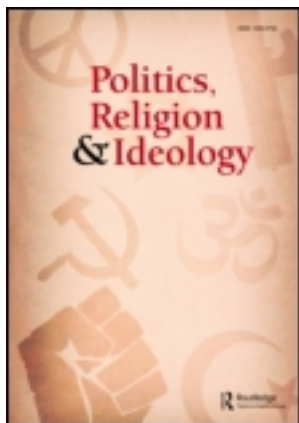


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Politics, Religion & Ideology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and
subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ftmp21>

The Formation, Institutionalization and Consolidation of the LTTE: Religious Practices, Intra-Tamil Divisions and a Violent Nationalist Ideology

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Version of record first published: 06 Dec 2012.

To cite this article: Nikolaos Biziouras (2012): The Formation, Institutionalization and Consolidation of the LTTE: Religious Practices, Intra-Tamil Divisions and a Violent Nationalist Ideology, *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 13:4, 547-559

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2012.732016>

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The Formation, Institutionalization and Consolidation of the LTTE: Religious Practices, Intra-Tamil Divisions and a Violent Nationalist Ideology

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ABSTRACT Utilizing the case of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, I make a three-part explanation for the critical role the religious organization, ideological fitness, and state capacity played in the formation, institutionalization and consolidation of the LTTE in the Tamil ethnic mobilization process. Firstly, I show how the Tamil religious re-awakening during the British colonial period led to religious practices which consolidated the social dominance of the Vellalar caste and blocked the upward economic, social and political mobility of the other Tamil castes, thus enabling the emergence of lower-caste groups such as the LTTE in the 1970s. Secondly, I demonstrate that the LTTE's ideology privileged its nationalist goals over Marxist doctrinal purity because of the LTTE's commitment to improved intra-Tamil caste equality; an ideological approach which only increased the LTTE's legitimacy within the Tamil community and solidified its institutionalization as a viable Tamil group. Finally, I demonstrate how the intense intra-Sinhalese elite-level bidding wars, driven by the partisan competition for power among the dominant Sinhalese parties of the early 1980s, reduced the autonomy and capacity of the Sri Lankan state and enabled the consolidation of the LTTE as the leader of the Tamil ethnic mobilization drive.

Introduction

How did 30 armed men in the early 1980s create one of the most powerful ethno-nationalist movements, lead a nearly 30-year war against a numerically superior state, supplant a well-entrenched social and political elite within their own ethnic group, and repel all forms of external intervention by regional hegemony? Most scholarly accounts of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) have stressed institutional and structural factors in the formation, institutionalization and consolidation of the LTTE and the subsequent civil war that engulfed Sri Lanka over nearly 30 years.¹ The few accounts that focus on religious

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¹For institutional accounts, see S. Bandaranayake, 'The Peopling of Sri Lanka: The National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity' in Social Scientists' Association (ed) *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists' Association, 1984), pp. i–ixx; K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions in Multi-ethnic Societies: Sri Lanka, 1880–1985* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986); Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, *The Break-Up of Sri Lanka: The Sinhalese–Tamil Conflict* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988); Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism: Its Origins and Development in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000); N. DeVotta, 'Control Democracy, Institutional Decay, and the Quest for Eelam: Explaining Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka', *Pacific Affairs*, 73:1 (2000),

and ideological causes for this case of ethnic conflict stress the virulent and aggressive Buddhist elements within the Sinhalese side² or focus on cultural elements within the Tamil tradition that enabled the LTTE, through its commitment to violence, to achieve leadership over the Tamil ethnic drive.³

I use this article to amend this understanding by engaging in a three-step process. Firstly, I show how the Tamil religious re-awakening during the British colonial period led to religious practices which consolidated the social dominance of the Vellalar caste and blocked the upward economic, social and political mobility of the other Tamil castes, thus enabling the emergence of lower-caste groups such as the LTTE in the 1970s.⁴ Secondly, I demonstrate that the LTTE's ideology privileged its nationalist goals over Marxist doctrinal purity because of the LTTE's commitment to improved intra-Tamil caste equality; an ideological approach which only increased the LTTE's legitimacy within the Tamil community and solidified its institutionalization as a viable Tamil group. Finally, I demonstrate how the intense intra-Sinhalese elite-level bidding wars,⁵ driven by the partisan competition for power among the dominant Sinhalese parties of the early 1980s, reduced the autonomy and capacity of the Sri Lankan state and enabled the consolidation of the LTTE as the leader of the Tamil ethnic mobilization drive.

From Religious Awakening to Religious Practices with Intra-ethnic Consequences

The British colonial period revolutionised Sri Lankan society by changing caste relationships within the Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups. The integration of the Sri Lankan economy within the international economy changed inter-caste dynamics within the Sinhalese, pitting the emerging merchant Karava and Salagama castes against the land-owning Goyigama caste while it affirmed the dominant role of the land-owning Vellalar caste within the Tamils.⁶ In addition, the arrival of Christian missionaries meant the founding

pp. 55–76; Neil DeVotta, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). For structural explanations see Robert N. Kearney *Communalism and Language in the Politics of Ceylon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967); Sumantra Bose, *States, Nations, Sovereignty: Sri Lanka, India and the Tamil Eelam Movement* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994); L. Fernando, 'Ethnic Conflict and the State in Sri Lanka: A Possible Solution?', in Ian Watson and Siri Gamage (eds) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' or 'The Island of Tears'* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 77–88.

²See Bardwell Smith, *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg: ANIMA Books, 1978); Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); David Little, *Sri Lanka: The Invention of Enmity* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1994), pp. 103–105 and 'Religion and Ethnicity in the Sri Lankan Civil War' in Robert I. Rotberg (ed) *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), pp. 41–56.

³Michael Roberts, 'Killing Rajiv Gandhi: Dhanu's Sacrificial Metamorphosis in Death', *South Asian History and Culture*, 1:1 (2010), pp. 25–41; Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, *The Tamil Tigers: Armed Struggle for Identity* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1994).

⁴To further clarify this point, I focus on how Tamil religious practices impacted social norms and caste stratification within the Tamil community and continued a particular form of intra-Tamil fractionalization.

⁵By bidding wars, I am referring to intra-ethnic elite-level competition to further placate their ethnic brethren in terms of resource allocation and goal fulfilment.

⁶See C.R. de Silva, 'Sinhala–Tamil Ethnic Rivalry: The Background' in Robert B. Goldmann and A. Jeyaratnam Wilson (eds) *From Independence to Statehood: Managing Ethnic Conflict in 5 African and Asian States* (London: Pinter 1984), pp. 111–124; K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions*, op. cit., p. 20; Michael Roberts, *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500–1931* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Kumari Jayawardena, 'Some Aspects of Class and Ethnic Consciousness in Sri Lanka in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries' in Social Scientists' Association (ed) *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo:

of English-medium schools for the affluent Sinhalese and Tamils as well as an aggressive proselytization drive.⁷ It was this introduction of English and Christianity that led to religious re-awakenings among the Sinhalese and the Tamils.

Fuelled by the British decision to drastically reduce the funding of Buddhist temples,⁸ the Buddhist Sinhalese revivalist movement, led by Anagarika Dharmapala⁹ – whose name means the ‘homeless guardian of the Dharma’ (and who was born Don David Hewaviratne and grew up, English-schooled, in an affluent middle-class Sinhalese family) – established a national network of temples, which shed their traditional preference for localized autonomy and financial self-sufficiency in exchange for coordinated collective action and to the emergence of a number of public intellectuals and religious leaders. Cognizant of the capacity of modern communication technologies to aid their cause,¹⁰ these Sinhalese Buddhist religious leaders diffused their message by using their newly built schools and the printing press to establish local chapters of supporters.¹¹ Quickly, religious processions and celebrations became opportunity structures for the mobilization of the Sinhalese by their religious figures.¹²

By demanding temperance, swabhasha,¹³ and the preferential treatment of Buddhism within Sri Lanka, the Buddhist Sinhalese revivalists were attempting to unite the Sinhalese who had been divided by the economic changes wrought by the British colonial experience.¹⁴ For the Buddhist Sinhalese revivalists, who were aided by the increasingly affluent Karava elites, the Anglicized Goyigama elites were not providing for their less well-off ethnic brethren.¹⁵ They utilized this incipient and centralized organization of nationwide mobilisational resources to increase their mobilisation capacity by advocating the break-down of Sinhalese caste barriers in order to create a common, inter-caste Sinhalese

Karunaratne and Sons, 1984), pp. 74–92; Bryan Pfaffenberger, *Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982).

⁷See Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka*, op. cit., p. 16; Sinnappah Arasatnam, ‘Sri Lanka’s Tamils under Colonial Rule’ in Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger (eds) *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 28–53.

⁸Additionally, the Buddhist temples, because of British reluctance, lacked formal property rights for their land holdings. See K.M. de Silva, *Reaping the Whirlwind: Ethnic Conflict, Ethnic Politics in Sri Lanka* (London: Penguin Publishing, 1988).

⁹See David Little, ‘Religion and Ethnicity in the Sri Lankan Civil War’ in Robert I. Rotberg (ed) *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), pp. 41–56.

¹⁰In many ways, the Sinhalese Buddhist revival leaders imitated the Christian missionary groups in their use of modern technology. See M. Roberts, ‘Language and National Identity: The Sinhalese and Others over the Centuries’, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 9:2 (2003), pp. 75–102.

¹¹By 1890 50 new schools had been built focusing on instruction in Sinhalese and religious teaching in Buddhism. Moreover, nearly 30 new monastic fraternities were established. See Kearney, *Communalism and Language*, op. cit., p. 43; M.M. Ames, ‘Westernization of Modernization: The Case of the Sinhalese Buddhism’, *Social Compass*, 20:2 (1973), pp. 139–170.

¹²See Michael Roberts, ‘Noise as Cultural Struggle: Tom-Tom Beating, the British, and Communal Disturbances in Sri Lanka, 1880s–1930s’ in Veena Das (ed) *Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford India Press, 1990), pp. 240–285.

¹³Swabhasha has been defined as vernacular language acquisition either in Tamil or Sinhalese.

¹⁴See Michael Roberts, ‘Stimulants and Ingredients in the Awakening of Latter-Day Nationalism’ in Michael Roberts (ed) *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume I* (Colombo: MARGA Institute, 1997), pp. 267–291.

¹⁵See T. Fernando, ‘Buddhist Leadership in the Nationalist Movement of Ceylon: The Role of the Temperance Campaign’, *Social Compass*, 20:2 (1973), pp. 333–336; Ganath Obeyesekere, ‘Sinhalese–Buddhist Identity in Ceylon’ in George de Vos and Lola Romanucci-Ross (eds) *Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 231–258; J.D. Rogers, ‘Social Mobility, Popular Ideology, and Collective Violence in Modern Sri Lanka’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 46:3 (1987), pp. 583–602.

Buddhist identity.¹⁶ In effect, they sought to rally the Sinhalese into an ethnic mobilization drive that sought to reduce intra-Sinhalese caste differences.

In contrast, the Tamil religious re-awakening process, led by Arumuka Navalar, was significantly less focused on ameliorating intra-Tamil caste inequality because it was traditionally dominant Vellalar caste, which had only become more dominant under the British.¹⁷ Unlike the Sinhalese, the Tamils created cultural associations without political overtones because the Vellalar Tamil leaders of these religious drives were far less interested in reducing caste inequalities within Tamil society.¹⁸ While they engaged in mass mobilization practices like the Sinhalese, the Tamils preserved the traditional caste system with its rigid hierarchy.¹⁹ As such, the Tamil religious re-awakening allowed for religious fractionalization: it was not frowned upon to be Tamil and Christian (or at least non-Hindu) to the same extent as it was among the Sinhalese (in terms of being Sinhalese and Christian).²⁰ In effect, while the Buddhist Sinhalese religious revival created a flatter mobilisational religious network than the Tamil one, it tolerated less intra-Sinhalese difference and sought to integrate religion and ethnicity in an exclusivist fashion. Conversely, while the Sinhalese religious revival created an independent set of mobilisational resources because of its opposition to the established Sinhalese political entrepreneurs,²¹ the Tamil religious networks were strongly integrated with the existing Tamil political entrepreneur, and as such, only further reinforced the strict social and political hierarchy within the Tamil community.²² While political formations like the Jaffna Youth Congress sought to ameliorate such intra-Tamil caste differences, they were not able to effectively incorporate the lower Tamil castes within the decision-making processes of the Tamil group.²³ As such, these Tamil caste differences, which were based on

¹⁶For Dharmapala only by focusing on these common religious and linguistic elements could there emerge a common Sinhalese identity. See R.A.L.H. Gunewardena, 'The People of the Lion: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography' in Social Scientists' Association (ed) *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists' Association, 1984), pp. 1–53; E. Nissan, 'History in the Making: Anuradhapura and the Sinhala Buddhist Nation' in H.L. Seneviratne (ed) *Identity, Consciousness and the Past: Forging of Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 23–41.

¹⁷The Tamil revivalist movement focused more on the creation of a unified linguistic practice and eschewed the creation and management of a grass-roots mobilization. See K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions*, op. cit., pp. 38–40; H.L. Seneviratne, 'Identity and the Conflation of Past and Present' in H.L. Seneviratne (ed) *Identity, Consciousness and the Past: Forging of Caste and Community in India and Sri Lanka* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 1–22.

¹⁸See K. Kailasapathy, 'Cultural and Linguistic Consciousness of the Tamil Community' in Social Scientists' Association (ed) *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Social Scientists' Association, 1984), pp. 107–120; Rohan Bastin, 'The Authentic Inner Life: Complicity and Resistance in the Tamil Hindu Revival' in Michael Roberts (ed) *Sri Lanka: Collective Identities Revisited, Volume I* (Colombo: MARGA Institute, 1997), pp. 385–438.

¹⁹See Karthigesu Sivathamby, *Sri Lanka Tamil Society and Politics* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1995).

²⁰Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, op. cit., p. 30. But that did not mean that Navalar was not concerned with Christian proselytization, especially in their English-medium schools. See Nira Wickramasinghe, *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 257; K. M. de Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1981), pp. 351–353.

²¹By political entrepreneur, I refer to a political actor who is willing to use social cleavages to advance his political organization. See David Laitin, 'National Revival and Violence', *Archives of European Sociology*, 36:1 (1995), pp. 3–43.

²²Throughout the 1870s and 1880s both Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan and his brother Sir Ponnambalam Arunachalam, the era's leading Tamil political entrepreneurs, financially aided the Navalar's religious revival movement. See Bastin, op. cit., p. 391. This was a symbiotic relationship since Navalar had been instrumental in the selection and election of Ponnambalam Ramanathan as the native representative in the 1879 Legislative Council Elections. See Kailasapathy, op. cit., p. 111.

²³See Wickramasinghe, op. cit., pp. 113–114; Rajan Hoole, Daya Somasundaram, K. Sritharan and Rajini Thiraganagama, *The Broken Palmyra: The Tamil Crisis in Sri Lanka (An Inside Account)* (Claremont: Sri Lanka Studies Institute, 1990), pp. 15–16.

economic factors, with the Vellalars being land-owners and the other castes engaged in economically-dependent, specialized occupations as well as social conditions, such as access to temples, clothing restrictions and upward social mobility, persisted.

From Religious Practices with Intra-ethnic Consequences to Political Mobilization with Inter-ethnic Effects

The consequences of this difference in intra-ethnic divisions which resulted from dominant religious practices became increasingly visible in the political arena of post-colonial Sri Lanka. While competing for leadership among the Sinhalese, Bandaranaike and his Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) was able to defeat the incumbent United National Party in the 1956 elections because of the support of the All-Ceylon Buddhist Congress (ACBC) and the Eksath Bhikkhu Peramuna (EBP or the United Front of Monks).²⁴ Organized nationally with local branches dispersed throughout the country, the monks held regular public meetings where they disseminated a combination of clear-cut and increasingly ethnically-exclusivist policy positions on education, language, religion, and culture.²⁵ To further diffuse their message, the Buddhist networks of temples and bhikkhus were instructed to distribute two pamphlets stressing the need for the Buddhist Sinhalese identity to become fully institutionalized within the Sri Lankan state.²⁶ Last, but not least, in order to further polarize the upcoming elections, the Buddhist priests and their affiliated lay organizations actively campaigned against the UNP in an extremely polarizing way that increasingly perceived the UNP as inherently as anti-Sinhalese and anti-Buddhist.²⁷

While the 1956 elections ushered an era of politicized Buddhism within the Sinhalese, they did not activate religious networks within the Tamils. Although the emerging Federal Party (FP) started building a grass-roots organizational component to its formal structures, it still remained concentrated in Jaffna because of the powerful networks of the Tamils employed in the public sector.²⁸ Even when the intra-Tamil partisan competition between the established Tamil Congress (TC) and the FP could have led to the mobilization of lower castes, continued caste hierarchies hampered attempts to build an organized network of mobilisational links in the Colombo-Jaffna-Batticaloa triangle. The continued domination of the Tamil mobilization by the Vellalar caste meant not only a reliance on the professional association networks of urban-based Tamils, but also an

²⁴Both groups, and especially the ACBC, acted as modern interest groups with regular agenda-setting meetings, a formal organizational structure and direct links to policy-makers. See W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 207–208; James Jupp, *Sri Lanka: Third World Democracy* (London: Frank Cass Publishing, 1978), p. 174.

²⁵See Jonathan Spencer, *A Sinhala Village in a Time of Trouble: Politics and Change in Rural Sri Lanka* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 81–82.

²⁶See D.C. Wijewardena, *The Revolt in the Temple, Composed to Commemorate 2500 Years of the Land, the Race and the Faith* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Sinha Publications, 1953); Buddhist Inquiry Committee, *The Betrayal of Buddhism* (Balangoda: Dharmavijaya Press, 1956).

²⁷The bhikkhus distributed pamphlets such as 'The Government and the Power of the Missionaries', 'The Government Cheated the Buddhists', 'The Government Sacrifices the Buddhists to the Christians'. See K.N.O. Dharmadasa, 'Buddhist Resurgence and Christian Privilege in Sri Lanka, c. 1940–1965' in K.M. de Silva (ed) *Ethnic Conflict in Buddhist Societies: Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1988), pp. 110–125; Jayadeva Uyangoda, 'A Political Culture of Conflict' in Robert I. Rotberg (ed) *Creating Peace in Sri Lanka: Civil War and Reconciliation* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1999), pp. 63–64. Wriggins had also shown how the UNP continued operating as an inter-ethnic, inter-faith political organization. See Wriggins, op. cit., p. 117.

²⁸See Ambalavanar Sivarajah, *Politics of Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1996).

unwillingness on the part of the FP and TC leaders to venture towards the predominantly rural-based lower castes.²⁹ The absence of an all-caste-encompassing religious network continued to marginalize the non-Vellalar Tamils within the Tamil ethnic mobilization drives. Even when such a network could have helped reduce inter-caste equality, the dominant Vellalar Tamil leaders sought to prevent it from actually emerging because of their concern for their ability to continue dominating the Tamil ethnic movement.

These inter-caste, intra-Tamil tensions came to the fore during the 1968 temple crisis. When temple officials refused to allow lower-caste Tamils to enter a Vellalar Jaffna temple, the Tamil youth leaders protested vociferously and contentiously, attacking both the UNP government and its FP coalition partner, because it had enabled Sinhalese political entrepreneurs, since the 1957 Prevention of Social Disabilities Act, to highlight intra-Tamil social divisions and caste stratification.³⁰ Confronted with increased intra-Tamil turmoil and UNP pressure to resolve the situation by granting access to the lower-caste Tamils, the FP leaders decided to leave the governing coalition rather than risk a confrontation with its Vellalar Tamil critical mass of supporters.³¹ By choosing defection from government, they were choosing an increasing level of reliance upon the Vellalar Jaffna-based Tamils. While the FP leaders realized that the continuation of a rigid caste hierarchy, which privileged one section of the Tamil population over another one, was not conducive to ethnic mobilization,³² they also realized that the incorporation of these lower-caste Tamils would require a major restructuring of established religious practices and social norms within Tamil society that would only reduce the social power of the traditionally dominant Vellalar Tamils. Unsurprisingly, this religiously-sanctioned caste hierarchy only increased solidarity among lower-caste Tamils, thus setting the stage for the formation of lower-caste-based political groups.

Intra-Tamil Caste Differences and the Formation of the LTTE

Unlike previous generations of marginalized lower-caste Tamils, the lower-caste Tamils of the late 1960s and early 1970s had better educational opportunities, especially in terms of higher education, and greater economic opportunities, especially because of the economic policies that the SLFP had implemented in the agricultural sector.³³ More politically aware and better equipped than their forefathers, they began to challenge the established Vellalar leaders within the FP and the TC. The formation of the Tamil Youth Front movement was instrumental in this evolution.³⁴ In the tradition of intra-ethnic bidding wars, these young Tamil political entrepreneurs targeted the existing FP and TC Tamil leaders, accusing them

²⁹See Wriggins, op. cit., p. 160; Wilson, *The Break-up of Sri Lanka*, op. cit., pp. 192–104; Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, *S.J.V. Chelvanayakam and the Crisis of Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism, 1947–1977* (London: Hurst, 1994), p. 132; Uyangoda, op. cit., p. 64.

³⁰See Vernon Abeysekera, *Images of Jaffna: A Government Agent's Recollections* (Colombo: Unigraphics, 1989), pp. 28–39.

³¹See K.M. de Silva, *Managing Ethnic Tensions*, op. cit., p. 219; Bryan Pfaffenberger, 'The Sri Lankan Tamils' in Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger (eds) *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

³²See Amita Shastri, 'Government Policy and the Ethnic Crisis in Sri Lanka' in Michael E. Brown and Sumit Ganguly (eds) *Government Policies and Ethnic Relations in Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 129–163.

³³See Hellmann-Rajanayagam, op. cit., p. 35.

³⁴The Tamil Youth Front was established by Tamil university hopefuls who were suffered from the early 1970s university admissions policies. See Rohan Gunaratna, *War and Peace in Sri Lanka (With a Post-Accord Report from Jaffna)* (Colombo: Institute of Fundamental Studies, 1987), pp. 18–19.

of under-performing in terms of their ability to represent Tamil interests.³⁵ Recognizing the inter-caste character of their membership base, the young Tamil political entrepreneurs deployed the organizational skills of the under-employed Tamil university graduates to mobilize their age cohort.³⁶ Driven by the changes to the university admissions processes, which disadvantaged Tamils in favour of the Sinhalese, these under-employed Tamil university students quickly found time to spread their views among their cohort.

However, these youth movements interacted with the stratified nature of the Tamil community to enable the emergence of radical, youth-led Tamil groups. These groups were particularly successful in combining the push factor of state response to youth mobilization with the pull factors of organized membership.³⁷ Having avoided the organizational mistakes of the previous Tamil ethnic collective action drives, they insisted upon relying upon the critical mass of under-employed educated Tamil youth and lower-caste rural peasants.³⁸ Indeed, the core membership group of what would soon become the LTTE was a group of young Karayar Tamils from the Valvettithurai part of the Jaffna Peninsula who had grown up together.³⁹ These Karayar youths combined access to the fishing communities of the Jaffna Peninsula, which were well-known for generating funding and logistical resources from smuggling, with limited reliance upon the Jaffna Vellalar for economic resources, thus being ideally situated to challenge their intra-ethnic rivals. Essentially all those parts of Tamil society who had been previously been under-utilized in Tamil ethnic mobilization drives. For these recruits, membership in these radical Tamil promised significantly increased opportunities for upward economic and social mobility within the context of a successful ethnic mobilization drive, even if that drive was based on violence.⁴⁰ While Vellalar Tamils, such as Uma Maheswaran joined the LTTE, it remained overwhelmingly Karayar in the pre-1983 era and often based on pre-existing social relationships.⁴¹

Veluppillai Prabhakaran, who founded the Tamil Nation Tigers in 1972 and emerged as the LTTE leader, realized the need for the pursuit of actions outside the realm of parliamentary politics.⁴² Given his bidding strategies vis-à-vis the TULF political entrepreneurs, the

³⁵See P. Kloos, 'Globalization and Localized Violence', *Folk*, 35:1 (1993), pp. 5–16.

³⁶See Nihal Perera, 'Colonialism and National Space: Representations of Sri Lanka' in Ian Watson and Siri Gamage (eds) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' or 'The Island of Tears'* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 23–48.

³⁷See Bose, op. cit., pp. 91–92.

³⁸Both of these two Tamil sub-groups demonstrated a high level of dense and socially-embedded networks. See J. Goodhand, D. Hulme and N. Lewer, 'Social Capital and the Political Economy of Violence: A Case Study of Sri Lanka', *Disasters*, 24:4 (2000), pp. 390–406; Bose, op. cit., p. 104; Pfaffenberger, op. cit., p. 11; Arasatnam, op. cit., pp. 39–40; Margaret Trawick, 'Reasons for Violence: A Preliminary Ethnographic Account of the LTTE' in Ian Watson and Siri Gamage (eds) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' or 'The Island of Tears'* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 139–163.

³⁹See Swamy, op. cit., pp. 25–26; Hellmann-Rajanayagam, op. cit., p. 36; Siri Hettige, 'Economic Liberalization, Social Class and Ethnicity: Emerging Trends and Conflicts' in Ian Watson and Siri Gamage (eds) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' or 'The Island of Tears'* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 299–323. Moreover, whether the Karayar Tamils were more lower-caste than the Vellalar Tamils has become part of an interesting historiographical project that has increased the Karayars' visibility within the Tamil tradition since so many LTTE leaders have been Karayar. See Wickramasinghe, op. cit., p. 261.

⁴⁰See Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson, 'Sri Lanka and its Future: Sinhalese versus Tamils' in Alfred Jeyaratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton (eds) *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration (Essays in Honor of W.H. Morris-Jones)* (London: C. Hurst, 1982), pp. 295–312.

⁴¹For example, Sathasivan Krishnakumar (Kittu) who served as military commander for Prabhakaran for nearly 20 years was his cousin. See Swamy, op. cit., pp. 25–26, 52–53; Hellmann-Rajanayagam, op. cit.; Asoka Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka: Terrorism, Ethnicity, Political Economy* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 67.

⁴²See Hellmann-Rajanayagam, op. cit., pp. 37–38; Purnaka de Silva, 'The Growth of Tamil Paramilitary Nationalisms: Sinhala Chauvinism and Tamil Responses' in Ian Watson and Siri Gamage (eds) *Conflict and Community in Contemporary Sri Lanka: 'Pearl of the Indian Ocean' or 'The Island of Tears'* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 89–107.

only way that he could entice the Tamil critical mass into supporting violent inter-ethnic conflict was through the elimination of all other options. Having already engaged in a series of localized, small-scale acts of violence, Prabhakaran used the LTTE for a campaign of intimidation and violence targeted at moderate and older Tamil political leaders, especially in Jaffna.⁴³ While these actions increased intra-Tamil uncertainty, forcing otherwise moderate Tamils to switch sides, they did not spark a large-scale inter-ethnic conflict. Prabhakaran needed to force Tamils into a situation where large-scale inter-ethnic conflict would be their only option. However, he also realized that he would need to push the UNP-controlled state to violent extremes as well.⁴⁴ Hence, between May 1976, when he founded the LTTE, and July 1983, when the mass conflict commenced, the LTTE had assassinated 50 police officers and Sri Lankan army servicemen, 11 Tamil politicians (which included four UNP parliamentary candidates and 5 UNP organizers), 13 police informants and 16 civilians. Moreover, the LTTE was responsible for 265 bombings, robberies and other criminal acts.⁴⁵

Ideological Differentiation and the Institutionalization of the LTTE

While the LTTE was competing with the traditional Tamil elites, a series of competing radical organizations had emerged: the Eelam Peoples' Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Peoples' Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE),⁴⁶ the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) and the Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS).⁴⁷ Led by better-educated and higher-caste Vellalar Tamils,⁴⁸ these competing organizations mixed revolutionary Marxist beliefs with a commitment to violence against the Sinhalese state. For the LTTE, they presented a problem to its left-wing with their commitment to radical income and land redistribution and a commitment to the use of violence in order to achieve their goals. Prabhakaran embarked on a series of decisions to deal with these problems.

Ideologically, in order to deal with the EPRLF, the PLOTE, and the TELO Prabhakaran developed a passionate commitment to secession and Tamil independence. This commitment essentially transformed the LTTE from a Marxist liberation movement into a

⁴³Starting with the assassination of the SLFP-backed Tamil Mayor of Jaffna, Alfred Duraiyappa, in August 1975, whom Prabhakaran killed as the leader of the TNT, the LTTE targeted local Tamil political entrepreneurs who did not accept its positions on Tamil nationalism. See R. Kearney, 'Language and the Rise of Tamil Separatism in Sri Lanka', *Asian Survey*, 18:5 (1978), pp. 521–534; P. de Silva, op. cit., p. 98; Swamy, op. cit., pp. 45–46.

⁴⁴See Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah *Sri Lanka: Ethnic fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 120. Moreover, the violent reaction by the UNP-controlled state would increase the Tamil ethnic group boundaries. See S. Hennayake, 'Interactive Ethnonationalism: An Alternative Explanation of Minority Ethnonationalism', *Political Geography*, 11:6 (1992), pp. 526–549.

⁴⁵See T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, *The Agony of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Swastika Press, 1983), pp. 30–42; R. Kearney, 'Ethnic Conflict and the Tamil Separatist Movement in Sri Lanka', *Asian Survey*, 25:9 (1985), pp. 898–917; Hoole et al., op. cit.; Kartigesu Sivathamby, *Sri Lanka Tamil Society and Politics* (Madras: New Century Book House, 1995), pp. 123–126; Gamini Samaranyake, 'Ethnic Conflict and Guerilla Warfare of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka' in Girin Phukon (ed) *Ethnicity and Polity in South Asia* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2002), pp. 149–169.

⁴⁶Uma Maheswaran was forced out of the LTTE and founded PLOTE. See Swamy, op. cit., p. 41; Wickramasinghe, op. cit., p. 283.

⁴⁷See D. Hellman-Rajanayagam, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism: the Sri Lanka Tamils in the late 19th Century: Some Theoretical Questions' in Diethelm Weidemann (ed) *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Political Development in South Asia* (New Delhi: Mahomar Publications, 1991), pp. 25–49.

⁴⁸For evidence on the Vellalar origins of these movements, see Hoole et al., op. cit., pp. 95–96; Wilson, *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism*, pp. 127–131; Wickramasinghe, op. cit., pp. 282–284.

nationalist movement that supported Marxist policies when it did not interfere with its commitment to an independent Tamil state.⁴⁹ Similarly, Prabhakaran increasingly rejected any and all ideas about reconciliation with the Sinhalese and refused to consider that the Sinhalese working classes could have a lot in common with the oppressed Tamils.⁵⁰ Unsurprisingly, this insistence on refining the Sinhalese other did not overlap with any of the Marxist groups which stressed the importance of class-based alliances across ethnic lines, sought to build links with ideologically-similar Sinhalese groups and perceived the situation as driven by a Marxist logic of class oppression rather than an ethnic logic of domination.⁵¹ Moreover, Prabhakaran rejected all other options as inherently traitorous which deserved to be dealt with in the most violent way possible, insisting in the LTTE's constitution to demand the death penalty on all those who would leave the organization and form their own groups.⁵² More importantly, Prabhakaran stressed how the LTTE would use armed struggle to create an independent and casteless Tamil state.⁵³ In effect, instead of negotiating, Prabhakaran set the LTTE upon a course of mass violence.

Tactically, Prabhakaran ordered an LTTE attack on an army convoy in July 1983.⁵⁴ Given the brazenness of the action and the possibility for a bidding war among Sinhalese politicians in terms of a response, any use of indiscriminate violence would lead Tamils into the arms of the LTTE. Not only would this attack rapidly increase the ranks of LTTE fighters, but it would also marginalize all other organized Tamil political parties. Moreover, this attack was the first palpable indication to the Sinhalese of the strength and organizational capacity of the LTTE: until then its Tamil victims had outnumbered its Sinhalese victims.⁵⁵ In essence, Prabhakaran was hoping for an indiscriminate response by the Sinhalese that would validate his ideological message of ethnic hatred towards the Sinhalese while undermining the rhetorical appeal of his intra-Tamil competitors who would appear as naive appeasers in the eyes of the Tamils.

State (In)Capacity and the Consolidation of the LTTE

The Sinhalese response to news of this attack sparked the beginning of the nearly 30-year ethnic conflict. Soon after the attack, coordinated, systematic and strategic Sinhalese attacks on the Tamils occurred in Colombo.⁵⁶ Using voter registration lists, the Sinhalese groups attacked Tamils in Colombo, often using their occupational situation and economic background as a selection mechanism.⁵⁷ Led by either local UNP political entrepreneurs or by

⁴⁹See Swamy, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵⁰See Lakshmanan Sabaratnam, *Ethnic Attachments in Sri Lanka: Social Change and Cultural Continuity* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 215.

⁵¹See S. Nadarajah and S. Dhananjayan, 'Liberation Struggle or Terrorism? The Politics of Naming the LTTE', *Third World Quarterly*, 26:1 (2005), pp. 87–100.

⁵²See Swamy, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵³See Swamy, op. cit., p. 59.

⁵⁴Even by then, the LTTE had approximately 30 operational military wing members in Jaffna. However, by July 1987, these numbers had increased to approximately 4,000 and by March 1990, the LTTE could claim over 10,000 military wing members. See Bose, op. cit., p. 87.

⁵⁵See Swamy, op. cit., p. 95.

⁵⁶See Spencer, 'Popular Perceptions of the Violence: A Provincial View' in James Manor (ed) *Sri Lanka in Change and Crisis* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 187–195, Valli Kanapathipillai, 'July 1983: The Survivor's Experience' in Veena Das (ed) *Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford India Press, 1990), pp. 321–344; T.D.S.A. Dissanayaka, *War or Peace in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Swastika Press (1995), pp. 32–54.

⁵⁷What appeared as mob-based riots, quickly became obvious as a coordinated and targeted destruction of property, especially in the retail and small-scale, labor-intensive industries. See Dissanayaka, *The Agony*, op. cit., pp. 77–81.

mid-level Sinhalese bureaucrats, the Sinhalese groups utilized state resources, often in the form of transportation, to attack the targeted Tamils.⁵⁸

Yet, these attacks did not resemble the random acts of violence that occurred in the 1958 riots. As such, they were not the spontaneous outbursts of ancient hatreds, of a primordially-determined form of long-standing inter-ethnic tensions that were finally coming to fruition. They were actively organized and implemented on the basis of attacking the Tamils' economic resources. These attacks were implemented by rank-and-file JSS members, coordinated by the UNP Minister of Industry Cyril Matthew, often targeting the properties of Colombo-area Tamil merchants.⁵⁹ Utilizing the threat of more LTTE attacks, the UNP political entrepreneurs inflamed their rank-and-file supporters with an acutely uncertain, but potentially disastrous, ethnic security dilemma.⁶⁰

The intra-UNP bidding wars for the succession of Jayawardene as party leader, which had involved a variety of UNP leaders, predetermined the strategic nature of the Sinhalese response.⁶¹ The intra-UNP political entrepreneurs with their support base among the Kandyan Sinhalese farmers and the urban small-scale entrepreneurs were dominating their more liberal-oriented intra-UNP competitors.⁶² Additionally, the increased intra-Sinhalese bidding wars, illustrated by the SLFP's insistence for even more violent measures against the Tamils, prevented Jayawardene from reacting in an autonomous fashion.⁶³

The need to placate these twin forms of Sinhalese political entrepreneur competition, meant the rapid spread of the Sinhalese attacks on the Tamils throughout the country: by July 27th, the ethnic attacks had spread from Colombo to Kandy and Trincomalee and by July 29th there were over 64,000 Tamils in Colombo-area refugee centres.⁶⁴ Again on that night, under the spreading of rumours about an imminent Tamil attack, there was another round of attacks.⁶⁵

Yet, what distinguished these riots from any other kind of inter-ethnic strife, which had occurred in the past, was, not only their ferocity, but also the role of the armed forces and of the police. Unlike in the 1958 riots, the armed forces and the police declined to intervene on the behalf of the Tamils, allowing the Sinhalese to engage in violent ethnic conflict.⁶⁶ Indeed, the official state reaction to these attacks, as voiced by Jayawardene himself on

⁵⁸See Hoole et al., op. cit., p. 64.

⁵⁹By 1983, Cyril Mathew had emerged as a strong contender for the succession of Jayawardene in any possible UNP leadership change. Utilizing his mobilization of the Colombo Sinhalese economically-disadvantaged lower *vahumpura* caste and of the small-scale Sinhalese retailers and entrepreneurs, he had built a powerful and organized base throughout Colombo. See J N. Gunasinghe, 'The Open Economy and its Impact on Ethnic Relations in Sri Lanka', *Lanka Guardian*, 6 (1994), pp. 6–17; Deshapriya, 'The Rise of New Sinhala Nationalism' in Kousar Azam (ed) *Ethnicity, Identity and the State in South Asia* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2001), pp. 146–163; Kenneth D. Bush, *The Intra-group Dimensions of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Learning to Read between the Lines* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 50; DeVotta, op. cit., p. 152.

⁶⁰By an ethnic security dilemma, I am referring to the possibility that if ethnic group members did not seek to defend themselves they could be experience severe losses at the hands of their ethnic competitors. See Barry Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival*, 35:1 (1993), pp. 27–47.

⁶¹See Meyer, op. cit., p. 143; Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Sri Lanka after Independence: Nationalism, Communalism and Nation Building* (Madras: University of Madras, 1986), p. 77.

⁶²This intra-UNP competition continued throughout the 1980s with the more interventionist wing of the UNP political entrepreneurs winning. See Hoole et al., op. cit., pp. 373–374.

⁶³See Wilson, op. cit., p. 143.

⁶⁴See Dissanayaka, op. cit., p. 90. Moreover, the attacks outside of Colombo followed the same pattern: Tamil businesses were targeted for looting and arson before attacks on persons were initiated. See O. Hollup, 'Ethnic Identity, Violence and the Estate Tamil Minority in Sri Lanka', *The Round Table*, 323 (1992), pp. 315–338.

⁶⁵For the diffusion of these rumors see Jonathan Spencer, 'Collective Violence and Everyday Practice in Sri Lanka', *Modern Asian Studies*, 24:3 (1990), pp. 618–619.

⁶⁶See Tambiah, op. cit., pp. 24–25; K.M. de Silva, op. cit., p. 191, p. 338.

July 28th, referred with sympathy to the Sinhalese actions, almost supporting them.⁶⁷ This acute ethnic security dilemma increased the rapid migration of Tamils from Colombo and other ethnically-mixed areas to Tamil-majority areas when nearly 100,000 out of the 162,000 Tamils living in Colombo and an additional 75,000 from other Southern provinces became internally-displaced refugees by the end of August 1983.⁶⁸

In effect, the Sinhalese attacks on the Tamils demonstrated the diminished capacity of the Sri Lankan state. Dominated by Sinhalese political elites who were attempting to out-bid each other in terms of the stringency of their response to the LTTE attacks, the Sri Lankan state apparatus failed to protect innocent Tamil civilians from attack. Unlike previous ethnic confrontations, in the July 1983 riots the Sri Lankan failed to impose law and order in an ethnically-blind fashion, thus increasing the chances that it would be perceived as an inherently anti-Tamil in the eyes of its Tamil citizens.

As such, the July 1983 riots led the Tamils to believe that the path towards ethnic conflict was paved with Sinhalese intentions.⁶⁹ Indeed, by August 1st the attacks had culminated in 471 deaths, nearly 8000 cases of arson, and nearly 3900 cases of looting with Colombo accounting for nearly half of all deaths, a third of all arson instances, and a third of all cases of looting. Subsequent to the movement of the Tamils into the refugee camps of the Eastern and Northern Provinces, the number of LTTE recruits increased sharply.⁷⁰ Aided by the territorial concentration of the refugee Tamils and supported by their extensive mobilisational resources in those areas, the LTTE political entrepreneurs quickly tied any opportunity for upward economic mobility to LTTE membership, incessantly campaigning for the affections of the displaced and impoverished Tamils.⁷¹

In order to deal with this influx of new recruits, Prabhakaran transformed the LTTE from a politico-military organization into an increasingly military organization.⁷² In effect, within 10 years, Prabhakaran had transformed the LTTE from a small band of personal friends from similar lower-caste backgrounds into an increasingly organized, professional guerrilla force. Indeed, Prabhakaran was able to use Tamil cultural traditions to achieve these goals. He made the LTTE fighters commit to the infamous cyanide oath, but he also forbade them from having any other occupation, thus treating them as professional warriors.⁷³ He commenced a particularly effective tradition of public venerating fallen heroes that harkened to earlier traditions of Tamil heroism.⁷⁴ He used the Tiger symbols of the Chola kings to highlight the long history of Tamil military prowess.⁷⁵

⁶⁷In his televised address to the nation Jayawardene followed his intra-UNP Sinhalese rival political entrepreneurs in laying the blame for the riots upon the Tamils. See Nissan, op. cit., p. 178; DeVotta, op. cit., p. 65. These comments echoed earlier comments on July 11 when Jayawardene had stressed how the opinions of the Tamil did not matter to him as long as the LTTE attacks persisted. As he vividly stated, 'we [the UNP] cannot think of them [the Tamils]. . . You cannot cure an appendix patient until you remove the appendix'. Cited in Virginia Leary, *Ethnic Conflict and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Geneva: International Commission of Jurists, 1983).

⁶⁸See Edgar O'Balance, *The Cyanide War: Tamil Insurrection in Sri Lanka, 1973–1988* (London: Brassey's Publishers, 1989), p. 26; Sunil Bastian, 'Political Economy of Ethnic Violence in Sri Lanka: The July 1983' in Veena Das (ed) *Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford India Press, 1990), pp. 286–304.

⁶⁹See Dissanayaka, *The Agony*, op. cit., p. 93.

⁷⁰See Hellman-Rajanayagam, op. cit., p. 175; Swamy, op. cit., p. 185.

⁷¹See Hoole et al., op. cit., pp. 77–78; Bose, op. cit., p. 96.

⁷²In Jayatilleka's apt conceptualization, Prabhakaran was attempting to create a 'Tamil Sparta'. See D. Jayatilleka, 'Sri Lanka's Separatist Conflict: The Sources of Intractability', *Ethnic Studies Report*, 19:2 (2001), pp. 207–226.

⁷³See Wickramasinghe, op. cit., p. 300.

⁷⁴See Michael Roberts, 'Tamil Tiger "Martyrs": Regenerating Divine Potency?', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28:3 (2005), pp. 493–514.

⁷⁵See V. Nithi Nithiyandam, 'Changing Scenarios of Tamilian Culture: Some Thoughts on the Cultural Dimensions of the Ethnic War in Sri Lanka', *Asian Ethnicity*, 2:1 (2001), pp. 35–54.

Finally, in order to deal with his critical mass of lower-caste, under-educated, un-skilled and young supporters, he made their commitment to the cause and its corollary use of violence their only option for upward social and economic mobility. After the onset of violent ethnic conflict with the Sinhalese state and the other Tamil organizations, the LTTE rank-and-file realized that only through the successful culmination of the secessionist conflict would be able to achieve what they had originally signed up for: social equality with the higher-caste Vellalar Jaffna Tamils and access to economic opportunities within a Tamil-majority state, which meant control over the Eastern Province within an independent Tamil state.⁷⁶ As such, they followed him into conflict with the Sri Lankan state, never questioning his methods because, unlike a significant percentage Vellalar recruits who had returned to their university studies or sought refuge abroad by 1985.⁷⁷ Indeed, by the mid-1980s, the LTTE leadership had effectively become overwhelmingly Karayar, as it had started.⁷⁸

And herein laid the powerfully legitimizing combination of ideology and violence that Prabhakaran and the LTTE had accomplished over significant elements of the Tamil population. The LTTE's demands for independence were based on their suspicion of Sinhalese motives, which had been vividly demonstrated, to all Tamils, during the July 1983 riots. Their demands for exclusive control over the Tamil ethnic movement had been vindicated because of the ineffectiveness of the traditional Tamil political elites, ensconced within the TULF, to accomplish any meaningful concessions from the Sinhalese despite decades of parliamentary negotiations. Moreover, the July 1983 riots, had shown to the lower-caste Tamils that their traditional Vellalar leaders could not protect them from Sinhalese violence. Similarly, the naiveté of the Marxist movements had been illustrated by the unwillingness of the Sinhalese left to actively condemn the July 1983 riots. Additionally, for the LTTE and Prabhakaran, the events of July 1983 showed that only an independent Tamil Eelam could protect Tamils from Sinhalese violence. Last, but not least, the violence that accompanied the July 1983 riots, demonstrated vividly the need for violence that Prabhakaran and the LTTE had been actively preaching for nearly 10 years.

Conclusion

Despite the structural and institutional arguments that have been used in the literature, the formation, institutionalization and consolidation of the LTTE was not a foregone conclusion. Rather, as I have attempted to show, it was the result of a series of contingencies that have illustrated the critical role that religion and ideology can play in this process.

While the nineteenth century Tamil religious re-awakening did not lead to a particularly closed doctrinal set of restrictions upon lower-caste Tamils, it did lead to a particularly closed set of religious practices. These religious practices solidified the social, economic and political privileges of the Jaffna-based Vellalars over their lower-caste ethnic brethren. Even when partisan competition demanded mass political mobilization, the Vellalar Tamil leaders sought to minimize the political mobilization of their lower-caste brethren, lest they upset Vellalar dominance. Even when the Sinhalization of politics was becoming obvious, the rigidity of organized Tamil religious practices prevented the flexible adjustment of its practices and norms. Such rigidity increased the awareness of the Tamil lower castes and essentially formed the social networks upon which the LTTE was based. In essence,

⁷⁶See Hellman-Rajanayagam, *op. cit.*, pp. 617–618.

⁷⁷See Hoole et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 77–78.

⁷⁸See Michael Roberts, 'Caste in Modern Sri Lankan Politics – II', *The Island*, 2010, <http://www.island.lk/2010/02/26/features4.html>.

Tamil religious practices led to the social marginalization and political exclusion of the lower castes which only increased their belief in their common goals outside the existing and Vellalar-dominated Tamil political parties.

Founded by lower-caste Tamils from the rural parts of the Northern Province, the LTTE achieved its institutionalization with an ideological platform that stressed the re-ordering of existing caste hierarchies within an independent Tamil state. Such an ideological platform was both radical and nationalist and unique among the traditional Tamil political parties and among the competing Tamil revolutionary groups. It was radical because it sought to achieve a fully independent Tamil state, thus increasing Sinhalese anxieties about the territorial integrity of the Sri Lankan state, and because it wanted to fundamentally change Tamil society. It was unique because it rejected the institutional and political solutions that the traditional Tamil parties espoused in favor of violent struggle and it was unique, among the Tamil revolutionary groups, because it rejected any form of compromise, even with revolutionary Sinhalese groups such as the JVP.

But, save for the decreased state capacity of the Sri Lankan state, it would not have been able to consolidate its power and assume leadership of the Tamil ethnic mobilization drive. Indeed, the LTTE's consolidation of control over the Tamil group is a testament to the critical role that state capacity plays in the early stages of ethnic conflict. If the Sri Lankan state had not been so indiscriminate in its reaction to the July 1983 LTTE ambush, the July 1983 riots could have resembled the 1958 riots. Yet, the intra-Sinhalese partisan bidding wars did not allow such restraint because by 1983 the Sri Lankan state had become the source of resources and material benefits that the Sinhalese political leaders used in order to placate their Sinhalese voters. Consequently, any attempt by an incumbent Sinhalese political leader to impose an ethnically-blind rule of law would have been immediately attacked by an opposition Sinhalese political leader as a form of appeasement, as the events of July 1983 aptly demonstrated. Such a reduced level of state capacity meant that the ideological claims of the LTTE, about the Sri Lankan state and the Tamils' future within it, rang true in the minds of their Tamil audience members.

Notes on Contributor

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