Dreaming Mutton Rolls, Drinking *Kanji*: Foodscapes and Life Writing of War, Hunger, and Resilience

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Abstract

This dissertation examines Tamil narratives of starvation, resilience, and food memories in life writing during the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. Existing research has focused on the destruction of food systems, humanitarian intervention, and food insecurity. Studies on foodways, food trauma, and gustatory memories in rebel territory, however, are scarce. This dissertation addresses some of these limitations by examining the lived experiences of food anxiety and violence in Tamil writings from Sri Lanka. The approach takes measures to translate, for English readers, forms of lesser-known life writing.

Mutton rolls are comforting Sri Lankan spicy snacks. *Kanji* is rice cooked in salt and water, which became the sole sustenance during the final war in Mullivaikal. The personal narratives of violence juxtapose the sensory memories of imaginary mutton rolls with the actuality of *kanji*.

Drawing upon Tamil literary works, colonial accounts, news clips, social media posts, and rebel publications, the study sheds light on experiences of wartime food vulnerabilities. This approach brings literary texts such as Nillanthan's poetry anthology, *Yugamudivum Pinnarum* (End of an Age and After), and Thamizhini's memoir, *Oru Koorvalin Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of a Sword) alongside rebel publications such as *Aathaaram* (Resource) and local food practices to examine the everyday life in a warzone.

Chapter One outlines the interdisciplinary approach to foodways and war using the fields of food studies, life writing, gender studies, and memory studies concerning postcolonial Sri Lanka. Chapter Two analyzes the life writing of rebel fighters to reveal the intersections of gender, food work, and combat. Chapter Three examines the way the political death-fasting shapes a collective identity through affect. Chapter Four

conceptualizes LTTE publications on foodways as “food narratives for life” since the armed group regulates bodies to create alternate identities outside the state. Chapter Five explores the war’s end in relation to feminist geographies of food deprivation. Additionally, the chapter reads Nillanthan’s poems of resistance as “recipe-life narratives.”

In sum, this dissertation concludes that gendered alimentary life narratives of insurgents, civilians, and rebel foodways writing provide nuanced understandings of famines, food provisioning, Indigenous knowledge, and the materialities of food, body, and consumption.

To my amma

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Timeline

The political timeline is provided in black. The period of the texts examined for this research is provided in chronological order in green.

1948	Sri Lanka becomes an independent country.
1956	The "Sinhala Only Act" (Official Language Act, No. 33 of 1956) is passed. It limits employment and educational opportunities for Tamils. The first anti-Tamil riot breaks out in Gal Oya, Eastern province. About 150 Tamils are killed.
1958	Anti-Tamil riots break out, in which more than 300 Tamils are killed. Tamils are chased away from the south of the island to the north.
1960-2002	*Pachaivayal Kanavu* (The Dream of Green Fields)
1965-1977	*Akaalam* (Ill-Timed)
1972	Ceylon is renamed the Republic of Sri Lanka, with Buddhism recognized as the official religion.
1975	Velupillai Prabhakaran founds the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).
1976-1981	*Eela Porattathil Enathu Pathivukal Pirapakarnodu Pulikal Amaippai Aramapiththa Naatkal* (My Account of the Eelam Struggle: The Founding of the Tigers Movement with Prabhakaran)
1977	Another anti-Tamil riot breaks out, killing more than 300 Tamils.
1981	The prestigious historical Jaffna Public Library, which housed a vast collection of palm scripts and rare books, is burned down by state-backed mobs.
1983-1986	*Sothu Parcel* (Rice Parcel)
1983	A Tamil pogrom known as Black July begins, in which thousands of Tamils are killed, displaced, and become refugees.
1983-2001	*Ayutha Ezuthu* (Weapon Writing)
1985	First set of talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE takes place in Thimpu, Bhutan.
1985	*Namathu Poulaathaaram* (Our Economy)
1987	The Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord is signed by Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene and Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) arrives on the north and the east of the island.
1990 March	India withdraws the IPKF and the LTTE takes control of Jaffna.
1990-1995	*Aathaaram* (Resource)
1991 May	Rajiv Gandhi is killed by a Tiger suicide bomber.
1992	*Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum* (Food Requirement and Production Goals)

1993 May	President Premadasa is killed by a Tiger suicide bomber.
1993-2002	*Appal Oru Nilam* (The Faraway Land)
1995	Peace talks between President Chandrika Kumaratunga and the Tigers fail.
	The LTTE loses control of Jaffna in Operation Leap Forward.
	The LTTE reaches Vanni and establishes Kilinochi as their headquarters.
1995-2003	*Vizhuthaki Verumaki* (Becoming Prop Roots and Roots)
1995-2003	*Malaimakal Kathaikal* (Stories of Malaimakal)
	About half a million people are forced to move with them into Vanni.
1996 to 2002	A period in which the Sri Lanka Army (SLA) and the LTTE engage in a series of offences and defences.
2002	The LTTE and the government sign a ceasefire pact with Norway's intervention. Peace talks begin between the two warring parties.
2002-2015	*Oru Koorvalin Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of a Sword)
2003	The LTTE pulls back from the talks. The ceasefire continues.
2004	The Tiger commander in Eastern Sri Lanka splits from the LTTE with a faction. A tsunami kills about 10,000 people.
2005	Mahinda Rajapaksa becomes the president.
2006	The LTTE blocks the sluice-gates of Mavil Aru, and the SLA offensive begins in eastern Sri Lanka.
2007	Fighting begins in the north.
2008	A mass military offensive begins as the government pulls out of the peace talks.
2008-2009	*Oozhikaalam* (Time of Deluge)
2009	The president takes over the Media Ministry.
	A final UN food convoy reaches the north.
	The SLA captures the A9 highway.
	From January to May, the villages of Tharmapuram, Mullaitivu, Visuwamadu, Puthukudiyiruppu, and Vellamullivaykal are captured one by one by the SLA.
2009	*Yugamudivum Pinnarum* (End of an Age and After)
2009, 18 May	The last village, Karaimullivaykal, is captured and Prabhakaran is killed.

List of Abbreviations

EROS: Eelam Revolution Organization of Students
EPRLF: Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
TELO: The Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization
IPKF: Indian Peace Keeping Force
LTTE: Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
PLOTE: People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam
SLA: Sri Lanka Army
UF: United Front

List of Important Tamil and Sinhala Terms

Brahmacharya: Ascetic way of life characterized by sexual abstinence.
Biriyani: Aromatic rice dish usually cooked with layered meat, ghee, and spices.
Chithirai kanji: Rice gruel made with coconut milk, spices, onions, and green chillies for the Chithirai festival.
Chithirai paruvam: The festival of the full moon day in the month of April.
Idiyappam: Rice flour noodles made in the shape of a disc and then steamed.
Ilaikanji: Rice boiled in excess water and mixed with greens and spices.
Irandam paal: Milk extracted from coconut by adding water to the shredded coconut, usually done following the extraction of undiluted milk.
Kanji: Rice boiled in excess water with salt or milk with sugar.
Kanjikottil: Rice gruel shelters managed to provide *kanji*, used usually during famine, natural disaster, or war.
Kavady: A religious practice of fasting in the Tamil month of Thai (January to February). It culminates by carrying across the shoulders a long bar with two pieces of wood or steel attached to it.
Kozhipukkai: Rice dish prepared with chicken and a blend of spices.
Mavirar thuyilum illam: Cemetery of the LTTE rebels.
Muchuttai: Medicinal plant used in Tamil cuisine. Botanical name: *Rivea hypocrateriformis.*
Muthal paal: Milk extracted from shredded coconut without water.
Muunram paal: Milk extracted for the third time, adding more water to the shredded coconut.
Natukal: The cultural practice of the planting of a stone in the memory of a dead warrior for worship by ancient Tamils.
Nithyakalyani: A perennial flowering plant used in traditional Indian medicine. Botanical term: *Catharanthus roseus.*
Paal kanji: *Kanji* made with coconut milk and sometimes mixed with lentils.
Paravai or thooku kavady: A ritual in which the back of the devotee is pierced, and the devotee hangs like a bird suspended from a canopy decorated with flowers.
Pongal: Harvest festival celebrated by Tamils in the month of January; a sweet dish made with rice, lentils, coconut milk, jaggery, and ghee on that day.
Puli kanji: *Kanji* made with tamarind extract, seafood or vegetables, and spices.
Pulisatham: Rice prepared with tamarind pulp and a blend of spices. A culinary tradition of South India and northern Sri Lanka.
Prayopavesa: A practice of fasting to death in Hinduism. Generally observed when an individual has no more desire and responsibilities.
Purananuru: One of the eight anthologies of classical Tamil poetry.
Puttu: Steamed rice flour layered with coconut usually in cylindrical forms.
Rolls: Breaded cylindrical cutlets usually stuffed with mutton.
Sallekhana: A voluntary practice of fasting until death in Jainism.
Suthanthira Paravaikal (Birds of Freedom): The LTTE's women's wing and publication.
Thaathu varuda pancham: The great famine of 1876-1878, also known as the Madras Famine of 1877, which affected British colonies in South Asia. About 8.2 million people died of hunger during this time.
Unnanonpu: Hunger fast.
Uppu kanji or kanji thanni: *Kanji* made with excess salt and water and devoid of spices.

Uyirveli: A fence made of medicinal and edible plants that surrounds the house.
Vadai: Fried lentil fritters.
Vadakkiruthal: A practice in early Tamil culture exclusive to men in which the individual sits facing the north and starves himself to death.
Vap Magul: A Buddhist farming festival in which the king enters the paddy field with the plough to mark the beginning of the agricultural cycle.
Viththudal (seed body): A phrase coined by the LTTE to refer to the dead bodies of the rebel fighters.

Chapter One:

Introduction

In a recent court argument in Sri Lanka, while requesting that the events of the annual war commemoration held by the Tamil public be restricted, the Sinhala police chief of Jaffna stated, "By ending the war, we introduced pizza to the people of the north, who have been eating *puttu, vadai,* and rice."[1] The chief's insensitive argument against the memorialization intertwines food, memory, identity, trauma, and globalization with the context of civil war—the contours of which this dissertation unveils. I theorize that food—in particular, its production and consumption—becomes a site for narrativizing displacement, resistance, and trauma in a postcolonial context, for the process of reconstituting identity, especially a national identity through memory.

I analyze literary works produced under the extraordinary circumstances of protracted civil war in Sri Lanka through a culinary lens, probing gendered foodscapes, including the growing, procuring, preparing, and consuming of food. My primary sources are narratives of Tamil militants and civilians and the accounts in rebel publications, of which I focus on how the authors write about food. Through a close examination of various literary forms in Tamil texts, this dissertation interrogates how memories of dietary practices and food production and preparation connect life with state violence, trauma, memory, and displacement. I argue that the kitchen space and its related activities in the conflict zone are mediated by multiple forms of resistance, creativity, and subjectivity, as well as embodied gender experiences. Thus, the framework of this dissertation touches upon several disciplines—food studies, memory studies, body, gender, and subalternity—which reconfigure postcolonial studies. I

draw upon particular threads from the aforementioned fields and treat them as a form of life writing. Tracing these connecting threads through the culinary narratives of Tamil writings, this dissertation aims to make an important contribution to the complex study of conflict, food, body, memory, and gender in the context of Sri Lanka. Along with the literary narratives, I also consider personal narratives in social media, news clips, recipe-poetry, and the starving body that emphasize foodways, hunger, and culinary memories. Analyses of these varied primary sources as a collective body of life writing make this study significant.

1. Context of the Study: Food and Conflict

Food is closely linked to a community's culture, memory, identity, and ecology. It connects with the body and the senses, symbolically, materially, and socially; its production and consumption are etched in the bodies of everyday lives, labour, relationships, and transactions. I borrow the term *foodscape* from Gisèle Yasmeen, who was one of the first to propose the concept to "describe a complementary representation of foodways and place" (1996, 44). Her conceptual framework of foodscape is crucial for my study since this research is rooted in the narratives and memories of local food and farming practices of war-ravaged northern Sri Lanka.

In their introduction, the authors of the canonical *Food and Culture: A Reader* introduce food studies as an interdisciplinary study that explores the linkages between biology and culture, individual and community, and local and global, as that which "resists separating biological from cultural, individual from society and local from global culture" (Counihan and Van Esterik 2018, 1). Building on the structuralist works of Mary Douglas

(1972, 1984) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), Carol Counihan and Penny Van Esterik were instrumental in shaping the field of food studies that has now been established as bridging pedagogy, creativity, everyday experiences, gender, and more. Food studies has largely benefited from interdisciplinary sociological and anthropological approaches. Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power* (1986), Barthes's semiotic approach (1997), and Bourdieu's approach to class and taste (1984) are, for instance, foundational texts that touch upon politics, culture, and communication. The field encompasses food research in the myriad ways food production, circulation (Gabaccia 1998; Ray 2004; Ray and Srinivas 2012; Epp 2023), and consumption are interwoven with the histories and migrations of humans, plants, and animals (Turner 2004; Pilcher ed. 2012; Albala 2013; Pilcher 2023); Indigeneity and lived experiences (Shiva 2020; Antonelli 2022); and memories (Holtzman 2006; Sutton 2001, 2008; Abarca and Colby 2016).[2]

The "Proust effect" defines the memory of taste and smell as a reflex of the past (Green et al. 2023, 1-6). Memory, however, is not the only faculty to narrativize experiences of food and food deprivation. A simple online search using the phrase *food and conflict* generates references to scholarly works on hunger, food insecurity, farmland loss, the reduction of farming populations, the nonexistence of food markets, the disruption of food supplies, rebel governance, food aid, scarcity, repetitive foods, famine, and the destruction of food systems. While much of existing research focuses on starvation, humanitarian intervention, and data on food insecurity,[3] few more focus on food governance and everyday food control by armed groups in conflict-ridden regions.[4] Research on the cultural aspects of

food in a war zone, resilience, and the meaning of food have begun to appear more recently (Das 1991; Mookherjee 2015; Dossa 2014; Katto 2020).

The general contention within the field of food studies is that topics such as food scarcity, food consumption and production, and sustainable agriculture require sociological, anthropological, historical, and cultural application often supported by empirical values (Rahman 2022, 4). Literature, alternatively, is a product of fiction and distanced from ethnographic approach (5). As Tigner and Caruth note, "works of literature interact with food in various stages—agricultural, culinary and alimentary—they often traverse the boundaries between the intimate and the social as well as the microscopic and the planetary, the capacity that arguably defines the literary" (2018, 1). Literature in its myriad forms—poetry, memoir, fiction and autofiction, life writing, and testimony—serves as an archive of the alimentary.

Wars and ethnic conflicts compounded by food scarcities[5] produce various literary forms to record the experiences of survival. Life writing on conflict is thickly intertwined with food, which is often used as a weapon in combat regions.[6] A study of the narratives from conflict zones reveals the intricacies of the lives of commoners and armed insurgents alike. Food memories shared within them highlight the corporeal ties to meals since the body is the primary space where violence manifests, through wounds, mutilation, starvation, hunger, taste, and death. Labelling the food-life stories of Jaffna women survivors of the war "gastro-testimonials," Mehta notes that food enables the women to narrate their inner lives of pain and strength in open space through their "cooking against war" (2022, 147).

Despite the existence of scholarly works on the literary approach to food, "literary food studies" is far from being mainstream within the field (Rahman 2022, 5).[7] Writing about food provides a means to record the everyday effects of violence. Accordingly, my dissertation looks at the lived experiences of a marginalized group amid a civil war through the lens of food as narrated in life writings, social media, newspaper articles, and the publications of insurgent movements. The insurgent publications, often termed *propaganda material*, focus on food production and consumption in the context of nationalism and combat. The food goals set in such publications are juxtaposed with counter-narratives from news clips and fiction. Arguing that food is not a mere study of data on health, Barthes asserts "when he buys an item of food, consumes it or serves it, modern man does not manipulate a simple object in a purely transitive fashion; this item of food sums up and transmits a situation; it constitutes an information; it signifies… the functional unit of a system of communication" (2018, 14).

I approach the everyday life experience in a war zone within the framework of foodways as a communicative device. I have selected such narratives for their immersive reflection on the culinary culture, food insecurity, starvation, and taste memory during the war. I want to add the vast collection and myriad forms of personal narratives by civilians and combatants as well as propaganda material by the rebel groups to the growing research in conflict regions. My approach aims to combine the literary and humanities approach to food and provide a nuanced understanding of foodways narratives. My attempt, by including a large pool of writing, moves beyond sociological and anthropological approaches to food studies and is not confined to literature. The method unearths culture, human emotions, and

experiences surrounding wartime foodways and survival and is not limited to the tangible evidences of data.

2. Methodology and Framework

This dissertation makes use of memoirs, biographies, poetry, fiction, blogs, social media, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) publications, and news articles as forms of life writing to analyze experiences of starvation, hunger strikes, and the collective memory of violence recorded through food. Using life writing, the research traces the armed conflict from its beginnings in 1983 until the final war in 2009 through food production, distribution, and consumption. When English translations are not available, I have translated from the original Tamil writings. This dissertation takes measures to translate, for English readers, forms of life writing that reveal the experiences of food and hunger among rebel fighters and the LTTE documents during the civil war.

The approach undertaken for this dissertation is interdisciplinary, which creates a unique framework to study the everyday life of civilians and combatants in Sri Lanka's conflict zone. The framework uses the study of foodways to analyze life writing that emerged from the complexities of a prolonged civil war. While life writing and foodways are the overarching fields, my research draws on postcolonial studies, memory studies, affect and body studies, and gender studies to explicate the food experiences of a marginalized group. This approach combines these distinct components and builds upon the existing scholarly works in the corresponding disciplines. This approach accentuates stories of resistance, resourcefulness, and survival through the mapping of foodways.

My study draws on the colonial and postcolonial histories of food economy to elucidate the Sri Lankan state's Sinhala nationalist agendas and the subaltern struggle for Tamil nationalism. I use theories of affect, the body, gender, and memory to interrogate the multiple complexities of food, subjectivity, and resilience in the face of violence. The study extracts notions of war masculinities and farming masculinities from the works of Jellison (2018), Eichler (2014), and Enloe (2000) to highlight the way the two are combined to build Tamil nationalism. Gendered gustatory knowledge and resourcefulness as discussed by Gvion (2006) and rural agricultural experiences of women are used to study the personal narratives of female combatants and victims.

The research also analyzes archival materials of the LTTE and draws on the concepts of rebel governance combined with culinary nationalism alongside the narrative voices of civilians. It uses Foucault's perspectives of food provisioning in biopolitics (2007) to examine the way food was used as a weapon in the prolonged war. This lens is also applied to study the nationalist narratives in the LTTE publications that advocate sustainable farming, self-sufficiency, and natural farming to survive the state's embargos and disrupted food supplies.

Discussion on food stress and food suffering, self-inflicted or externally imposed—an emotional and physical condition—is interwoven throughout the chapters. Although I do not delve into the theoretical aspect of trauma as a framework, I look at *food trauma*, a term I borrow from Holyck Hunchuck, who defines it as "the enduring physical and psychological

injury resulting from food deprivation" (2012, 140). The term yokes the physical suffering due to lack of food with the memories of such loss of food. The phrase identifies the close association between the body and mind. Epp argues that food memories are "intensely felt in the body, even while expressed by mouth or by pen" (2016, 371).

The dissertation looks at affect and body theories to illuminate the way the body is construed as an agent of resilience through cooking, farming, as well as remembering and consuming food. Alongside those theories, I use the Tamil sense of fasting and politics in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I use poems from classical Tamil literature and the Tamil concept of *thinai* (landscape and ecology) to explicate my arguments on Indigenous food knowledge systems. Colonial and postcolonial histories of cash crops and starvation are also interwoven into the discussion. A combination of theories, history, culture, and knowledge from classical literature are employed to study starvation, resilient foodways, alimentary memories, and violence by focusing on the culinary scape and writing.

3. Translation, Cooking, and Food

As I translate life writing on memories of food and hunger, I steam *puttu* and make *kuzhambu* and *poriyal*, some of the foods discussed in these chapters. The act of cooking is an embodied translation of recipes—not only from printed cookbooks but also from memorized recipes. As an Indian Tamil, who shares food similarities with Sri Lankan Tamils, I note that there are also differences. For instance, in Tamilnadu, *puttu* is usually a home-cooked meal served with sugar and ghee or sometimes with sugar and banana. It is usually sweet. Only after my marriage to a Tamil Canadian family did I discover the range of

curries eaten with *puttu* in Sri Lankan cuisine. Since here *puttu* is an everyday staple, unlike Tamil food in India, learning to make it was an important part of my identity as a wife of a Tamil from Sri Lanka. Despite the fact that numerous recipes exist, to prepare the *puttu* flour one has to rely on embodied memory: the memory of the right amount of moisture, the texture of the flour when mixed with hot water, the feel of the granules in the fingers, and the smell of the steamed flour to know when to stop steaming. For an outsider, all of these rely on remembering what the steamed *puttu* looks and tastes like. If translation is an act of intimacy toward the text, as argued by Spivak (2012, 398), cooking is a translation act of bodily intimacy with the food in the text and in memory.

Whether what is being cooked is from a printed or remembered recipe, it is the familiarity of the senses that the cook relies on to test their translation of the original; the original here is the memory of texture, taste, colour, and flavour. Only translators know if their translation holds fidelity to the original since the original exists only in their mind. Cooking is thus a corporeal translation of the memory of methods and senses. Where traditional translations have moved away from the body, cooking as figurative translation brings the body and the mind together.

4. Historical Context

The following sections aim to provide a glimpse of Sri Lanka's colonial past, plantation history, famines, food shortages, and their connection to the ethnic conflict. It then traces the way the ethnic crisis descended into a more than thirty-year civil war that devastated Tamil communities on the island, especially in the north and the east. Due to the

limitation of the scope of this dissertation I have concentrated on the north, the Jaffna Peninsula, and Vanni, the LTTE stronghold until 2009.

4.1 Cash Crops and Farmlands: The Violent History of Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a country with many ethnicities, the majority being Sinhala-speaking Buddhists. The minorities comprise the Indigenous Veddas, Tamils, and Muslims in the north and the east of the island; Tamils who came as plantation workers in the hilly regions of the central island during the British rule; and Burghers, who are descendants of the Dutch, Portuguese, and the British. In the sixteenth century, Sri Lanka was colonized by the Dutch, followed by the Portuguese, and then it came under British rule until it became an independent country in 1948.

Sri Lanka's colonial encounters underpinned the country as the exotic land of spices and its plantation economy. The country's birth of Sinhala nationalist identity that eventually descended into armed ethnic struggle has its roots in the colonial history. De Silva underlines the significance of the spice trade as follows: "the one product that brought most of the Europeans to Sri Lanka was unquestionably cinnamon" (1993, 82).

Cinnamon was exchanged for rice in cargo ships from the ports of Nagapattinam in southern India (Stephen 2009, 124). Because of the huge revenue derived from cinnamon, it was planted and cultivated in larger farm areas by the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch and then the English in Nigambo and Kandy; and the monopoly ruled until cinnamon was replaced by cassia in the 1830s (Capper 1846, 377). Patches of land in which cinnamon was

planted were abandoned and finally sold to various owners in British Ceylon (Wikramasinghe and Cameron 2005). The new owners destroyed the bush and replaced it with coffee. Coffee, however, failed in the 1880s due to coffee leaf disease and was replaced by tea in the 1890s, which flourished with the labour of the coolies brought from Tamil Nadu.

If the central kingdom of Kandy flourished with cinnamon, tobacco grew to become a huge industry in the Jaffna Peninsula. Jaffna tobacco had a unique taste due to the red soil, known as *sempattu man*, and proximity to the salty sea. The region's economic prominence was created by tobacco (*Ceylon Gazetteer* 1834, 103; Rasanayagam 1934, 74; De Silva 1942). Even though both India and Sri Lanka were ruled by the same colonial power, the tobacco trade with the Travancore king exploited Sri Lanka to serve the Indian kingdoms (Bastiampillai 1982, 56). To feed the labourers and the Jaffna people, rice was imported from India beginning from the Portuguese period, and thus Sri Lanka was established on the revenue from cash crops and dependent on rice imports. These colonial practices led to grain shortages and grain riots, which became more pronounced during British rule. The history of such famines and riots alongside survival memories of them are embedded in the chapter. This part of the colonial history of famines and grain riots is linked to the irrigation projects and land settlement plans of state and is explicated in Chapters Two and Four. When the British left the island, the once self-sufficient country was reliant on foreign exchanges for its existence and continued to experience food shortages that determined the nationalist projects of the later independent Sri Lanka.

The postcolonial Sri Lankan state was committed to building a Sinhalese nationalism, which attached significant importance to the Sinhala language and Buddhist culture. The state began to issue divisive laws favouring the Sinhalese majority. In 1956, in a country where Tamil, English, and Sinhala languages prevailed, the Official Language Act 33 was passed. It was the "Sinhala Only Act" that subdued the rest of the ethnicities. The act aimed to establish the Sinhala supremacy, which sparked the island's long history of atrocities against minorities. In the newly founded state, a group of Tamils and Moors flourished in the social and economic sector through civil administration and business. The rural Sinhalese were bought into the narrow nationalist paradigm through campaigns for land and rice. Independent Sri Lanka witnessed its first sign of ethnic violence in 1958; the Tamil minority was oppressed by the state in 1958, which intensified and became more frequent, developing into large-scale murders and atrocities against the Tamils.

In the traditionally dry zone of Jaffna, the Tamils paid great attention to education since low agricultural yields, compounded with a dense population, provided fewer economic opportunities. The Jaffna region had the highest number of missionary schools, and therefore education conducted in English was more common compared with the rest of the country, which had yet to be urbanized. Under British rule, Tamils flourished with academic excellence in science and math, alongside English. After independence, they occupied government jobs as well as took on professional roles such as those of engineers and doctors. As Ramaswamy notes, Tamils, as the most literate, took up the best jobs in the country while the rural Sinhalese, without education or land, were heavily disappointed to live in a country that no longer provided them opportunities (2022, 179). In 1972, the state passed the

Standardization law, which restricted Tamils from university admission (Tambiah 1991; Hoole et al. 1992; De Silva 2005; Mohan 2015). The law, coupled with restrictive policies on government jobs, denied jobs to Tamil youths.

Meanwhile, Tamil plantation workers, who had no land or history of land ownership in the newly independent country, were left unrecognized (Ramaswamy 2022, 183). They were perceived as belonging to India because of their frequent travels to the country and because of their alienation in Sri Lanka, where the state denied them citizenship. When the Federal Party left office in 1968, the incumbent United Front (UF) introduced state-sponsored internal land development schemes to settle Sinhala population in the traditional Tamil lands. The repeated violence against Tamils continued throughout the 1960s amid protests from Tamils, which were met by repressive measures of the state. With continued failing political solutions, by the 1970s, armed Tamil insurgent movements began to sprout up, demanding a separate Tamil state.

In 1983, one of the rebel groups murdered thirteen Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna. The act triggered a pre-planned pogrom: large-scale violence with heavy participation by Sinhalese civilians. On July 24, the anti-Tamil riots, later known as Black July, began in Colombo and spread to the rest of the island. The death toll estimated thousands of people, and approximately 150,000 were rendered homeless while many fled Sri Lanka and sought asylum in Western countries. There were more than twenty Tamil rebel groups before 1983, and the post–Black July period saw an increasing number of Tamil youth joining the armed

insurgency. Black July is considered to be the official start of the decades-long Sri Lankan war. This aspect of the insurgence history is detailed in Chapters Two, Three, and Four.

4.2 The Political Background of the Militant Organizations

Although many small and large Tamil rebel groups existed in Jaffna, the Eelam Revolution Organization of Students (EROS), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), the People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were predominant in the early 1980s. Following the 1983 Tamil pogrom, thousands of youths, even those from Colombo and the UK, joined these organizations, each of which took different approaches toward the liberation struggle. Out of these organizations, EROS, EPRLF, and PLOTE were based on leftist ideology. Influenced by the French and Russian revolutions, EROS and EPRLF took a socialist approach to the Tamil cause. EROS believed in attacking the economic focus of the Sri Lankan government and creating divisions aimed at self-sustainability. The LTTE and TELO, conversely, took a military approach toward building Tamil nationalism. By 1986, the LTTE succeeded as a powerful, ruthless organization crushing other militant groups. The 1990s saw the most internecine killings, with some of the groups, including EROS, being absorbed by the LTTE, and others being banned: the members were forced to leave the island or were executed.

4.3 Annals of the Eelam Wars

It is pertinent to have insight into the different phases of the long, devastating civil war of Sri Lanka to comprehend its impact on the public. The following sections delineate its phases.

4.3.1 Eelam War I (1983–1990)

Following the burning of the Jaffna library, and the riots, murders, and lootings of 1983, a full-scale war erupted between the Tamil insurgents and the Sri Lankan Army (SLA). Indian intelligence had been providing arms training to the militants. In 1987, Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President J. R. Jayewardene signed the Indo–Sri Lankan accord, which gave provincial autonomy, the annexation of the Tamil regions of the two provinces of the North and the East, and, in return, envisioned a disarmament by the militants. The Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) entered the north and the east to oversee the demilitarization of the Tamil Tigers, which was by now the only powerful rebel group. Even after the accord was signed, murders and looting of the Tamils by the SLA continued. The LTTE gained power as a fearful organization that executed its own dissidents and refused to disarm.

In 1987, Thileepan, a prominent LTTE member, died during a hunger strike protesting state hostilities and demanding implementation of the Peace Accord. The war now intensified, with the Indian troops fighting against the LTTE to disarm them. The first suicide attack by the LTTE took place in 1987.[8] The IPKF committed countless acts of torture, rape, and murder, which left the community disillusioned (Crossette 1989; *Amnesty.org* 1990; *PearlAction.org* n.d.; *Tamilnation.org* n.d.). Following the death of Thileepan, male youths

and adults of families in the north and the east were imprisoned or murdered. Annai (Mother) Poopathy, a middle-aged mother whose sons had been killed in the recent war, starved herself to death, demanding peace. The two incidents escalated the mobilization of public support, and finally the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka, leaving the war open between the LTTE and the SLA.

4.3.2 Eelam War II (1990–1995)

The LTTE became the sole militant group fighting against the SLA, marking the beginning of the second phase of the war. The state issued economic embargos in an effort to weaken the movement. The ban on essential goods such as food, fuel, and medicine left civilians in the middle of heightened food insecurity and continuous displacements. With the failure of the talks between the then-President Premadasa and the Tigers, the LTTE massacred more than 600 Sinhalese and Muslim police members in the east, which ignited a fresh war (C.N.B. 1990; UTHR 1990). On October 30, 1990, the Tigers ordered the expulsion of Tamil Muslims from Jaffna (US Dept. of State 1997; Imtiyaz and Iqbal 2011; Hasbullah 2016). During this Black October, more than 72,000 were forced to leave the north and live in camps. The movement, which until now had remained a large guerilla unit, shifted to conventional war, with civilians paying the highest cost: their lives. Jaffna Peninsula had now become the Tigers' stronghold.

4.3.3 Eelam War III (1995–2002)

In 1994, with Chandrika Kumaratunga being elected as the president, fresh peace negotiations began and a ceasefire was agreed upon. Both the SLA and the LTTE, however,

broke the ceasefire with their increasing offences and the war began again. In October 1995, the SLA fought with the LTTE in the operation known as Riviresa; and by December 1995, the army had regained control over the regions captured by the Tigers, who were driven into the forests of Vanni. The Tigers coerced Jaffna civilians, mostly by force and the fear of being overtaken by the SLA, to move with them. On October 30, the largest displacement, known as the Jaffna exodus, began with almost 500,000 Tamils moving into Vanni in their effort to flee the war (UTHR 1995; *Tamil Guardian* 2020; "On This Day 1950-2005" n.d.). It was one of the largest humanitarian crises ever, with very little information leaking from the region due to the state's control of the media (see Chapter Four). In many ways, the Jaffna exodus was a precursor to the forthcoming madness that unfolded in the final war of 2009. From 1996 until 2002, conventional battles continued between the SLA and the Tigers mostly in and around the Vanni region. In 2002, with mounting casualties on both sides and almost one million people displaced, efforts to find a peaceful resolution with foreign intervention began. Norway took the responsibility of negotiating a ceasefire, which brought the army and the Tigers to an agreement. This agreement remained largely intact from 2002 to 2006, during which time civilians enjoyed temporary relief from their struggles to survive. In 2004, however, one of the largest dissident groups in the LTTE, under the leadership of Karuna, turned against the militant group and carried out attacks against them in the east. Mistrust brewed on both sides— the state and the Tigers—and infractions took place on both sides as well.

4.3.4 Eelam War IV (2006-2009)

Following aggressions from both warring parties, the final war began with the Tigers closing the sluice gates of Mavil Aru dam on July 21, 2006 (Moorcraft 2012; Thamizhini 2021; Nillanthan 2022). The blocked waterway was the main source of irrigation for most of the Sinhalese farmers, and a battle ensued between the SLA and the LTTE, which the latter lost. Amid efforts for peace, violence nonetheless spread to the rest of the conflict regions. Under the leadership of Rajapakse, ceasefire agreements were broken by the government in May 2007 and a fierce battle ensued until May 2009, in which the LTTE leader Prabhakaran was killed. This war marked the end of a more than twenty-five-year-old armed ethnic conflict, with scores of Tamil civilians dead and thousands displaced. Chapter Four furnishes further details on the final war.

5. Literature Review

This section provides an outline of the theories and scholarly works used to undertake this study. The two overarching areas of the study are food studies and life writing. The fields of body studies, gender studies, and memory studies in relation to food serve as interlinking threads to use the alimentary as a lens to view life narratives. Accordingly, the literature review on life writing, followed by food studies, provides the foundation for this study. My research touches upon trauma, specifically food trauma as one of the lenses through which I conduct my analysis.

5.1 Life Writing

Whitlock notes that autobiography was identified with a literary tradition that imitates the selfhood engagement influenced by the "Enlightenment archetype" of a European white

man (2015, 2). Citing Smith and Watson, Whitlock adds that the canonization of autobiography in Western literature implied that diaries and journals produced by women, slave narratives, travel writing, and such were not considered life writing (2015, 3; Smith and Watson 2010, 3)—a point that Moore-Gilbert also raises, citing the neglect of the memoir of the sixteenth-century Moghul king Babur (2009, xii). Kadar was among the first to identify life writing as a genre and as a critical practice (1992, 3). Her feminist critique defines life writing as "written (or spoken) by an author (or speaker) who does not continuously write about someone else and who also does not pretend to be absent from the text herself" (ix). Kadar explored life writing at a time when scholars including Olney (1980), Smith (1987), and Heiburn (1988) had published their engagements on auto/biography in the Western world.[9] Nussbaum explored women's diaries and journals as forms of life writing (1988) and Bunkers and Huff's work provides a critical framework to approaching women's diaries as life writing (1996).

Scholars of postcolonial life writing map the ways contemporary personal narratives in the global south, for example, are fraught with the ongoing and aftermath of colonial violence, civil wars, sexual violence, and refugee experiences (Moore-Gilmore 2009; Whitlock 2015). Rota makes an important distinction between the subjectivities of autobiography and life writing: the traditional, universal, and whole white male produces a "*descriptive*" autobiography because his words "*represent* things." The subjectivity in life writing in the postcolonial is "*performative*" because words are "productive and *do*" (2009, 52, author's emphasis). Smith and Watson echo this distinction by reserving the word *autobiography* for Western life stories. They define life writing as "a general term for acts of

self-representation of all kinds and in diverse media that take the producer's life as their subject, whether written, performative, visual, filmic or digital" (2010, 4). I use the above arguments in my approach to the personal narratives.

5.2 The Body, Self, Food, and Life Writing

Autobiographical subjectivity, Smith and Watson argue, influences "memory, experience, identity, spatial location, embodiment and agency" (2010, 22). In my research, I unravel these concepts in relation to alimentary acts and memory. The body and bodily being of the senses are the primary premises in which any encounter with food happens, from creating to consuming. Such interactions with food, as individuals and groups, form the base of our identities through the limits created by the body (Douglas 1984). Using food, Bourdieu demonstrates the way individual identity is constructed through taste or esthetics acquired through and controlled by one's social class and tradition: "Taste distinguishes in an essential way, since taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others" (1984, 56). In opposition to Bourdieu, Foucault constructs the body as being created through performances, subjectification, resistance, and changes in forms to connect/challenge the society and the world (1979, 1980).[10] Among the existing theories of the body, I consider Foucault's approach more relevant to my dissertation.

Foucault's concept of "technologies of self" asserts that the experiences of the everyday labour of food procuring, cooking, and consuming are engraved in the body and the self that identifies the body (1980).[11] Lupton stretches this concept and connects it with the

ideas of Grosz (1990): “technologies of the self” explicates the ways individuals comply with certain customs since they see them as crucial to their well-being and embody them willingly in their everyday being. Such customs and habits are practiced by individuals as a project to “construct and express their subjectivity” (Lupton 1998, 16). This is also touched upon by Connerton, who calls such everyday mind-body practices “habit memories” (2014, 84), a notion elaborated on later in this dissertation. Since my study is concerned with food-related bodily labour and memory, I engage with theories on the body connected to this aspect.

Rahman uses notions of the open body and the closed body to elucidate the connections between hunger, the body, and writing, drawing on Falk (1994): a closed body is “what is incorporated within the body/self, and what is ejected or rejected from it—food is a primary object of mediation between the two. This inside/outside dichotomy is what constitutes the body in society” (Rahman 2022, 13). This description of body is associated with the Western world beginning from the Middle Ages. The open body exists in contrast to the closed body: it brings in the community or group as an influence on the individual body and both are in constant connection. The open body is recognized as existing in non-Western cultures. Here, identity is constructed in relation to the self and the other (Falk 1994; also cited in Rahman 2022, 13).[12]

Gilmore notes that the autobiography of an individual in the postcolonial world is also “an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of personal identity and one’s relation to a family, a region of a nation; and of citizenship and politics of representativeness (and exclusion)” (2001, 12). Drawing parallels with Gilmore, Hammack

and Pilecki argue that individual narratives can form collective voices when they are rooted in a specific history that is shared and remembered within a group (2012, 78). The arguments echo what Spivak grounds in her essay "Three Women's Text and Circumfession," in which the narrator "withheld autobiography" to give voice to the shared lived experiences of their community (1998, 10; also cited in Rota 2021, 60). Accordingly, the self in life writing operates in multiple positionalities, such as decentred, relational, embodied, and located, as argued by Moore-Gilmore, which he borrows from the feminist interpretation of women's personal narratives (2009). In his work on the writings of postcolonial life, he discusses the influence of place in the formation of postcolonial subjecthood. Citing examples that include Nehru's *An Autobiography*, Morgan's *My Place*, and Said's *Out of Place*, Moore-Gilbert notes that the association between displacement and identity in the life narratives from postcolonial locations is disputed (66). I draw on the notions of these authors who locate the open body through location, food, and writing in relation not only to others and the community, but also to geopolitics and culture. These concepts are used to reveal struggles and resistance through the performances of the bodies engaged in food work as it comes through in the life writing considered there.

I explicate the connection between the life narrative and "body narrative" of the hunger strikers, rebel fighters, civilians, and the LTTE in general in the following chapters through the materiality of food, body, and memory. Embedded in my approach to life writing is the subjective experience of taste: how emotions of disgust, desire, and hunger occupy the personal experiences of conflict and how the starving body becomes a mobilizing force of resistance.

5.3 Affect, the Body, and Emotions

Drawing on Deleuze (1988, 1990), Fox defines affect as "a capacity to affect or be affected" and "the force producing bodies, identities and the social world" (2013, 27). Affect is not just how individuals feel a particular emotion, but rather the way social structures, principles, integrity, legal codes, and physical pressure are confluent with the emotion to create "capacities in bodies, identities and subjectivities, collectives and even entire nations" (28). Therefore, in "affective economies," emotions perform to connect individuals, groups, bodies, and public spaces through a range of emotions, such as shame, hate, and disgust (Ahmed 2004, 44). Ahmed's study of the affective dimension of disgust, taste, and experience of food informs my exploration of the food narratives of the insurgent fighters. Rahman argues that affect theory can be seen as jointly associated with the alimentary and the community since it links the sensory experience of food to "the affective body" and brings together the agency of the open body and the community (2022, 14). This is particularly relevant to my study of hunger strikes. I contextualize hunger strikes and social mobilization in the above framework.

In addition, I examine the discursive elements in the context of food work and farm work through their words and performances. Foodways combines the postcolonial autobiographical performance through words and the body—food provisioning, sharing, consuming, feeding and caring—and through labour that becomes their common identity as insurgents and civilians belonging to a marginalized group in their nationalist struggles. The

performances of the labouring body, the hunger-striking body, and memory underpin the context of this study.

The work of Ellman and Feldman informs my inquiry into the body of the hunger strikers. Both Ellman (1993, 9) and Feldman (1991, 250) argue that bodies on hunger strikes can be read as texts, while Feldman adds that they can be disseminated like texts. Expanding his assertion on the circulation of starving bodies, Feldman contends that political violence turns the body into an object and provides it with political agency. The body then signifies a specific moment in its history and enables other bodies to participate. Ellman repeatedly comes back to the term *hunger artist*, which she borrowed for her book title from Kafka's short story "A Hunger Artist" (1993, 7). She draws attention to the performance aspect and the spectatorship of the corporeal, which slowly ebbs away in starvation and is admired, worshipped, and followed as a tool of defiance (9).

Machin argues that the hunger striker's dying body is affective, represents a collective identification, and becomes a section of the group for which the action is undertaken. That "the identification is fed by the hungry body it incorporates" (2016, 160) by incorporating three political strategies: "1) the facilitation of non-verbal communication, 2) the embodiment of collective identifications, 3) and the disruption of the dominant order" (157; also quoted in Rahman 2022, 45). Chapter Three on hunger strikers makes use of this concept in the context of the public display of the hunger strikers' fasts and bodies.

Smith and Watson note that "food memoir incorporates food-laced memories that feed readers desire to redefine themselves by both imagining pleasures and cooking them up, as a way of enacting the life chronicled" (2010, 149). They use the term *gastrography* to describe such personal narratives that extensively speak from the experiences of cooking, hunger, eating, and sharing (149). In the postcolonial world—ridden with ethnic conflicts—personal narratives emerge from various circumstances and subjectivities. As the authors point out, such writings provide a glimpse of everyday life, rituals, and "the politics of hunger and scarcity" (149). I draw on their argument about the audience identifying themselves with the narrator through the pleasures of cooking to show how such acts are not always pleasurable in the background of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Instead, in zones of conflict, food provisioning and starvation often equate to resistance, resourcefulness, and sustenance.

5.4 Foucauldian Biopower and Food Provisioning

Foucault's discussion of biopower hinges on food provisioning, alongside "achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (1980, 140). Foucault also looks at the role of food scarcity in the formation of economic policies of the modern state, which become "apparatuses of security" (2009, 11). Drawing on his example from eighteenth-century France, he notes that the threat of food shortage in urban spaces demanded the regulating or policing of grain. The natural production of grain through periods of varied climatical conditions of heat and drought may become bountiful or meagre. By regulating prices, managing the availability of grains, and controlling imports and exports, the sovereign establishes an apparatus of security that is not dependent on a "juridical-disciplinary system"

(2009, 37). The process of the analysis of grain circulation that determines the price of grain, the quantity to be sold in the market, and as such the regulation of the entire process from grain cultivation to market prices "integrates the moment of production, the world market, and, finally, the economic behavior of the population, of producers and consumers" (Foucault 2007, 41). These regulations do not mean that there is no scarcity:

> On condition that for a whole series of people, in a whole series of markets, there was some scarcity, some dearness, some difficulty in buying wheat, and consequently some hunger, and it may well be that some people die of hunger after all. But by letting these people die of hunger one will be able to make scarcity a chimera and prevent it from occurring in this massive form of the scourge typical of the previous systems. Thus, the scarcity event is split. The scarcity scourge disappears, but scarcity that causes the death of individuals not only does not disappear, it must not disappear. (Foucault 2007, 42; also cited in Nally 2010, 40)

Starvation or scarcity is also a notion that Sen engages with, although he does extend his argument into biopolitics. Sen defines starvation "as the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat" (1981, 1; also cited in Rahman 2022, 48). He asserts that people remain hungry because of poor distribution of food and the ability to buy food because of the unfavourable market conditions of demand and supply. His approach to hunger is through the economy, which is controlled by the state and makes the state accountable (Rahman 2022, 48). Foucault's biopolitical lens uses the same forces to demonstrate the role of the state in hunger and scarcity.

Foucault distinguishes between population and people. While population is the group that willingly abides by the system of regulation, people agitate and revolt against the regulations and fall outside the system (Foucault 2007, 44; also cited in Nally 2010, 40). Foucault contends that the people who are outside the regime are seen as a threat and are allowed to die. Killing is justified in this view, to maintain order and development (2003,

256; Nally 2010, 40). The entire range of activities surrounding grain cultivation and the control of the market shifts the city to the backburner and propels farming as pivotal to governmentality.

> It is a governmentality that takes the land into consideration. This governmentality not only takes the land into consideration, but it must no longer focus on the market, on the buying and selling of products, on their circulation, but first of all on production. Finally, third, this governmentality is no longer greatly interested in selling cheaply to others what has been produced at the lowest cost but focuses on the problem of the return, that is to say, how the value of the product can be returned to its primary producer, namely the peasant or farmer (Foucault 2003, 343; Nally 2010, 40).

These arguments on land, agriculture, and food provisioning as part of governmentality are closely connected to the repressive activities of the Sri Lankan state in the guise of land and agro-development projects. In addition, the way food provisioning is turned into an apparatus of security or food denial as an act of killing is vital in the context of the Sri Lankan Civil War, where the state resorted to holding back food, fuel, fertilizers, and other consumer goods essential for biological existence.

While embargo is one aspect of the way food provisioning is politicized, letting individuals die by hunger strike is another way of denying biological life. Drawing on Foucault, Agamben notes that people are allowed to die because they are perceived as "the other," a threat to the state, as *homines sacri.* He observes that ancient Greeks used two terms: *bios* (the way life is lived) and *zoe* (biological life), which is replaced by the modern single word *life* (1995, 19). Agambe argues that in a political context, "bare life" is the blurring between biologic and political life: "abandoned […] exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable" (28). Modern states exercise sovereignty through violence over their citizens, whose life is just biological

and thus bare life. Places such as internment camps and refugee sites in which humans are stripped of being human and exposed to ultimate cruelty are zones of bare life (53). I extend his argument to the individuals who were left to die in hunger strikes in protest over state violence, as outlined in Chapter Three.

6. Food Studies

6.1 Violence, Food, and Land

No postcolonial violence can be addressed without reference to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*; I draw on his work to analyze the way violence, foodways, and everyday lives are connected. Fanon observes: "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and naturally, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with human 'dignity.' The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten and starved with impunity" (2004, 9). Echoing Fanon, Pushparani, the first female resistance activist to be arrested, writes poignantly in her memoir about food, hunger, and the violence unleashed upon her as well as the dignity she lost as a prisoner (2012). Fanon's argument draws on the relationship among land, body, and food, which can be read in the context of internal colonialism. Scholars define internal colonialism as the suppression of a minority group within a country by the state, which replicates the Western colonial apparatus for the purpose of building a state with a specific identity (Casanova 1965; Hechter 1975; Pfaffenberger 1984). In parallel, Bhabha identifies the new subaltern[s] as being stateless "minorities, migrant workers, asylum seekers, refugees" since

their lives and conditions are unprotected and unclaimed by nation/states that conflate internal colonization and globalization (2008, 39).

I use Fanon's focus on the violence on land and body in the background of the Sri Lankan conflict in which the state colonized the Tamil lands through development projects, settlement plans, and violence on Tamil bodies. I analyze these two acts of state subjugation through the framework of the food work of the Tamils and the food provisioning plans of the state that directly link to notions of biopower (see subsection 5.4, Foucauldian Biopower and Food Provisioning).

6.2 Food Memory, Everyday Labour, and Collective Memory

The act of recalling violence and starvation, consequentially, relies on the body as an experiential site of smell, taste, hunger, and resistance that often speaks through food as a medium. As Smith and Watson contend, memory is always concerned with "materiality" and is linked to the body and texture and the like and is embodied in the senses before narration (2010, 21). In the same vein, Ricoeur argues that the past is shaped by the slippery course of remembrance from the present and states that remembering cannot ensue until forgetting happens (2004, 412-452). This dissertation uses Smith and Watson's notion as well as Ricoeur's concept of memory to trace the interconnections of the body and food trauma, and illuminates foodways as sites of resistance. My focus on food trauma moves my study away from war-related bodily trauma, which is usually rendered as a location of torture, mutilation, and pain.

Food memories reside in the sensory organs and are shaped by remembrance of past events such as family meals, communal eating, rituals, and other special events. They are both individual and collective. Halbwachs, whose work forms a basis for the concept of collective memory, uses a presentist approach to demonstrate that collective memory is a past reconstructed by a group to address the present social concerns of the group. He argues that such memory does not naturally exist in the group and instead "it draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember" (1980, 48). He adds that "every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time" (84). Linking collective memory and autobiographic memory, Halbwachs argues that unlike, historical memory, autobiographical memory is based on personal experience and shared within a group, a group that is lost when the reconstructing and the sharing stops (2020, loc 34). Drawing upon these concepts, the chapters of this dissertation examine collective memory of war and resistance through foodways in the Tamil life narratives.

Connerton builds on Halbwachs's concepts of collective memory and expands on how such memories are sustained and disseminated. Using commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices, he demonstrates the way social memory is "conveyed and sustained" (1989, 1). Since ceremonies are closely associated with performance and performativity is habitual, he asserts that "habits cannot be thought without a notion of bodily automatisms" (5). Connerton extends his argument to assert that in both rituals and everyday bodily practices, humans think and act based on automatic movements of the body and such movements are social habits. His observation of habitual memory is also connected to bodily food memory

in which acts of cooking, eating, and sharing are repeatedly performed (Abarca and Colby 2016, 6).

Connerton notes that food memory shifts personal memory into social memory: the habitual labour of chopping, kneading, and cooking involved in food work and the acts of sharing, eating, and the like are frequently performed in everyday lives and in rituals similar to the "automatic, long familiar movements of the artisans" (2014, 94). These bodily performances are passed down through generations and this kind of experiential learning is common in rural settings (17). Drawing heavily on Connerton's "habit memory" and his emphasis on memories "sedimented in the body," Sutton grounds his memory work in the connection between the sensory and food (2001, 12). Reflecting on his work on Kalymnos Island, he calls this memory "synesthetic memory" and argues that memories of the senses influence the brain to store the social and cultural background as an embodied experience of food moments (98-102). In a later work, Korsmeyer and Sutton argue "both memory and the senses are now being conceptualized as active, creative, even transformative cultural processes" (2011, 471). Along the same vein, addressing sense memory as "edible memory" (Jordan 2015, 6) and "palate memory" (Cuadra 2013, 2), academics draw attention to the way sensory memory is intertwined with the social and cultural aspects of eating and sharing food.[13] Drawing on the above arguments on bodily labour, I argue that food memories provide a medium through the body to remember, protest, and narrate experiences of the war.

6.3 Postmemory and Food

Hirsch conceptualizes postmemory as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (2012, 5). This transgenerational memory shapes the memories of the present in the transnational second generation whose parents have suffered from traumas of colonization, slavery, the Holocaust, and genocides. Hirsch elaborates on the way memory acts as a thread signaling "an affective link to the past, a sense, precisely, of an embodied 'living connection'" (2008, 104). Cooking, consuming, or participating in such somatic acts emphasize the affective dimension of lives as lived and impart knowledge to the next generation. Epp argues that the intergenerational transference of oral and written recipes is another way to ensure the continued existence of memory (2016, 370). *In Memory's Kitchen*, a collection of recipes that reveal the resilience of women in the concentration camp in Terezine, is a testament to the way recipes, food memories, and lived experiences of the Holocaust were transmitted to the diasporic second generation. Although Hirsch did not contextualize postmemory in the context of food, I apply Epp's and Hirsch's assertion in my study on the way food drives, symbolic fasting, and *Mullivaikal kanji* mediate war memories through the alimentary among the transnational Tamils. Their concepts explicate the way second-generation Tamils remember the ethnic war.

6.4 Food and Nationalism: Gastronationalism

Gastronationalism is conceptualized as "the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to demarcate and sustain the emotive power of national attachment, as well as the use of nationalist sentiments to produce and market food" by DeSoucey (2010, 433).[14] I

use DeSoucey's framework to analyze LTTE publications on food provisioning and its fashioning of Tamil nationalism. Among the various threads connecting food and nationalism, Ichijo and Ranta argue that individuals contest a nation's identity based on gender, ethnicity, and class; and cuisines are one such site (2015, 8). Gvion illuminates the way food performance creates contesting identities: "culinary knowledge becomes a means of identity creation that strengthens [communal boundaries], redefines their political identity, and forms a culture of resistance" (2006, 309; also quoted in Ichijo and Ranta 2015, 9). Nation-states create an imagined community by "constructing, reifying, asserting and at times, inventing a common food culture" (Ichijo and Ranta 2015, 11). My study of culinary nationalism focuses on this aspect of challenge as a way to construct national identity.

The nation as an "imagined community," a concept grounded by Anderson (2016), was based on acts of resistance against being threatened. Anderson expands on the notion of European nationalism as "an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally imagined community" (101). His emphasis on the nation as a community is founded on the notion that language-centred activities—state language, vernacular, print language, print technology—is pivotal in building an identity toward a collective belonging. In the context of colonial countries, he asserts that the nation was envisioned as a group through colonial education, European travels, bilingual learning, and civil administration. I draw from Anderson's contention on resistance as the premise for the nationalist struggle to interrogate the rebel archives on aspects of economic nation-building through localized agroecological projects. Among them are regulation of food production, food provisioning, dietary practices,

constructing Tamil identity through historical Tamil food practices, and decolonizing food systems, to name a few.

There are scholars who construct a contrasting paradigm for postcolonial nationalism. Chatterjee, for example, argues that nationalist aspirations in India were rooted in two domains even before India achieved independence (1993). The material domain was aimed at learning and producing Western forms of technological advancement. The internal domain comprised a group of intellectuals who shaped social structures, traditions, and moral values that defined the Indian nation. Touching upon Anderson's notion of imagined community, Chatterjee argues, "If the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power" (6). I draw on Chatterjee's external and internal domains to untangle the ways the totalitarian regime of the LTTE ruled the public and the foodways knowledge produced by the civilians that constructed Tamil national identity.

7. Decolonial Foodways: Ecology and Land

In the case of Tamil nationalism, embodied acts of food provisioning became a necessity due to the state's economic embargo in the north of Sri Lanka. The restriction of essential goods served as a catalyst to invent new sustainable food solutions and local production of rice and grains. The LTTE's approach to foodways defined the movement's strategies for farming and land use. I draw on the Tamil notion of *thinai* to delineate the

interconnection between ecosystems, people, and culture. I then map the Tamil concept with modern perceptions of sustainability and landscape ecology using the LTTE doctrines.

7.1 Food Narratives for Life: The Context of Rebel Governance

I use the phrase *food narratives for life* to refer to the printed materials of the LTTE that prepare the civilian political bodies to live in a rebel-controlled region, bound by the doctrines issued by the movement on food production and consumption. An armed group engages with some form of governance when they are able to win over land through violence.[15] Accordingly, scholars studying rebel governance argue that violence is one of the methods the rebel groups often attempt to control the civil population. The way the rebels govern people, in addition, largely depends on the temporality, duration, cultural and religious beliefs, and group identities (Hoffman 2015; Mampilly 2011, 15; Kasfir 2015). Force only works until the rebels capture a region and once that is done, they move toward communicative devices to garner support from the public (Kasfir 2005, 285). Kasfir's work on the National Resistance Army (NRA) in Uganda argues that rebels either modify their activities and messages to accommodate civilian beliefs or persuade them to accept rebel messages (281).

Often the threat of violence by the state becomes its tool to convince the public to support the rebel group. Kasfir contends that, even though rebels are driven ideologically, often their approach has to be adapted according to civilian needs and voices since rebels "learn how to stay alive and how to use their immediate environment" (2015, 34). Yet a vast majority of scholarly works on the operation of rebel rule largely ignore food production and

provisioning as part of governance. I draw on the above-mentioned scholarly works to analyze the "food narratives" in the movement's publications toward food sovereignty. Brenner and Tazzioli argue that state governance and rebel governance (often replicating the state) are parallel and competing forms of biopolitical tools. They concur that insurgents' efforts to optimize "life in rebel schools and rebel hospitals work to craft population bodies that stand in a conflicting relationship with the population body of the existing nation-states" (2022, 4). The authors contend that rebel governance is about providing sustenance and longer life to form "alternative subjects and imagined communities in opposition to the ones prescribed by the modern nation-state" (5). These bodies exist in a state of exception as bare life and lie outside the nation-state. To emphasize lived experiences of war through foodways, I refer to the insurgent archival material that engages with food provision of the minority groups as "food narratives for life." The authors argue that Foucault's concept of biopower (1980) not only exists in nation-states but is also reproduced in groups that contest nation-states and operate outside of them. Foucault's study on food provisioning is based on eighteenth-century France and by extension Europe.

Unlike the global north, where governmentality originated with the formation of modern states, "technologies of governmentality often predate the nation-state" in the rest of the world (Chatterjee 2004, 36; also quoted in Brenner and Tazzioli 2022, 4). These older forms of governance offered alternative notions of citizenship by "classifying groups of people into suitable targets for administrative, legal, economic and electoral policy… Thus caste and religion in India, ethnic groups in Southeast Asia and tribes in Africa remained the dominant criteria for identifying communities among the populations as objects of policy"

(Chatterjee 2004, 37; also quoted in Brenner and Tazzioli 2022, 4). Chatterji's notion of governance can be applied to Indigenous knowledge systems of food, land, and survival, an argument to which Fanon (2004) often returns.

7.2 Indigenous Knowledge and Epistemic Violence: A Decolonial Approach to Food

When a modern repressive state employs colonial forms of subjugation, militant organizations tend to resort to the use of epistemologies of premodern socio-cultural forms of lifestyle to establish ethnic nationalism. In that sense, ethnic struggles replicate the colonized-colonizer model for the path to liberation and reaffirm Fanon's assertion that the violent liberation struggle is "national, revolutionary and collective" (2004, 96). He adds that such a resurgence reveals everyday struggles and disputes with the state and brings together the lived experiences of the people and the rebel fighters in their fight for freedom (96). It is in their collective action that the nation comes into being, as Fanon states: "the living expression of the nation is the collective consciousness in motion of the entire people" (144). This nationalist movement is established by celebrating the "Indigenous landscape" (158) and reclaiming customs and cultures associated with the terrain.

Grounded on such lived experiences, Fanon argues that "combat literature, revolutionary literature and national literature" emerge from civilians and rebels who feel the sudden urge to narrate their acts of defiance to reflect their lived realities (159). The nationalist intellectuals use their past to produce a future by invigorating the public for collective action, which becomes national literature. Fanon terms this writing "combat literature" in its "true form" (173). He uses the term since this literature mobilizes an entire

population toward action and elevates concerns of the nation creating "new horizons," shaped and reshaped by multiple layers of consciousness (173). Although Fanon's arguments on Indigenous landscape and collective action exist in the context of literature, oral narratives, and art forms, I extend them to my analysis of the food narratives for life by the Tigers. In addition, the term Indigenous is problematic when used in the context of the global south as defined by domestic and international laws, claims, and colonizations (Bello-Bravo 2019, 111-120). I have used Indigenous in the context of knowledge and *local* in the context of regional food production.

Rebel governance often resorts to precolonial structures of power and is rooted in Indigenous knowledge of governance. Hoppers defines Indigenous knowledge as "the sum total of the knowledges and skills which people in a particular geographic area possess and which enables them to get the most out of their environment.… Traditional knowledge is … the totality of all knowledges and practices, whether explicit or implicit, used in the management of socio-economic, spiritual and ecological facets of life" (2008, 130). In an analogous claim rooted in ecology, human geography scholars note that traditional foods and modes of consumption are rooted in ecology, culture, and heritage and are bound by ethnic and cultural identities (McElroy and Townsend 2015, 180).

Indigenous knowledge is not always acknowledged in Western system, as argued by Spivak in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Spivak uses the term *epistemic violence* to refer to the act of obscuring and impeding traditional knowledge located in specific geographies of the global south (1988, 24). The writings of the rebel

organizations and the accounts of individual and collective public action on food governance and self-sustainable ecosystems are located in the regional knowledge. I extend Spivak's concept of epistemic violence in my approach to the publications of insurgent organizations since these publications reveal a narrative of a particular time for a particular group in a particular landscape.

8. Gendered Spaces, Cooking, and Foodways Knowledge

Life writing on war frequently describes acts of cooking and eating unusual foods for survival. Asserting that the hearth is a site of "warmth and hospitality," Dossa (2014) notes that it is also the locus of recollection and the symbol of a home. In the nationalist paradigm of gender, scholars observe that men are groomed with the expectation to fight and protect their nation and women, whereas women are trained to be nurturers, protectors of culture, and caretakers of the family (Chatterjee 1997; Enloe 1990; De Mel 2001; Jayawardena 1986; De Alwis 1998a; Nagel 1998; Yuval-Davis 1998). Acts of cooking and caring are most often assigned to women and are traditionally identified as gendered acts. Hastorf contends that gender and identity are constructed through everyday acts of cooking and eating (2017, 294). In Sri Lanka, gender analysis in the construction of identity and nationhood has revealed ways in which women have persistently constructed themselves as mothers, caretakers, cultural protectors, and propagators of nation, regardless of their intersectional roles in nationhood and insurgency (Maunaguru 1995; Hellmann-Rajanayagam 1990; Jayawardena 1995, 1986; De Alwis 1994, 1998a, 1998b). Hyndman and De Alwis (2003) note that the Sri Lankan conflict has disrupted gender labour and shifted ever-evolving gender roles, disadvantaging women in myriad ways. In context, however, they speak of a feminist lens in

the context of development and humanitarian aid, they argue that a feminist approach "resists typologies, eschews modules, and allows for examination of multiple bases of identity that shape, and shaped by, the geographically and historically specific dynamics of conflict" (2003, 223). I use their lens as a context to study men's and women's lived experiences of violence, trauma, and displacements located in time and space. I also use this perspective to illustrate the way in which myriad masculinities and femininities are made manifest and experienced through agroecological knowledge, culinary production, eating, and sharing in the context of the insurgence.

Drawing on the notion that home is a place of security, identity, and care, scholars contend that home has become a feminized space (Rose 1993, 56; Massey 1994b, 179; also cited in De Alwis 2004, 215). This gendered space, they argue, is also a domestic place that manifests the fostering of love, dependability, selfhood, and genuineness. They identify women not only with the home and the hearth, but also with the traditional knowledge of the environment. As food providers, caretakers, and mothers, women's existence is intrinsically connected to the local terrain and intergenerational knowledge transference. In the context of everyday kitchen work, women are also seen as responsible for mastering agroecological knowledge through cultivating and cooking green leaves (Kidane et al. 2015, 228). Clearly men and women possess agroecological knowledge in rural settings in India; scholars note that rural women's lived experiences in particular provide them with extensive practical knowledge on seed varieties, conservation, and cultivation (Mies and Shiva 2014; Suma and Großmann 2017; and Singh et al. 2012).

The gendered geographies of food security among rural women are usually farmlands, backyards, and land surrounding their houses and the adjacent untenable lands with wild plants and trees. In contemporary conflicts, women in these regions lose their gendered locations, thereby losing their food territories, and the distance between food procurement and feeding increases (Giles and Hyndman 2004, 1-22). Dossa identifies three sites—the hearth, the cart, and the patch—as ethnographic sites that bear the "scar of wars" (2014, 107). She notes, for example, that for the war-worn Afghan community, the act of women cooking embodies normalcy since "an extinguished hearth is a poignant reminder of the crisis that can erupt during times of war" (92). She includes the local cartmen, who are equally impoverished and provide produce to the women and live in the same neighbourhood in the three ethnographic sites. Here the buyer and the seller remain fluid as victims of war and trauma (106). The patch is the home garden, which remains barren due to the war. Displacements alienate women from these culinary spaces, and they often identify the unfamiliar barren landscapes they are forced to tread by the lack of alimentary supply.[16] In Chapter Five, I draw on the above arguments to expand on gendered life narrative of war, food territories, and displacement.

In her study on Mozambique female war survivors, Katto asserts that female victims and combatants narrate their war memories by juxtaposing their farming activities, availability of seasonal fruits and vegetables, peacetime agricultural activities, and home gardens with obscure bushes and forests of their displacements (2020, 972-973). The women demonstrate how their efforts toward sustenance transform those unfamiliar landscapes into perilous gustatory landscapes through their cooking (976). Gvion's study on Palestinian

women relates to such bio-knowledge and defines “cuisines of poverty” as gendered “practical systems of knowledge that assure survival and self-reliance” and resist oppression. This “gender-based knowledge” is women’s domain because of their connection to the land and their role as nurturers of the family and women’s labour (2006, 299). She adds that such culinary practices are indicators of national food culture and, by extension, food elements of nation-states. I use these concepts of gendered spaces and stock knowledge for discussions on gendered foodways in the background of the war’s end in 2009 in Chapter Five.

While farming and food knowledge are associated with women in the contexts mentioned, agricultural labour is often associated with war masculinities. Jellison notes, for instance, that during the Second World War “wartime propaganda portrayed both the ideal servicemen and the ideal farmer as white, muscular and ready to use his powerful body to fight the war on the battlefield and as well as the farm field” (2018, 5). She argues that the United States government conflated participation in the war with farming activities through posters and public announcements; the messages displayed made it clear that muscular white male bodies were the protectors of the United States regardless of whether they worked on the farm or fought on the battlefield (9). Accordingly, agrarian masculinity draws on men’s capability to till and sow the soil to provide the best yields; it is a zone where women are relegated to basic work in the kitchen.

In his study on horticultural masculinity in southern India, Kumar points out that farmers who are proactive in the control of pests and provide intensive labour on dry lands exhibit “masculine” qualities (2018, 12). Fighting is described similarly in most war

accounts. Eichler describes war masculinity as follows: “Militarized masculinity, at its most basic level, refers to the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat in particular…” (2014, 81-2). Thus, the parallel between agricultural and military masculine is how well an individual meets and conquers a challenge, be it pests or enemies.

Drawing on John Locke’s colonial contention that tilling the land enables the individual to own the land, Arendt argues that “ … the same task, performed year in and year out, will eventually transform the wilderness into cultivated land. The example figures prominently in all ancient and modern theories of labouring precisely for this reason … tilling the soil not only procures means of subsistence but in this process prepares the earth for the building of the world” (1998, 399). My point of interest in Arendt’s argument is the act of cultivation that controls the forest, turning it into a region of development. My approach uses these viewpoints to analyze the alimentary point of both genders and the memories of gendered culinary sites in Sri Lanka’s insurgency.

9. Food Trauma and Memory

Food trauma, a term coined and defined by Holyck Hunchuck, is “the enduring physical and psychological injury resulting from food deprivation” (2012, 140). The term yokes the physical suffering due to lack of food with the memories of such loss of food. Even though the phrase identifies the close association between the body and mind, Epp argues that food memories are “intensely felt in the body, even while expressed by mouth or by pen” (2016, 371).

Memories of sites of food production and consumption occupy the personal narratives of the final war, which saw continuous displacements. These ethnographic sites, as Dossa calls them, in remote villages, the Mullivaikal seacoast, and open spaces have to be understood in the context of the gustatory (2014). They do not acquire significance without the memories of food and writings from this period's repeatedly remembered geographical locations.

Scholars in postcolonial trauma have also noted the numerous ways the social actors of the global south counter the violence forced upon them and exhibit resistance. Colvin critiques the Western trauma model, arguing that it ignores the continuous traumas of the postcolonial community and focuses primarily on the individual (2008, 230). Additionally, he concurs that people subject to traumatic events, frequently, or as a condition of their lived experiences, develop mechanisms to relieve their suffering: some of them "channel their experiences of suffering into social and political activism" (231). I use these arguments to associate food trauma with resilient foodways in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict in my final chapter.

10. Outline of Chapters

The chapters in the dissertation bring together life writing and food studies, intertwining them with the concepts of body and memory. Each chapter applies different aspects of food frameworks to the reading of various modes of life narratives and body narratives. Concepts of collective and individual memory as well as sensory memory are

used to interrogate the personal narratives of civilians, rebel fighters, and the Tigers. The chapters are arranged based on a loose chronology of the armed conflict. Additionally, each chapter delves into the theoretical discourses that feature in the mapping of foodways and in modes of life writing that demonstrate strength, resistance, and resilience built into the collective memory of a people.

Chapter Two contextualizes colonial famines and food shortages during the rise of postcolonial Buddhist nationalism and rural masculinity in Sri Lanka. It engages with gendered food memories among male and female Tamil rebel fighters as a relational experience. Armed women insurgents were not known until the late 1980s, although women actively took part in rebel activities. As a consequence, the voices of male writers appear from various groups, including the LTTE, and relate their experiences from the time of the initial formation of armed movements. The chapter looks at the memoir of Ganesan, who was instrumental in the formation of the LTTE: *Eela Porattathil Enathu Pathivukal: Pirapakarnodu Pulikal Amaippai Aramapiththa Naatkal* (My Account of the Eelam Struggle: The Founding of the Tigers Movement with Prabhakaran). The chapter also includes the following personal accounts and fiction: Nanda Kandasamy's unpublished manuscript written between 2021 and 2022, *Sothu Parcel* (Rice Parcel); Sattiri's *Ayutha Ezhuthu* (Weapon Writing); and Guna Kaviyazhagan's *Appal Oru Nilam* (The Faraway Land). The personal narratives underscore the importance of land acquisition and farming to becoming a Tamil nationalist and a strong fighter in the rebel groups. In a striking parallel, the chapter looks at the process in which Sri Lankan presidents have accentuated farming masculinity with nationalism.

The discussion then moves on to the life writing of female combatants: Thamizhini's *Oru Koorvalin Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of a Sword); Malaimakal's *Malaimakal Kathaikal* (Stories of Malaimakal); Pushparani's *Akaalam* (Ill-Timed); and the collective narrative voices in *Vizhuthaki Verumaki* (Becoming Prop Roots and Roots). Analyzing women's narratives, the chapter looks at the women insurgents' engagement with memories of food or farming and the way they demonstrate gendered knowledge of food in a conflict zone.

Chapter Three engages with the hunger strikes of Thileepan, a member of the LTTE, and Annai (Mother) Poopathy, a middle-aged woman whose sons had been killed in the recent war. Both succumbed from fasting in public. The chapter traces early Tamil notions and forms of fasting and the historical view of hunger strikes. It then looks at Gandhi's fast, since both Thileepan and Poopathy emulated the fasts observed by Gandhi with the expectation that India would intervene to bring about a solution. In addition, I use Olney's argument on memory's flexible functionality to interpret the hunger strike of Thileepan (1998, 343). I explain the way Thileepan's hunger strike decides the trajectory of the war. I juxtapose Thileepan's final speech before his death with the silent hungry body-text of Annai Poopathy in the context of Feldman's (1991) and Ellman's (1993) arguments on the starving body. The chapter scrutinizes the way hunger lives on in commemorations in the connected diaspora through the collective memories of Thileepan and Annai Poopathy.

Chapter Four looks at the publications of the Tigers that advocate for locally produced, self-sufficient food system solutions from 1990 when the embargo on essential

goods was issued by the state. I contextualize the publications as "food narratives for life" since the rebel governance used them to protect the lives that the state sought to eliminate. The chapter draws on *thinai*—the concepts of landscape and ecology—and uses recent arguments on biodiversity to analyze the narratives of the publications *Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum* (Food Requirement and Production Goals) and *Namatu Porulaathaaram* (Our Economy). In addition, it looks at the way the LTTE narrative is constructed through nationalist ideology and violence in its issues of *Aathaaram* (Resource). It also looks at the civilian voices within the larger nationalist framework. The chapter analyzes the counter-voice to the self-sustainable projects of the Tigers in the autofiction *Pachaivayal Kanavu* (The Dream of Green Fields), written by Thamaraiselvi. Finally, the chapter raises questions about available models to study these materials.

Chapter Five looks at the end of the war in Mullivaikal in 2009 through the life writing of Nillanthan and Tamilkavi. Tamilkavi's narrative in *Oozhikaalam* (Time of Deluge) traces the final months of the most devastating war that the community experienced using the lens of food trauma. The stories of the war are interlaced with the availability or lack of certain foods in specific geographic locations within the combat area. I draw on the history of famines, famine memories, and food sustenance practices that inform the gendered knowledge of food extension and creative resourcing. Since it is impossible to perceive those harrowing last days without a sense of the local geography, the war experiences of food are charted with the map of the local villages. The chapter moves on to Nillanthan's *Yugamudivum Pinnarum* (End of the Age and After). It analyzes the wartime recipes that

Nillanthan's poetry includes in the collection. Calling the poems "recipe-life narratives," the chapter looks at the resilience and survival tactics of the community.

My concluding chapter draws on the theories and concepts used throughout the study to foreground the ways that food memories and food work encapsulate the lived experiences of civilians and combatants. By adopting a unique interdisciplinary approach, this study sheds light on the everyday acts of resistance and survival of a marginalized group amid wartime experiences of heightened food insecurity. This chapter summarizes the findings of this research, and the conclusion highlights future research possibilities in the field.

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[1] The reference is to the brutal war's end in 2009 and its commemorative events. *Vadai* (fried lentil batter) and *puttu* (steamed rice flour cakes eaten with curry) are staple foods in the Tamil diet.

[2] The interdisciplinary field and the intersections of scholarly engagements with food are exhaustive. For instance, some of the important works on gender, body, and food include Yasmeen (1996), Williams-Forsen (2006), Abarca (2006, 2007), Vallianatos (2006), Vallianatos and Raine (2008), Epp (2016, 2023), Epp and Iacovetta (2016), DeVault (1991), Lupton (1998), Counihan (1999, 2004), Counihan and Kaplan (1998), Probyn (2000), Avakian (1997), Avakian and Haber (2005), Meah (2014), Adams (2010), Inness (2000, 2001), Cairns and Johnston (2015), Phillips et al. (2017). For scholarly research on the politics of food, see Nestle (2002, 2003, 2022), Burrows and Cezar (2020). For food, taste and culture, see Bourdieu (1984), Brady (2005), Freedman (2007), Flammang (2009). For nation, identity and ethnicity, see Appadurai (1988), Rogers (2003), Gold (2007), Gabbacia (1998). For food and labour, see Davidson (1983), Deutsch (2012). For famine, and hunger, see Sen (1981), Singer (1972), Kelleher (1997), Devereux (1993), Davis (2000), Russell (2006), Meegama (2012), Becker (1998), Vernon (2007), Slobodkin (2023). For food studies in South Asia, see Pant (2010), Roy (2010), R. S. Khare (1992, 1986), Sengupta (2009), Kikon (2023), Sharma (2012), Sharma and Lambert-Hurley (2023).

[3] See, for instance, Camacho (2008), Akresh et al. (2012), Brück et al. (2016), Zurayk (2020), Martin-Shields and Stojetz (2019), Ben Hassen and El Bilali (2024).

[4] See, for, instance Keen (1998), De Waal (2018), Giustozzi (2019), Eklund et al. (2017).

[5] For food, war, and conflict, see, for instance, Collingham (2013), Knight (2007), Collinson and Macbeth (2017), Brück et al. (2016), Hendrix and Brinkman (2013).

[6] De Silva (2006), Mosby (2014), Ciezadlo (2011), Tanelian (2017), El-Haddad and Schmitt (2012), Dossa (2014), Eliezer and Roberts (2015), Katto (2020), Mehta (2022).

[7] See, for instance, Schofield (1989), Boyce and Frizpatrick (2017), Humble (2020), Theime and Raja (2007), Aoyama (2008), Vlitos (2018), Mannur (2010), Van Gelder (2000), Tigner and Carruth (2018), Coghlan (2020), Olsen (2005), Shahani (2018), Piatti-Farnell and Lee Bien (2018).

[8] The LTTE trained a special unit known as the Black Tigers, who carried out countless ruthless suicide attacks. Anyone who defied them—public figures, political leaders, and government servants—were targeted and this is not an exhaustive list (see, for instance, Francis 2000; Kumar 2005; and *OutlookIndia.com* 2022).

[9] The 1980s saw a fresh approach in biography studies, with feminists questioning the existing paradigms of autobiography. Apart from Smith (1987), Benstock (1988), Nussbaum (1988), and Brodzki (1988) published edited volumes on women's autobiography. Moore-Gilbert asserts that James Olney's *Autobiography* was the only book to engage with slave narratives while not addressing postcolonial autobiography theoretically when the field was still largely Western white male centred. For a more expansive list and a detailed account on postcolonial life writing, see Moore-Gilbert (2009). I am using the term *postcolonial life writing* to engage with the life narratives of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, which has its roots in colonialism. Postcolonialism in Sri Lanka, however, has a slightly different context when compared with the rest of the South Asian countries. I elaborate on this in the section on the background of Sri Lanka.

[10] For a more nuanced reading on the construction of the body, see Butler (1990).

[11] For a more detailed study on the relationship among the body, food, and identity, see Lupton (1998), Muass (1973), Bordo (2004), Probyn (2000), Counihan (1999), Falk (1994).

[12] Not only Rahman, but most scholars who have worked on food and the body interpret Falk's concept of the closed and open body corresponding to European and colonial bodies in different contexts. For instance, see Lupton (1998), Hastorf (2017), Sutton (2001).

[13] For instance, Jon D. Holtzman (2006) provides a comprehensive view on the various ways aspects of food and memory are connected to our lives. See also Abarca and Colby (2016). Studies in food and memory have explored linking various aspects such as diaspora and food memory, most of which have been included in the above-mentioned articles. Gendered memories of food and war are expanding with studies from contemporary conflict regions in the global south (Dossa 2014; Hudson 2019; Mehta 2022; Katto 2020).

[14] A number of studies have appeared on the concept of food and nationalism that connect state policies, geopolitics, culture, and nutrition to construct a national identity based on the gustatory. Ichijo and Ranta (2015) provide a comprehensive survey on the existing literature.

Also, see Appadurai (1988), Montanari (2006), Pilcher (1996, 1998), Miller (2021), Harris (2012), Kim (2010), Ferguson (2006, 2010), Gvion (2012).

[15] In his early essay on governance and government, Rosenau contends that "governance refers to activities backed by shared goals that may or may not derive from legally and formally prescribed responsibilities and that do not necessarily rely on the police powers to overcome defiance and attain compliance" (1992, 4). The concepts of rebellion as explained by Mao (1961) and Guevara (1969) are founded on notions of politicizing civil populations by ruling them in some form and not by merely capturing power. Establishing some form of governance is a common concern among contemporary guerilla movements and they engage with it in various ways (Mampilly 2011; Risse 2011; Wood 2008; Arjona et al. 2015).

[16] For a detailed study on war, displacement, and gender, see Hyndman (2004), Hyndman and Gilles (2011), Silvey (2006), Manchanda (2004), Thakur (2023).

Chapter Two:

Food and Hunger in the Life Writing of the Rebel Fighters

1. *Pannai, Nel,* and *Puttu*: Writing of Male Fighters

This chapter looks at the writings of male and female Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka in order to explore how collective gendered narratives reveal relational, decentred, embodied, and located selves—all of which are at the core of women's life writing theorized by Moore-Gilbert (2009) and as features common in the writings of men and women in the postcolonial context. Their bodies are largely sites of masculine and feminine performances of war: digging trenches and wells, food provisioning through farm and culinary work, and the sharing and eating of food. Conflict and militarism impact gender in myriad ways, with several forms of masculinities and femininities at work. Here I explore the relational experiences of violence, food deprivation, and gendered food memories in the context of combat. By examining how groups of rebel fighters, men and women, narrativize their contacts with the alimentary, I attempt to provide an outline of gender experience as relational. As such, the chapter does not aim to contrast ways that men's and women's groups encountered war.

I begin with a historical analysis of colonial famine, rice and Buddhism, and rural masculinity as a related set of elements. My study provides an outline of colonial famines and their memories in the role of Sri Lanka's Buddhist nationalism. It is followed by an overview of the construction of a postcolonial Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalism and rural masculinity through rice cultivation. Next, I examine the narratives of male rebel fighters of two different groups in northern Sri Lanka: the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

and the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) in the context of foodways. In the final section of the chapter, I look at women's life writing of war and the gustatory.

The following section provides an outline of colonial famines and their memories in the role of Sri Lanka's Buddhist nationalism. It is followed by an overview of the construction of a postcolonial Sri Lankan Buddhist nationalism through rice cultivation. The chapter then delves into the narratives of the insurgents.

1.1 The Colonial Famine and Grain Riots and Ethnic Tensions

As mentioned in Chapter One, Sri Lanka faced famines, grain riots, and food shortages during the long colonial rule, as elsewhere in the colonized global south. The nature of the famine and suffering, however, was experienced differently by communities in the interior Kandyan kingdom and those in coastal Jaffna trade economy. Famine in the Jaffna Peninsula is dealt with in the final chapter in the context of the war. Here I confine my discussion to the Kandyan kingdom. The sixteenth-century Portuguese rule amplified the already existing grain import of the island by increasing the supply of shells, coconut, pearls, elephants, and gems in exchange for rice and fabric. The Dutch succeeded the Portuguese and dominated the cinnamon trade with increased taxes, which resulted in the inability of Indian grain traders to buy enough products from Sri Lanka to provide the required amount of paddy. When this resulted in grain shortages, the Dutch purchased rice directly from India and managed the drought, a practice that continued sporadically until the British conquered the island in 1815.

Under British rule, with an increase of coffee plantations in the southern regions, paddy imports increased to supply the Sinhala peasants, who were forced into labour work on the plantation. With the expansion of coffee plantations, more land was required. In 1840, the crown acquired 80,000 hectares of peasant lands (International Communist Union 2006). The peasant lands in the drylands of the lower region of the Kandyan kingdom continued to be acquired by the British. The colonial governance neglected the maintenance of irrigation tanks. The Sinhala farmers were not allowed to cultivate their own paddy and were forced to work as labourers (Raheem and Corea 2019). By the nineteenth century, the prevalence of famines, food shortages, and diseases became common (Meegama 2012; Jayasekera 2017). Occurrences of several grain unrests followed.

The colonial grain trade was under the control of South Indian Tamils settled in Colombo, coastal Sinhalese, and the coastal Moors. Locally cultivated paddy in the villages were meant for local consumption only. In 1866, when India faced a terrible famine due to poor weather conditions, the rice supply declined in Sri Lanka, resulting in grain prices skyrocketing. Sinhalese peasants living on daily wages were unable to purchase paddy, and local paddy growers and Tamil and Moor paddy traders were compelled to provide rice at a just price. Widespread looting took place in Colombo, where Tamil Chettiyar and Moors were attacked because of the prevalent belief that paddy should not be hoarded for high prices. Such prices only served a few foreign traders, the Moors, and the Tamil Chettiyars. In the next fifty years, whenever India was hit by drought and the paddy supply was reduced, Sri Lanka faced the threat of grain riots. Such riots, however, were averted by local

intervention and charity in the absence of state intervention (Ellis 1897, as quoted in Rogers 1987, 511).

1.2 Rice and the Rise of Buddhist Postcolonial Sri Lanka

After the Donoughmore constitution was passed under colonial rule in 1931, giving Sri Lanka full control over its internal affairs, the country's revival of Buddhism followed the model of Buddhist Southeast Asian countries. D.S. Senanayaka, the minister of agriculture and land development, pioneered land development policies combined with Sinhala nationalism, agriculture, and minority oppression. He designed the colonization of the Dry Zones, which are water-deficient regions, "as a return to the heartland of the ancient irrigation civilization of the Sinhalese" (Moore 1985, 45). Alongside rice, water supply and management hold high significance in ancient Sri Lanka, with farmers paying with grain for the water used (Chandrasekaraa et al. 2021). According to Sri Lankan historian Indrapala, the ancient Sinhalese capital of Anuradhapura in the Dry Zone had been a flourishing paddy land, well connected to early irrigation systems. The region was abandoned in the thirteenth century due to invasions, malaria, climate shift, and the like (Murphy 1957, 191; Indrapala 1972, 83). In the eighteenth century, when Buddhism declined, monks from Thailand visited Sri Lanka and created a monastic order to re-establish the religion. Consequently, the historical and archaeological sites in Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva in the Sinhalese Dry Zone were entrenched in Sinhalese nationalism, Buddhism, rice cultivation, and rural identity. Since paddy requires a well-supported water supply, rural idyllic Sinhalese life was reconfigured with the nationalist campaign slogan: *Wewa, chaithya, yaya* (Tank, stupa, paddy field) (Moore 1985, 190)

Although rice is significant in both Hindu and Buddhist life and religious rituals, rice occupies a particularly central place in Buddhism. In emphasizing the role of rice, Van Esterik notes that in Buddhism it is vital in almsgiving and listening to religious stories. The Buddhist concept of *puñña* (merit-making) involves giving rice to the monks as a means to improve the quality of an anticipated rebirth and to attain enlightenment (1984, 48). Thus, the act of merit-making is directly associated with rice cultivation, and importance is given to sowing and harvesting. Consequently, a society bound by Buddhist values works to ensure a surplus supply of rice, among other gifts (49). Buddhist monks who live in villages are provided with food by the locals, and therefore agrarian activities such as ploughing, sowing, and harvesting are associated with divinity. Any Buddhist state that ensures the abundant production of rice reflects its effective governance and rural popularity.

In postcolonial Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese political leaders made it a priority to develop irrigation in the drylands to appease the Kandyan peasants (Samaraweera 1981, 140-41; Peebles 1990, 37). The state formulated and sponsored policies to move landless Sinhalese peasants, living in southern fertile regions, to the Tamil-speaking regions of the east. Such gradual Sinhalese resettlement over the years began to break up the singular Tamil population in the historically Tamil landscape. Blauner theorizes that internal colonialism is a modern dominant method of repressing ethnic or racialized minorities inside a state (1972, 51-81). Thus, the Sinhala state's attempt at "developing" the country is a form of internal colonialism that varies according to each region. Moore notes that, unlike the politics of countries in both the global south and the global north, the politics of Sri Lanka are not

influenced by agrarian interest (1985, 7).[1] Instead, ethnic tension is a key factor in shaping Sri Lankan politics (191). In other words, the resettlement plan in postcolonial Sri Lanka succeeded in diluting the Tamil stronghold in the region using paddy and land in the context of Buddhist nationalism.

In the new nation, rice cultivation became a principal feature of the Sinhala nationalist agenda, a decision that affected the production of other crops. Traditionally, onions and chillies were the main food crops in Jaffna since it is a dry region. While Tamils in Jaffna bought rice from Muslims and Tamils in the Batticaloa and Amparai districts of the east, Jaffna was the main supplier of onions and chillies (Moore 1985, 193-94). State policies, however, favoured rice cultivation. This practice undermined other crops and eventually became a way to colonize Tamil lands. The situation became so dire that Tamil member of Parliament Dr. E.M.V. Naganathan, who represented the Nallur region in Jaffna, demanded in 1964 that the procurement price of rice be reduced, and subsidies be increased for other food crops (195).

1.3 Resettlement, Rice, and Rural Masculinity

For Sri Lanka, this arrangement was favourable because it contributed to the evolution of agro-development projects in the country.[2] At the same time, the arrangement informed a Sinhala rural masculinity. This vision was further developed by the second president, J.R. Jayewardene, when he initiated an agrarian development and electricity project by building dams in the Dry Zone. Emulating the Thai royal ceremony during the annual ploughing festival in October when the king enters the rice field and ploughs the soil,

Jayewardene inaugurated the *Mahaweli* program in October 1978 by reconfiguring the ploughing ceremony as *Vap Magul*. This forged a strong Sinhalese identity and culture rooted in the "myth of reconquest" of the Tamil territories (Moore 1985, 46). Figure 1 shows Jayewardene, wearing a coloured headcover, holding the plough behind the buffaloes.



Figure 1. President J.R. Jayewardene holds the plough, surrounded by cabinet ministers, to celebrate *Vap Magul* in 1977.[3]

Interestingly, a short video of the 1977 ceremony is housed in the British Pathé, the well-known newsreel archive, which shows Jayewardene entering the field followed by a long line of women carrying lunch pots on their heads. The caption "National food drive," accompanied by the summary that "For many years Sri Lanka has faced shortages of food and the country's staple food, rice has to be imported," casts the colonial gaze on the global south as the geopolitics of starvation. Jayewardene's *Vap Magul* inauguration ultimately paved the path to state-sponsored violence through the celebration of rural masculinity and rice as the identity markers of an ideal Buddhist village life. The agrarian image was also embraced by successive politicians such as Ranasinghe Premadasa in 1980 and various

agricultural ministers. They appear in newspapers and TV channels clad in the rural male's *amude* or sarong (a long piece of cloth worn around the waist), regardless of their elite background.[4]

It is of note that the political heads of the independent Sri Lankan state have mostly hailed from elite families, descendants of advocates, plantation owners, and families with Western education. Jayewardene himself hails from a prominent family influential in law and politics. His body is taught to eat, walk, speak, and act aesthetically to befit aristocratic behaviour (see Bourdieu 1984). His performance attempts to shed its aristocratic identity and embrace a masculine peasant identity. His wife, however, does not enact a romanticized farmer's wife, unlike the women in the video. This filmed display of masculinity is a demonstration of a rigid body juxtaposed with the homebound feminine body, which is not represented as engaged in farming labour. Even though women account for more than half of the farming labour, *Vap Magul* displays them as ideal cooking and caretaking wives. Mahinda Rajapaksa, who became the president in 2005 and ruthlessly ended the armed conflict, also used the masculine images of *Vap Magul* to garner support from Sinhala village farmers.



Figure 2. President Mahinda Rajapaksa ploughs the field for *Vap Magula* in 2007.[5]

In the 1970s, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike implemented a social economic policy of self-sufficiency. As part of the reforms, Tamils in northern Sri Lanka were given unoccupied lands for cultivation. Unemployed youths were encouraged to farm. Sirimavo's policies paid higher incentives to local farmers, but her iron-fisted "produce or perish" slogan left the people with virtually no rice and dependent on bread and sugar rations (Bradley 2020). Sirimavo attempted to stop rubber and tea plantations from functioning and instead encouraged the cultivation of beans, lentils, rice, and vegetables. Food crops were heavily subsidized, and the government procured them at a high price from the farmers. Since the state bought all the produce, farmers and distributors could not engage in the sale of agricultural products. With the ban on imports, chillies and onions gained higher prices in the 1970s. To reflect that reality, an article in the leading Indian newspaper reported that farmers in Sri Lanka welcomed Sirimavo with a chilli garland![6]

2. Food Paths of the LTTE and PLOTE: Male Rebel Fighter Groups

For a more thorough understanding, the life narratives of male fighters are categorized into two time periods: the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and the mid-1980s to the 1990s. The writings in the first category encapsulate the rebel groups' formation, arms training, and food procurement. The narratives in the second category focus on the period after 1983 when scores of youths joined the LTTE following the mass murder of Tamils, a period known as Black July. From that point on, the LTTE began to wield unlimited power within the region. Consequently, the writings of that period and the 1990s describe war and food scarcity. In section 3 of the chapter, I study the life writing of female rebel fighters, whose time period begins in the 1990s when the Tigers rose to prominence.

Narratives of insurgents from conflict zones provide the lens with which to analyze not only battles but also food provisioning, hunger, and food scarcity. Since such narratives are invested in specific social realities and values, they speak for the entire community. In the introduction to *Telling Stories,* Maines et al. note that Life Stories allow for reading the association between the "macro and micro," among other possibilities (2012, 3). In a postcolonial world reeling from conflicts, such narratives emerge from the oppressed groups and represent subaltern identities. Often within the oppressed community, ideological differences reveal more than one group of insurgents and the notions that construct their identities.[7] Life narratives of former members of the LTTE and PLOTE provide stories of food procurement that are one main avenue to look at the way the groups develop or vanish. In addition, the personal narratives reveal various aspects of the political and historical milieu of the state and the internecine strife.

One important formative mid-1970s category of life narratives is based on the writings of Ganesan, a former LTTE rebel, and the unpublished manuscript of Nanda Kandasamy, a former PLOTE rebel. A second important category is based on the late-1980s autofiction by Sattiri, *Ayutha Ezuthu* (Weapon Writing) and the 1990s-and-onward autofiction by Guna Kaviyazhagan. Alongside these is an abundance of writing by other former fighters. Although the memoirs of many early insurgents such as Pushparaja and Thevar Anna exist, only a few of them chronicle the connection between food and the evolution of their movements. This is the same for autofiction. For the purpose of this chapter, I chose life narratives based on their inclusion of food and food work.

Ganesan, known as Aiyar in the movement, was instrumental in the formation of the LTTE, along with Prabhakaran and a few others. His memoir *Eela Porattathil Enathu Pathivukal: Pirapakarnodu pulikal amaippai aramapiththa naatkal* (My Account of the Eelam Struggle: The Founding of the Tigers Movement with Prabhakaran) was published in 2011. In it, he traces his experiences during the LTTE's initial period in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nantha Kandasamy's unpublished manuscript, written during 2021-2022, *Sothu Parcel* (Rice Parcel), is his narrative of PLOTE's early days. While Ganesan wrote in blog format before publishing, Nantha Kandasamy shared his writing on Facebook. Because these are online formats and are available to a wide readership, both these narratives have become public voices. It is of note that although female rebel fighters were not yet in combat for most of the late 1970s and early 1980s, women participated in insurgency through their domestic and culinary skills, public protests, and political debates. Accordingly, women in the writing

of Ganesan's and Nantha Kandasamy's narratives occupy the roles of mother, wife, daughter, or sister, and their direct link to the armed resistance is their provision of food and shelter.

In addition to providing details on food work, the male fighters' life narratives present the socio-agro and economic histories of their region and the country. The recall of an event in the personal narrative voice illuminates specific junctures in the history of postcolonial Sri Lanka. Such histories are connected to the development projects of Sri Lanka's paddy cultivation, food scarcity, and Buddhist nationalism. Thus, these simple stories not only offer an alimentary glimpse of unfolding ethnic conflict, but also illuminate junctures of taste, scarcity, and discrimination.

2.1 The Farm in Ganesan's Memoir

In many of his chapters, Ganesan writes about the movement's acquisition of farmlands in its early days, noting that their management came under his responsibility, and he spent a lot of time there. In Chapter Eight, Ganesan recounts:

> The path to the movement began from our farms. The lands existed near forest areas and were aloof. Only those used to the lower middle class life and loneliness could survive on those farms. The rest left the farm. Those who endured the tough terrain became armed fighters later on and stayed on with the movement […] those who are well known in the eighties as members of the LTTE were those who stayed with us on the farms from 1977. (2011, 75)

In the late 1970s, new recruits were first assigned to these farms, adjacent to forests. Vegetables and paddy fields were cultivated alongside separate farms for poultry. Ganesan notes that those who survived the farm work were taken for arms training. The most enduring members of the movement originally survived life on the farms, and some remained there and excelled in agricultural activities (81). Ganesan's narrative connects the tough, muscular

farming body with the warring body and thus echoes the association between agricultural and war masculinities.

Ganesan's account can be comprehended in the context of studies which have compared male bodies that perform farming activities and those that engage in arms training. It highlights the manner in which one image overlaps with the other (Jellison 2018; Kumar 2018; Eichler 2014). In addition, scholars observe that men are groomed with the expectation to fight and protect their nation and women, whereas women are trained to be nurturers and caretakers of the family.[8]

It is within this context that Ganesan's account is using farm labour as the testing ground for the necessary physical and mental strength to train as guerilla fighters. While his writing supplies a personal voice, Ganesan's narrative constructs a selfhood that presents the group's lived experience entrenched in the ecology, politics, and ethnicity (Gilmore 2001, 12). It speaks to the collective narrative of the history of a specific group through shared food work and arms training (Hammack 2008; Hammack and Pilecki 2012). During the period specified in Ganesan's memoir, the late 1970s to the early 1980s, the LTTE did not even consider recruiting women for armed insurgence. Women were, nevertheless, involved in various forms of street protests and began to join other rebel groups. Ganesan's writing, however, does not make any reference to women. Instead, his narrative remains confined to the male-centric experiences of the movement. His description oscillates between agrarian activities, small-scale fighting, and arms training since the farm space was a hybrid site for both farming and military activities.

Ganesan also writes about the poor breakfast of the fighters: bread and coconut. The movement was in dire need of finances for both weaponry and food; there were days when even bread was not available (2011, 89). In the South Asian context, outdoor cooking, especially in temple rituals and weddings, is mostly associated with men, in line with the concept of cooking as paid work. Women also share public culinary spaces in farmlands, temple rituals and other community-based events. In South Asia, this public space is commonly used for masculine and feminine food performances and differs from the Western notion that professional and outdoor cooking is associated with masculinity and strength (Szabo and Koch 2017; Harris and Giuffre 2015; Swenson 2009). Ganesan's narrative identifies the toughness of the male bodies engaged in farming, in the rugged landscape of isolated regions, as the foundation for the fighting bodies. The editors of *Country Boys: Masculinity and Rural Life* note, "the farm survives against the odds because of a tough kind of farming masculinity that endures—and goes on enduring—hardship" (Campbell et al. 2006, 5). In this context, the agricultural manliness that Ganesan draws upon to encapsulate their experiences is a familiar situation. These farms provided privacy, food, and a safe haven for fighters who were targeted by the state; they constantly moved between farms in various locations as the movement continued to acquire more.

2.2 Food Procurement in Ganesan's Narrative

In the same timeframe, the LTTE began to own lands in northern Sri Lanka, distributed by the state for their use, foremost for hideouts and agricultural production. The movement's acquisition of unoccupied lands and ownership of the terrain was an

unintentional act since its main aim was to provide hideouts. Their acquisition and ownership served as a multi-level move, however, and contested the government's development project. By occupying nonarable and arable lands in northern Sri Lanka, the LTTE established a space that kept the Sinhalese farmers from settling there. It is within this context that Ganesan's narrative on food production needs to be highlighted. Throughout his narrative, the forest figures as dangerous and lonely terrain, with wild animals and diseases. The farms he mentions are not lush, green paddy fields; instead, they are regions that demand heavy physical labour.

Ganesan's description of wild lands and their farming labour reinforces Arendt's notion that tilling the land "prepares the earth for the building of the world" (1998, 399). It builds on Saugeres' argument that the best farmer has hegemonic masculinity and learns to manoeuvre the landscape and train his body to be a reservoir of strength and power (2002, 378). The LTTE began to build their reckless regime by regulating human and natural resources. Although some were existing poultry farms and the like, most of the landscape had to be tilled and toiled over. As the LTTE gathered more members, they bought a tractor for cultivation and a boat for fishing. Ganesan notes that perhaps they created the first poultry farm in Jaffna, while onion and chilli crops provided them with a steady income, and rice was grown on another farm in the east (2011, 79). His narrative demonstrates not only how the emerging rebel movement found ways to sustain themselves through local produce, but also how the LTTE made use of the state's larger food production plans to build their organization, even though it was not a premeditated plan.

The Tamil landscape, which was transformed into large multipurpose farmlands, also became the landscape of large-scale cooking. Ganesan notes that as men trained and lived on the farms, outdoor cooking was another activity the early members engaged in. His narrative reveals three measures of the rebels' approach: taking control of the land before tackling the enemy, producing crops locally to develop an army, and countering the state's land colonizing projects. As a result, these measures helped to define the LTTE's activities and solidify their identity. One of the ways Ganesan's story establishes his identity as a founding member of the LTTE is through developing a connection among three forms of masculinities—the farm, the culinary, and the military.

The farming masculinity that Ganesan constructs is strikingly parallel to the masculine identity defined by *Vap Magula*. Both Sinhala and Tamil men use physical prowess rooted in the plough, land, and cattle to build their identities as protectors of the masses. The long history of famine and food suffering was one of the catalysts for the formation of a Buddhist state, complete with paddy fields, ponds, and Buddhist temples. The Buddhist nation was constructed on an agro-masculine identity, while Tamil nationalism was generated from farm, combat, and outdoor culinary masculinities.

2.3 Food Procurement in Nanda Kandasamy's Narrative

Nanda Kandasamy's unpublished manuscript, *Sothu Parcel* (Rice Parcel), is an account of his days in PLOTE. PLOTE was founded in 1981 by Uma Maheswaran after he split from the LTTE. Kandasamy notes that unlike the LTTE, which required its members to leave home and join the farm, PLOTE believed in its members working from home. One

reason for this decision is the fact that the bulk of the forest and farmlands had already been acquired by the LTTE, which had established itself as a larger group. This approach was reflected in the way the LTTE created their food supply and consequently shaped the movement's ideology. In writing about the choice of his title, Kandasamy notes that the group was derisively called *sothu parcel* (rice parcel) because the members relied on the Jaffna Tamil community to supply their food every day. Members of PLOTE would let the people know the number of food parcels they required when they were in their region, and the locals then provided the rebels with whatever they could give. He expands that since their group insisted on changing home and society before waging the battle for liberation, its members worked closely with the people. The PLOTE rebels listened to people's grievances, mobilized them toward social change, and accepted food from them.

2.4 Beef, Caste, and Food Sharing

In northern Sri Lanka, as in the Tamil-speaking region of India, food practices are interwoven with caste. Among Sri Lankan Tamils, the landowning Vellalas belong to the upper caste. They are not Brahmans, the usual high caste in the Hindu system, and may or may not be vegetarian. Unlike the Brahmans, the Vellalas are rooted in material life and wealth provided by their lands. The lower castes are Dalits, labouring in the Vellala-owned lands, toddy tappers, and other such working groups, and some may eat beef. The upper caste only accepts raw food from the lower castes and cooked food is accepted from equal castes. It is possible that Brahmans and vegetarian Vellalas share food and enjoy commensality. Dalit households and working groups such as the fishing caste can accept cooked food from any caste, but no upper caste would eat cooked meals from them. These groups also consume

beef. The type of food and the way it is cooked varies among different castes. For instance, smoked or barbecued meat is associated with lower castes. Since beef is generally not allowed in Hinduism, young boys in Jaffna often ate beef outside the house and sometimes even far away from their villages so that their families would not find out (Kandasamy, personal conversation, March 13, 2023; *Tamil Guardian* 2016).

After independence, in the 1960s, Jaffna witnessed severe social struggles against the caste system (Pfaffenberger 1990). Caste segregation diminished under the influence of left-oriented ideologies but did not vanish. Kandasamy's inclusion of beef curry points to the fact that PLOTE members broke caste taboos and accepted anything offered by anyone. On the other hand, beef curry in a Dalit household is a luxury, which proves the fact that the families offered the members the best they could.

One of Kandasamy's chapters lists the foods given to their group. The chapter appears as a form of dialogue, for example: "Today it is only vegetarian [food], but we have kept appalam, and Cassava chips [for you]" (n.p.). Every single dish appears in the form of a metaphoric dialogue, which implies a kind giver and a receiver. The food parcels include curried goat blood, moringa leaf curry, dry fish gravy, *puttu* made from "American flour," shrimp in coconut milk gravy, *idiappam*, bread, rice, and boiled eggs. Bread (roast paan) and "American flour" speak to the legacies of colonization and food aid programs. One family tells the rebel group, "We have beef curry and five pounds of roast paan, eat well," which illustrates the close association of food and caste within the South Asian context.

Kandasamy's narrative elucidates the way bodies relate to each other by eating together. Food is material and symbolic, erases boundaries of the body when shared and eaten together, and in many communities, this physical act identifies the individual as part of the group (Hastorf 2017, 282). Following Falk (1994), Hastorf argues that eating and sharing create relational bodies because they eat "in" and "for" a group (282). The act of receiving from the public and lower caste groups bring both the subaltern groups, the lower stratum and the rebels, together. Such techniques of the body benefit both groups and make them exist in a relational sphere. Focusing on bodily actions, Kandasamy's account reveals a self that views itself relational. Moore-Gilbert, borrowing heavily from the feminist life-writing argument that women's autobiography exists as relational rather than as an individual self, argues postcolonial life writing prevails "in solidarity with a variety of groups in relation to which the writer constructs" their "selfhood" (2009, 31). Kandasamy exemplifies these assertions and draws the relational body and the relational self together through somatic acts of eating and sharing.

2.5 Receiving Food, Gratitude, and Shame

The position of PLOTE fighters as individuals sustained by the mercy of people's generosity enabled them to place the community at a higher level than themselves. It made them accountable to the locals and therefore serve them. In recalling such multiple exchanges with a list of food varieties, Kandasamy notes that even now his tears well up at people's affectionate gesture. In the Tamil culture, receiving food from an outsider is often associated with gratitude on the part of the receiver. The early Tamil epic *Manimekalai* declares "*undi koduthor uyir koduthore* (the one who gives food, gives life)," equating giving food to

preserving or protecting life. In Tamil culture, gratitude is often shown through repaying in kind. Appadurai equates the Tamil culture's notion of a return gift to similar thoughts in other cultures that solidify human ties, adding that such "gratitude implies appreciation, appreciation involves acknowledgement, and the only significant form of acknowledgement is return" (1985, 240). Kandasamy's life writing displays the reciprocity of the rebels, who vow not to loot from the locals. He adds this comment to differentiate his rebel group from the other groups. Food in his narrative becomes a symbol of identity, unanimity, and group belonging. Appadurai argues that food "can signal rank and rivalry, solidarity and community, identity or exclusion and intimacy or distance" (1981, 494). Thus, Kandasamy's voice accords with Appadurai's argument on food, as perishable goods, charged with emotions, and as a marker of everyday practices.

To describe the act of receiving meals, Kandasamy uses the phrase *kaiyenthi ninrom* (we begged). The word *kaiyenthi* literally refers to the physical act of stretching one's palm to beg. In Tamil culture, similar to other cultures, receiving food without earning it, is considered shameful and puts the receiver at the lowest stratum of the society. The famous modern Tamil poet Bharati writes, "*Pichchai vaangi unnum vaazvu petruvittapothilum achchamillai achchamillai achhamenpathillaiye* (Even when one has to beg to live, no fear, no fear, still no fear)" (1987, 336). His lines demonstrate the act of begging as lowly and as being bound to be severely ridiculed. Accordingly, Kandasamy notes that the phrase *sothu parcel* (rice parcel) became synonymous with PLOTE as other liberation groups began to call them by that name. The choice of the title for Kandasamy's memoir uses "food parcel" as a symbol of subversion. His voice repeatedly establishes that the founding values of their

group were shaped by their sense of debt and gratitude to the public. These words signal the collective identity of PLOTE, including both benefactors and receivers, fashioned through food giving and receiving.

2.6 Cooking and Farming: Disciplinary Activities in Sattiri's *Ayutha Ezuthu* (Weapon Writing)

When rebel fighters disobeyed the rules of the LTTE or decided to leave the movement, they were punished. Food work and farm work were assigned as forms of disciplinary action. Both men and women were given the same punishment. The notion of such labour as punishment reveals two underlying generalizations about food work: food work is inferior; and as rebels, fighting is superior. Regardless of contemporary feminist reclamations of kitchen space, the overall view of domestic labour remains unchanged as argued by scholars who have complicated gendered kitchen roles (DeVault 1994; Williams-Forson 2006; Meah 2014). Even in the LTTE, a group in which significant importance was attached to nutritious meals (this is elaborated on in Chapter Four), food work was considered a resented task and assigned as punishment. Such notions are common even in state armies. There is evidence, for example, that in the British military, kitchen work was assigned to soldiers as a form of punishment (Perreira 2019; Ferretti 1981). The LTTE, notwithstanding its claim of women's empowerment and equality, did little or nothing to change this notion. Instead, by using food labour as part of their disciplinary action, the movement reinforced the stereotype. In addition, this reinforcement reflects the way the cadres looked at cooking and farming. Stories and personal narratives by most former rebels

frequently describe kitchen work as punishment that fellow fighters received.[9] As fighters, they viewed combat as a vital act of resistance, as opposed to feeding their own army.

2.7 Spoiled *Puttu* and Masculine Storytelling

Guna Kaviyazhagan was a rebel fighter in the LTTE who wrote several works of autofiction. His accounts look at the period from the late 1990s to 2009. In his narratives, Kaviyalagan makes more references to food than is found in most writings by male LTTE members. In *Appal Oru Nilam* (The Faraway Land), the author describes the steaming of rice in the palm leaf steamers traditionally used to steam *puttu* (2016, 186). In the LTTE, food is cooked in a general camp, which is usually closer to public residences, so the smoke does not give away their location to the enemies. The cooked food is then taken to the interior bases and checkpoints. Due to the presence of the huge state military forces, the movement of food is very slow. Food insecurity is at its peak in any armed conflict since supply paths are often the first target with the goal of withholding the enemy's food (Lightowler and Macbeth 2014, 106). As American war veterans have testified, even if there is abundant food, there are perpetual food shortages during battle, owing to the limited quantity one can carry to the front lines and the impermanence of supply chains (Smith et al. 2009, 283). In describing a similar situation during a personal communication, Kaviyazhagan notes that cooked rice gets spoiled in the heat by the time it reaches the destination when the supply paths are hit (28 Apr. 2023).

If one were to consider Lévi-Strauss's culinary triangle, in which raw food remains on the top of the triangle while cooked food (human intervention-culture) and rotten food (no

human participation) form the other two points of the triangle (1966, 46), in the insurgents' world the triangle is reversed. In this context, food made by humans is at the bottom and rotten food is at the top of the triangle. Another process of cooking, however, renders the rotten food edible again. In a personal communication, Kaviyazhagan notes that the spoiled rice is steamed again to get rid of the bad bacteria and is consumed by the militants (21 Apr. 2023). It is an act that conquers the process of nature. The notion of conquest permeates his writing—defeating the enemy, conquering nature, and digesting the indigestible. These bodily processes, which convey the masculine in his writing, are the pervading narrative alongside an emphasis on the taboos of contamination, dirt, and defilement.

2.8 Treading Narratives of Food and Danger

Each culture determines what is edible and what is not edible, demonstrating how notions of purity/impurity, and clean/unclean vary among different cultures. Douglas explicates that dirt is a threat to an established order of life and its denunciation is a way to control that perceived risk (1984). Dirt is considered "matter out of place" (36), and as such dirt equals disorder while purity is order. The Tamil rebels are acquainted with the cultural categories of impure food, and they identify impurity with their sense of smell. The memory of smell informs them that the food cannot be consumed. The combatants must save their bodies from the external attacks of the state army and the internal threats posed by microbes, and both these efforts presuppose the techniques of transforming chaos into control. Thus, to make the body digest the bacteria, albeit transformed through resteaming, becomes an act of making the body invincible against humans and pathogens alike: culture and nature.

In the ethnographic interviews of the women liberation fighters of northern Mozambique, the female combatants state that they ate anything to "get rid of the feeling of hunger" (Katto 2020, 976). As Katto notes, food in the war zones and especially in the rebel camps, unlike the state army camps, did not engage with the senses and did not signify smell or taste but instead signified danger (976). The combatants' everyday practice of consumption erased taste and their memories of the same. What remained was the smell and taste of contaminated foods and the threat they posed. If risk-taking is a trait associated with masculinity through physical prowess in fighting wars and ingesting food, then in the context of war, it is common to both genders. Their experiences of the body and bodily food labour are relational and shared in a battle zone.

3. Hunger and Mutton Rolls: Food and Food Memories of Female Fighters[10]

Personal writing by former female fighters published in recent decades provides details of food, memory, and conflict. This section of the chapter will centre on the life writing of female rebels of the Tamil resistance movements. It focuses on the way bodily acts and memories associated with food contribute to performing gender and intersect with their lives at war.

The works considered here are *Oru Koorvalin Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of a Sword) by Thamizhini, *Malaimakal Kathaikal* (Stories of Malaimakal) by Malaimakal, and *Akaalam* (Ill-Timed]) by Pushparani. Alongside these books, this section will also use a collection of life-narrative voices of female combatants *Vizhuthaki Verumaki* (Becoming Prop Roots and Roots). Employing life-writing theory in general and the specific lenses of food memories

and culinary practices, this section explores the multifaceted gendered articulations and memorialization of war, fighting, imprisonment, food scarcity, and hunger. In so doing, this section brings together conflict studies, gender studies, life writing, and food studies.

3.1 Women's Role in the Resistance Movement

In post-independent Sri Lanka, the oppression of the Tamil minority by the state saw the rise of insurgency, with women playing a crucial role in the resistance movements as early as the 1970s. Beginning from the 1980s, women fighters gained momentum under the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which emerged as a powerful movement. Young women were initially recruited for community work such as to create awareness of the Tamil cause, women's empowerment, and other social issues. Later they received arms training and some of them were trained to become suicide bombers known as the Black Tigers (Thamizhini 2003; Alison 2003, 38). There has been considerable scholarly engagement with the impact of state oppression, militant Tamil women, and their agency (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001; Gowrinathan 2012) based on ethnographic interviews. Still, a vast array of writings by women in the LTTE is yet to be explored.

Although scholars have challenged the LTTE's claim that the role of women combatants was emancipatory, female fighters truly believed that they were equal to men (Coomaraswamy 1996; De Mel 2001).[11] The majority of the women who joined the movement were from the lower class, with a few exceptions being from the middle class (Hellman-Rajanayakam 2008). Thus, their writings about their lives as women combatants are imbued with notions of women's liberation and the smell and taste of food, which are

often juxtaposed. Poverty and food scarcity were some of the common reasons to join the LTTE (Brun 2008; Gowrinathan 2021, 4). Additional motivating factors were the will to resist patriarchy and bring about women's emancipation, the urge to fight back against state oppression, dreams of Tamil nationalism, resisting disruption of studies, and defying subjection to rape and torture.

This section focuses on women's culinary experiences during combat and imprisonment. At the same time, the presence of articulations about cooking is scarce or is buried under the narratives of war and victories. This section delineates multiple representations of the acts of cooking, fasting, and eating during the extraordinary events of violence and attempts to explore the manner in which these culinaryscapes interacts with notions of feminism/feminist ideology and gendered narratives. In the process, it attempts to interrogate culinary aspects of women's writings as a site of struggle between the discourse of food-making and the silence that surrounds it (Sukumaran 2023).

Tamil women's writings from Sri Lanka about the civil conflict exist in many categories, including memoirs, biographies, fiction, and poetry. Despite this broad spectrum, for the purpose of this section, I am concentrating on writings by three women: Pushparani, Malaimakal, and Thamizhini as well as the collective voices in *Vizhuthaki Verumaki* (Becoming Prop Roots and Roots). Each writing represents a different phase of the prolonged civil war. Pushparani is one of the earliest women to participate in an armed resistance movement in the 1970s in the Jaffna Peninsula. Although she did not receive weapons training, her experience is crucial since she was involved in the formation period of the

armed outfit. Malaimakal's writings reflect her active participation in weapons training and intense moments of combat, while Thamizhini writes both about the active war and her surrender to the Sri Lankan Army in the aftermath of the armed conflict in 2009. *Vizhuthaki Verumaki* is a comprehensive narrative of weapons training and combat. It details events in the editorial voices of Kantha, Puratchika, and Malaimakal that overlap with the writings of Thamizhini. Accordingly, I focus on the books by these women in order to draw upon their experiences that intertwine with food memories at the different stages of the many-decades war.

3.2 The Texts of Female Rebels

3.2.1 Pushparani's Experience of Food and Hunger in Prison

Pushparani is the first woman to have been imprisoned because of her participation in the armed struggle of the Tamil resistance movement, and her memoir *Akaalam* (Ill-Timed) published in 2012 recounts her experiences. Although she was not combat trained, her activism belonged to the early period of gathering financial support for the movement, which involved bank robbery. Her writing unfolds her family life and the circumstances that propelled her toward political activism.

In the various incidents narrated in Pushparani's memoir, she underscores food and its consumption in many ways. She records her family home as a place that offered refuge to insurgents by providing food and shelter, even as her low-caste family remains hungry (2012). Toward the end of the book, she lists the names of her female friends, comrades, and their mothers, whose houses provided sustenance. The women she writes about were neither

combatant women nor were they recruited for resistance movements; their participation in resistance was by supplying kitchen services. Accordingly, culinary work and food are often visited and revisited in Pushparani's memoir. In addition, since much of Pushparani's book deals with her experience in the prison, food and nourishment is constantly explored as a theme. In that sense, her articulation becomes a medium to assign new significance to food, the body, life, and resistance, and it takes a central place in order to explore the body's existence in a prison.

Prison is a place where the body endures the most painful and challenging moments in order to exist. The body in pain loses even language and is maimed by the reality of this existence (Scarry 1985, 75). Pushparani summarizes the significance of food and politics as follows: "Anyone wondering why a woman imprisoned for political reason is blowing the food issue out of proportion would not have experienced life in the prison" (2012, 112). She describes the political upheaval in the 1970s, resulting in the beginning of the resistance movements; the events leading up to her arrest are outlined chronologically, and this chapter on food intercepts the continuation of her life in prison. Her remark is significant as it connects the larger political need with the smaller, hungry body, the public with the personal. As Spivak claims, "there is no such thing called an uncoded body" (in Barr 1989, 12).

In prison, Pushparani goes through a period of continued beatings, which are interrupted by the delivery of sparse meals such as a slice of bread or leftover chicken biriyani without any chicken pieces. The mention of biriyani, a luxurious food among South Asians, is intriguing as she recounts that the police would tell her family to make rich food

with chicken as she does not have enough strength in her body to withstand the beatings. And so, her mother would pack her chicken soup, chicken gravy, and such. None of these meals ever reached Pushparani and were instead consumed by the police. Her complaint about not receiving food is rooted in the thought that she does not get what she is entitled to. She clearly states that although the government had provided enough funds to feed political prisoners, she was never given what she was eligible for.

Spivak contends that hunger must be rewritten for it to be a "sign of exploitation" (in Barr 1989, 12) so it can turn into a political force. For a subaltern prisoner, however, whose physical existence is in peril, the mention of hunger proves nothing. It highlights how the prisoner is rendered voiceless, without a discourse; and food, or the lack thereof, becomes a vehicle to provide an account of his/her experience that is otherwise impossible for the reader to feel. Pushparani repeatedly writes about the rights of a political prisoner, which include special food, newspapers, as well as a pen and paper to write. Her narrative voices her loss of human dignity as her tortured body is no longer human. She exists in the primeval state of Fanon's black body, losing her dignity and integrity as a human (2004, 9). The prison's biopolitical control reduces her human life to a tortured existence. She further explains how elated she felt at the abundance of the food given to her and her friends, after their demands as political prisoners, when she was moved to another bigger prison in Velikkada (2012, 127-129).

Like physical pain, hunger is not something that can be shared; it is, however, understood at least to a certain extent, and Pushparani relies on starvation to engage the

reader. Knowing her destiny as a political prisoner, she does not throw herself into self-starvation. While it is common to write about torture and fear in the prison, Pushparani articulates her experience of gendered violence through food amid the political turmoil engulfing the Tamils and justifies it by adding:

> Food in the prison is not just connected to the stomach. There are multitudes of meanings for a ball of rice in the prison, such as, the uncertainty surrounding the availability of food and the quantity provided, the happiness of the tortured body that savors the food and the imagination that the body has become stronger with a morsel. (2012, 112)

This excerpt elucidates the connection among food, mind, body, and soul. Pushparani's narration identifies food with hope and resilience, although she has no control over her life or body in the prison. Her account is also a portrait of her inner self, which holds on to any little thread in order to prove that the self can exist under any circumstance. Through the metaphor of food, she explains that the short-lived hope and dream of food sustains her in the prison, and her imagination of the "nourished body" helps her to heal her battered mind and body. She does not indulge in comfort foods or articulate memories of such foods; instead, she views food as a representation of healthy living and her right as a prisoner for political reasons.

Unlike many accounts of imprisonment and hunger strikes who starve in prison or purge themselves to cling to their belief, Pushparani's narrative is more like the articulation of Holocaust survivors who ate whatever was available, even if it was just a morsel, to keep themselves alive, even though they were aware of imminent death (Ellmann 1993, 14-15). Pushparani's mode of resistance is eating to keep herself alive. This memoir, written many years after the experience of being held captive, recounts the moments between being tortured and fed, between becoming unconscious due to pain and swinging back to consciousness

through hunger. In both cases, the battered body moves between action and inaction, between being and non-existence, human and in-human. As Pushparani recounts, “other than the times we were beaten, we would be coiled in a corner half awake. Around eleven we would stand near the window to see if there was any food sent our way” (2012, 112). Her experience of food deprivation echoes the way food is used as a mechanism to displace the self from the body and convert personhood into a prisoner (Godderis 2006, 67).

3.2.2 Malaimakal: The Taste of Mutton Rolls and *Puttu*

Malaimakal was a female fighter who authored a few poems and several short stories. She died in the wars end in 2009. While I call them “short stories” for convenience of labelling, I view these writings as autofiction or fictive self-writing that emerged from the life of a woman combatant in the three-decade-long armed conflict. The stories examined here are those written during a period in which the LTTE was engaged in intense fighting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The short story “Until When” was written in 1999, with the front-line trenches as its backdrop (Malaimakal 2004, 11–15). The story begins with a group of young women digging a trench to build their hideout. As work proceeds, one woman exclaims, “bring the rolls with the tomato sauce, we are exhausted” (12). As argued by Sutton, cooking and consuming are tangible practices felt in the senses and kindle food repositories of the brain in the past (2001). The grave description of building a hideout is interspersed with the fond memory of comfort food, which enfolds the past. The body, which serves to actualize political aspirations and dreams of a free homeland, is also a site of physical desire. More than a substance to feed a hungry body, rolls, the breaded cylindrical cutlets, are seen as a semiotic tool of pleasure that appeals to a hungry body.

Sri Lankan rolls are unique: spicy mutton/fish or vegetable chunks are rolled in a thin crepe, soaked and sealed in egg white, rolled in breadcrumbs, and then deep-fried.[12] They are popular short eats and are common in bakeries, shops, and family parties. The short eats are material objects inscribed in the bodies and culture, and the very act of stuffing, frying, and eating is a way of "holding a community together" because gatherings such as political protests, meetings, and family get-togethers do not happen without them (Deepak 2019). These rolls are a material symbol of taste and affordability, specifically when a war zone does not grant survival or food. This example illustrates Foucault's contention that customs in a culture "inscribe" themselves upon the body and establish their forces, energies, sensations, pleasures (1980, 155). The rolls are an imagined indulgence as the women's cadres starve over a long period of time or have very limited food while on the front lines. The nostalgic memories connected to rolls are often associated with happy food times with family and friends, the immediate smell and taste of the food, and the alleviation it provides. As Abarca and Colby argue, the foremost connection between food and memory is the olfactory and affective experience combined with the social-cultural elements of food (2016, 5). The narrative continues with the forming of the hideout trenches and fences while two young women from the group go to a particular point to fetch food. Their return is marked by fun and songs as female fighters are provided with a special snack—*vadai*—that day. *Vadai* is a fritter made of ground lentils mixed with onions and curry leaves. It is often eaten with coconut chutney.

In Malaimakal's narrative, women's acute awareness of their vulnerability, coupled with the impermanence in the war zone, often intersects with their cravings for luxury food that could appeal to their taste buds. A point to note here is that although they are starving due to lack of food, the women's comfort lies not in food that would assuage their hunger, but in the snacks and savouries that dominate their longing and sensory experiences. Food memories of past joyous times are reimagined to cope with the stress of the warfront and the unfamiliar world of war gets familiarized with such acts. Basu, in his exploration of "palimpsest memory," contends that their memories are repeatedly visited, revisited, removed and concealed, creating accidental contiguity and multiple layers as "palimpsest memory" (2008, 231-260). Analogous to his discussion, these women interweave layers of memories and realities as survival tactics.

Another of Malaimakal's another ficton short stories, "A Cup of Tea," describes the everyday food the young female combatants receive and its subsequent reduction (2004, 23-36). The everyday menu includes *puttu* (a staple made of steamed rice flour) and curry for breakfast, rice and curry for midday meal, and then *puttu* and curry for dinner. Later, rice and eggplant curry constitute all the three meals since eggplant is an inexpensive, most commonly available vegetable in Sri Lanka. Finally, the supply turns into gruel in the morning and eggplant curry and rice for lunch and dinner. The women refuse to eat. Instead, they transform the rice into coarse flour by drying it in the sun, which becomes a snack with tea.

The story continues by describing a short supply of sugar and other such ingredients that especially appeal to the taste of the female insurgents. The entire narrative is about food and the lack of it and borders the food imaginations with the bodily labour of war. Malaimakal notes that the women are praised by their male counterparts for their physical stamina that withstands the laborious conditions. The everyday technologies of the body—in Foucault's terminology (1988, 17-49), the ingesting, digesting, walking, and the like—are contrasted with the wartime work of digging trenches and building hideouts and sentry posts. The body, habit memories, and techniques of the body (Connerton 2014; Sutton 2001; Hastorf 2017), which are gendered through everyday performance, are now turned into sites of war masculinity (Cock 1991; Enloe 1990, 2000). The story portrays the way of overcoming the challenges of the tough physical conditions the women undergo to perform the same tasks as the male fighters. Malaimakal's account, in its discursive pattern, assumes the tone of a masculine conqueror.

Such illuminations also demonstrate the qualities of good fighters and prove the women to be the "ideal fighters" of the organization. How does one know that he/she is the ideal representative? It is through following the organization's rules, by subjecting one's body to hardship in order to follow greater orders. In his discussion on subjectivity, Foucault contends that one becomes a subject when one is required to accept the "disciplinary power" (1994, 202). Unlike the reality of the conflict zone, the lack of food travels everywhere. Deprivation of food is a lens through which one can enter the world of these fighters. On the one hand, they are superhumans who possess extraordinary courage; on the other, they are just human, and their bodies turn into sites fraught with hunger, discipline, and desire.

Accordingly, these narratives manifest wartime masculinity and femininity alongside each other.

The story carries on along the same lines when the male counterparts of the LTTE border force join the women for a short period, providing them with snacks, biscuits, and chocolates. The account then shifts to the active fighting with the Sri Lankan Army. Malaimakal again projects the emaciated bodies of the young women's group and juxtaposes their fragile bodies with the well-trained, well-armed, and well-fed state army men. This is not an uncommon articulation. The Vietnamese, while remembering their female counterparts in the Vietnam War, usually compare the tiny stature of their country's women to the muscularly built American pilots (Gottschang and Hao 1999, 19). Such descriptions contrast domestic femininity against war masculinity.

During the rebel insurgent offence when they chased the state army out of their own camps, Malaimakal writes about the abundance of food that was left behind: fresh vegetables in the fridge; canned soda; meat still cooking on the stove; cheese tins, fruit, and meals on the table, either half-eaten or sometimes just served and left untouched. All these examples are signs that differentiate the groups. They are used as metaphors to accentuate the contrast between the bodies: the male bodies that grew up in luxury with body-conscious meals and the female bodies of the women Tamil insurgents who were deprived of all of the above. The army soldiers, as the embodiment of the state, are set against the female bodies, portrayed as the sites of carnal desires. The story concludes by highlighting Tamil nationalist hopes built by fragility and strength, food scarcity and memories of taste, consumption and deprivation

as experienced by the women fighters: “When the tigers who fed on porridge chased the lions who were eating cheese, dates, meat and yellow rice just ten minutes before the operation, they ran away” (Malaimakal 2012, 22).

3.2.3 Food Caring in the Collective Voices of *Vizhuthaki Verumaki*

Vizhuthaki Verumaki (Becoming Prop Roots and Roots) is written by Kantha, Puratchika, and Malaimakal—members of the LTTE’s Malathi battalion, the women’s wing of the movement. The narration weaves together multiple voices and selves with motifs of warfare, sustenance, weapons training, hunger, and food insecurity. This is a genre that can be termed “postcolonial collective life writing” and is akin to the older slave narratives that carry first-person experiences and accounts. Although the main purpose of the book, published by the LTTE, is to exhibit women’s accomplishments in the insurgency against the state army, descriptions of food and the lack of it finds a place in the narrative.

While the book is an extensive narration of war manoeuvres, the women also write about their hospitality. Since in Tamil culture domestic generosity is a role associated with the women of the house, in recalling the valour the speaker comments, “Captain Kethusha who died in the battle of Mannakulam was from Batticaloa and carried the generosity the region is famous for” (*Vizhuthaki Verumaki*, 147). In this instance, the female fighter juxtaposes a postcolonial self that took to arms against both the oppressive state forces and the domestic labour of food production and caregiving. This narrative reinforces the existing notion of women as nurturers, food provisioners, and caregivers among various cultures as problematized by scholars including DeVault (1991), Roy (1972), Meah (2014), and Inness

(2001). In the ethnographic interviews conducted by researchers of the Tamil female rebels (i.e., Rajasingham-Sennayake 2001; Herath 2007; Gowrinathan 2021; De Alwis 1998a; De Mel 2001), the armed women speak about the act of joining the movement as challenging gender norms and escaping the drudgery of food work. Yet unconsciously, in the writing, the woman combatant uses the term *virunthompal* (hospitality and caregiving) and forges women's identity as being the "good housewife" by performing domestic labour. At one level, the very use of the word challenges the image that the female fighters wanted to create about themselves; and at another, it becomes an example of embracing these various, contradicting selves that they enact in a war zone. In her work on the lived experiences of former women fighters of the Mozambique War of Independence, Katto argues that the female rebels constantly "negotiate between 'masculine' and 'feminine' coded ways of acting their corporality" (2020, 86). The single sentence in *Vizhuthaaki Verumaaki* about rebel fighter Kethusha's courage and hospitality encapsulates the contrasting gender roles that the LTTE women perform in the forests and drives home the point Katto makes in her study.

In another instance narrated in *Vizhuthaaki Verumaaki*, the female rebels celebrate *Pongal*, the Tamil harvest festival. The description begins with the bodily work of cleaning the place, drawing patterns known as *kolam*, fetching water, scraping the coconut, and all such familial labour for the festival. Here, their bodies undertake the conventional role of women as protectors of culture despite their roles as rebels in the movement. "Norms of behaviour by repetition" make it possible for the continuity of practice from the past (Hobsbawn 1992, 3). The human body is imbued with a code of behaviour and practices that

become “social conclusions” (as cited in Moore-Gilbert 2009, 35). These “social conclusions” become traditions and are often inscribed on female bodies and in the voices of women’s life narratives and the collective voices in *Vizhuthaaki Verumaaki* are imprinted with them too.

The embodied labour for *Pongal* celebration highlights the women as keepers of culture. The women’s food and food-related festive work demonstrates the way the combatants negotiate their identity as Tamil women and recreate a sense of home and a past familiarized from their childhood by their mothers. Such gendered voices in life narratives involve the body in some form (Smith 2010, 49). By performing this gendered task, the female insurgents conform to the LTTE’s nationalist enforcement of women as the embodiment of Tamil identity and culture. This is an argument commonly held about women’s representation in constructing a nation by scholars such as Chatterjee (1997), De Mel (2001), and De Alwis (1998) and is widely prevalent in most nationalist struggles. The women identify their bodies as oscillating between performing the external tasks of war (men’s world) and the internal toil (women’s cultural realm). It is through the collective bodily labour that the female combatants narrate their memories of fellow fighters and negotiate their multiple identities as insurgents and culture protectors.

3.2.4 Thamizhini’s Memories of Starvation

Thamizhini, the head of the LTTE’s female wing, has recorded her experiences and related them through food in her book *Oru Koorvalin Nizhalil* (In the Shadow of a Sword), published in 2021. Her memoir is an account of her time in the LTTE until the war’s end and

her consequent imprisonment. She joined the movement at a young age, trained in weaponry, and became the head of the women's wing. Thamizhini remained on the front line until the last moment of the conflict, and she is the only senior leader to survive the war. Her account is in the form of nonlinear life writing that focuses on the memories associated with the group's many victories, the final episode of surrender, her imprisonment, and the failure of the armed fight in 2009. In her narrative, she draws attention to food, its production, consumption, and its deprivation on various occasions. In the following passage, Thamizhini writes about a challenging foundational period for the LTTE, during which the movement was not financially self-reliant and was, in fact, in dire need:

> Many fighters called the time of 'Jayasikuru' 'porridge time.' A thin porridge made of a little rice and a lot of salted water was brought to the battlefront in plastic bags every day for the morning meal. A watery curry of beef or brinjals in the afternoons, and at night some puttu and a watery tomato curry, filled the stomachs of the fighters engaged in the rigorous work of battle, but gave them little nourishment. So, on the frontlines, where the ground shook from time to time, the fighters were injured or killed in large numbers. (Thamizhini 2021, 12)

In this excerpt, Thamizhini vocalizes the situation not by magnifying the challenges the fighters faced with the deficit of weapons or training, rather by articulating memories of the lack of food and what it meant for the body. Both Malaimakal and Thamizhini register the same period of food scarcity in their writings and yet their treatment of the issue varies. While Thamizhini reflects on the situation as an unfavourable reality that took the lives of the combatants, Malaimakal writes about the same concern as a challenge bravely and creatively overcome by the women. Her story does not reveal much of the loss and instead focuses only on the achievements of the women and the LTTE.

After surrendering to the Sri Lankan Army, Thamizhini is imprisoned for a few years, and her memoir poignantly recounts these days. She holds herself responsible for the protection of the public, a thought that commonly prevailed among the LTTE combatants (2021, 177). Her position within the movement and her experience at the war's end added a strong sense of guilt about the carnage of the final few days of the war and her failure to protect the people. Thamizhini narrates her view on hunger, body, and catharsis when she remarks, "As my stomach burned with hunger, I felt as though the pressures of my mind began to heal" (2021, 179). The realization that she can no longer speak for the people she was supposed to have saved takes over her mind and body. She notes that the LTTE movement existed like a large patriarchal system, in the sense that women were groomed to be obedient fighters obeying the orders from above. She stresses that the situation for women within the LTTE was akin to the expectation from girls brought up in individual families to be docile (2016, 111). Her position as the head of the women's political wing is the topmost a woman combatant can achieve (Satkunanathan 2012, 213; Herath 2007, 208), and this gendered experience reinforces her guilt.[13] Thamizhini's memoir was written after 2009. Therefore, she was at greater liberty to reflect upon the bygone tumultuous and violent years alongside the insurgence. She probably held herself responsible to write since she was the only living senior member in a powerful position.

As Butler argues, the body is a structure that holds interpretations and definitions and serves as an object of oppression and exchange (1993). Thamizhini's body as a woman combatant is forced to endure the guilt of the failure of a large militant organization. These lines explore the notion of punishing the body to relieve the guilt and ill feelings in the mind

and connect the agonized self with the agonized body. Repeatedly, the body becomes the place of self-affliction. As Lupton claims, food and its consumption are crucial to our sense of self and our bodily knowledge (1996). Thamizhini's thinking and actions echo Lupton's assertion, although she does not remain culpable toward the entire future. Instead, she uses self-punishment to discipline her mind and body and to rise above her guilt. She is able to recover her "self" through the awareness that her body requires to starve to fully comprehend her present situation. The starvation helps her assume her subject position as a prisoner and be liberated from her guilt.

3.3 An Analysis of the Culinary Voices: Discourses of Resistance

The voices of Pushparani, Malaimakal, and Thamizhini are subaltern and cannot speak. When they do speak about the tumultuous events and experiences of food, of hunger in extremis, cooking and recipes become discourses of resistance and tools to draw the readers into their brutality-laden worlds. The extent to which culinary experiences are used by women fighters, however, varies in many ways.

Food figures prominently in two of Malaimakal's stories. Even though Thamizhini discusses her training and encounters with the enemy in her memoir, food and its scarcity are only mentioned in a few chapters. It is interesting to note that Thamizhini's narrative is bookended by references to *kanji* (rice gruel). As noted earlier, the book begins with an account of "Kanji days" and ends with a note on civilians living with nothing but porridge at the end of the war. Women in the LTTE were not recruited for their food services; they were given weapons training and the male and female combatants cooked separately. In her

memoir, Thamizhini (2016) notes that regardless of the functions carried out by female cadets in the political or the women's wing as decided by the movement, they were always looked at with disdain if they were not combat trained. Stated differently, military training provided agency, even if it is limited, to the women to face the hatred. Malaimakal's voice about war reinforces the need for the women to glorify combat to confront the prejudice. As Cock observes, war does not require women to prove they are women; instead, wars signify the testing zone of manliness and patriarchy (1991, 235-36). As such, combatant women are constantly required to prove their "masculinity" to the men fighting alongside them, and Malaimakal's narration keeps coming back to the importance of the need to claim recognition as a warrior.

In Malaimakal's fiction, the Tamil women fighters draw on gendered memory to negotiate the tough food circumstances they face as combatants. Identical to what the Mozambique liberation fighters did, Malaimakal describes the creative use of the rice flour, which sets in motion women's traditional knowledge of sustenance originally learned at home cooking alongside their mothers or watching them cook. Katto too notes that the women ex-combatants in the Mozambique war fondly recount their early prewar years as their first acquaintance with cooking with their mothers (2020, 972) and they perform this memory collectively in the war zone. Building on the culinary practices of Caribbean slavery, urban poverty in India, and African-American "soul food," Gvion defines recipes and foods created using "gender based domestic stocks of knowledge" as "cuisines of poverty" that assure "survival and self-reliance" (2006, 300). The description in Malaimakal's narrative does not evoke an aesthetic presence; instead, it is a recipe created

under the conditions of hunger since the writer notes that with the energy the flour gives, they are able to dig a trench for an hour straight. Her account reiterates Gvion's view. The flour satiates their hungry bodies and turns into a regular snack. The young combatant women voice the memory of their mother's domestic knowledge of food to make provisions for their meal without wastage, thereby continuing the memory and performance of gender. They, however, unlike the Mozambique ex-combatants, do not recall their food experiences with the maternal. Instead, the Tamil female combatants recite the performance of both memory and gender associated with food, in creative ways of sustenance.

Unlike the voices of Thamizhini and Malaimakal, who were part of the LTTE, Pushparani's memoir elaborates on memories of food in many ways since she lived in a different period. Both Thamizhini and Pushparani write extensively about their experiences of being held in captivity and their narratives produce various meanings regarding food. Pushparani's prison account interweaves food insecurity with the right to good food and care, while Thamizhini's writing displays the agony of fear, uncertainty, and fasting. As Bynum and Ellman have pointed out, fasting in South Asian countries stems from feminine religious practices during the medieval period and has been used in several ways (Bynum 1990, 192; Ellman 1993, 5). Thamizhini uses this familiar practice in the prison. Her self-starvation is an individual attempt toward a collective responsibility, and to overcome her own mental anguish due to her role in the movement and the later captivity. Following Ellman's observation, "the starving body is itself a text" (17), Thamizhini's unfed, fasting body is a text. It not only bears witness to the decades-long ethnic tension, its brutal end, and her

imprisonment, but reflects on the traumatic past through abstinence from food and becomes an instrument to overcome her distress.

The accounts of Pushparani and Thamizhini reveal the changes that took place within the Sri Lankan state over the decades in handling people's resistance movements. Although the period of the 1970s in Sri Lanka saw insurgence against the state among the Sinhalese and the Tamils, the government still treated them as political prisoners. However, the final phase of the armed conflict in 2009 was merged into the larger anti-terrorism discourse of post-9/11, which became an apparatus in the way the prisoners were treated and their voices silenced.

Women fighters viewed the LTTE as a means to emancipation from gender roles and responsibilities, as stated previously. For women, nationalist protest is often interwoven with the oppression in the domestic space (Ranchod-Nilsson 2001, 168). For the female insurgents, unlike for their male counterparts, the struggle is about a separate Tamil nation as well as their own liberation from societal and familial discrimination, as the narratives in *Vizhuthaki Verumaki* demonstrate. As in many rebel organizations, there are women who trained under the LTTE's Black Tigers, an elite suicide squad that held martyrdom in the highest esteem. Coomaraswamy, however, identifies women as those who foster care and growth and contends that the LTTE does not recognize women as nurturers since its doctrine sees death as celebratory (1996, 10). Contradicting Coomaraswamy's essentialist view, Girija, a woman fighter, notes in an interview: "The whole concept of a Tamil woman's life used to be caring for her husband, children and cooking. That is gone now" (Jayamaha 2004,

19). For its young women members, the LTTE served as a medium to enter the political arena and an escape route from the kitchen space, which had previously been seen as a female realm. A point to note is that the women who refuse to only be identified with familial labour still perform cooking and caring for their friends and recognize their act as feminist work toward their liberation struggle. Their gendered caring through the gustatory recalls Black feminist theorization of the kitchen table "as a site of restoration and revolution" since it nurtures "the women to women relationships that nourish a community" (Phillips et al. 2017, 242). It is a gesture not of only nationalism, but also of feminist solidarity. In context, these acts are both expressions of feminism and Tamil nationalism.

The female cadres emerge as self-confident, assertive women who are no longer submissive to the patriarchs in the family and their voices reflect this shift. In the narratives cited, food and cooking are not registered to the same extent that war-front activities and victories are recorded. This scarcity of culinaryscapes runs along most of the narratives discussed, a fact that stands in contrast to the opinions of Das and Dossa. Das asserts that women often remember violence through their everyday kitchen activities (1991, 65-77); and Dossa contends that women's connection to memories of war oscillates between the "then" and the "now," between the abundance of food then and the lack of it now (2014, 45). A point to note is that the women mentioned by Das and Dossa are survivors of conflicts but were not involved in any kind of resistance movements. They are victims of a social condition, and their language finds expression through food work. The life writings discussed in this section, however, are by women engaged in active combat who narrate violence through their battlefront experience in which food is not their lens. This angle differentiates

narratives of female victims from the writings of women fighters. Women cadets constantly wrote about their achievements, roles in combat, and liberated selves in poetry, essays, and short stories in the LTTE's publication, *Suthanthira Paravaikal* (Birds of Freedom), in which food memories and narratives are few in number. Since the publication was heavily monitored by the LTTE, everything that was published was selective and subjected to censorship.[14]

Women's writing, as argued by feminist scholars, repeatedly uses the body as a trope. Neuman points out that the reclaiming of women's bodies confirms sexualization through "birth, belly and body" (in Moore-Gilmore 2009, 35). Instead, they provide personal and collective accounts of food memories bordering war performances. The verbal accounts of the female fighters speak through battlefront masculinity in which female fighting is emphasized in instrumental ways, and female food work is secondary. As we have seen in the writing of Pushparani, Malaimakal, Thamizhini, and the narratives in *Vizhuthaki Verumaki,* female food work does not receive mention. It holds importance in the following symbolic ways: memory, care for and solidarity with comrades, embodied performance, gendered traditional knowledge, desire, and, above all, resilience.

4. Chapter Two Conclusion

The life narratives discussed in this chapter shed light on the vital roles of land, food, and farming in the evolution of insurgence movements. In the process, the chapter makes the association between the small personal stories of individuals and the overarching stories of the state. To the extent that personal narratives scrutinize and locate the singular within a

shared group and a specific past (Maines et al. 2012, 43), Ganesan's personal account projects the way in which the LTTE came into existence as a rebel group. Furthermore, it reveals the way Sri Lanka's rice cultivation projects, campaigns of nationalism, and internal colonization and resettlements were imposed to their benefit. In addition, it positions Ganesan's foregrounding of rural masculinity as a parallel to the state president's propaganda, demonstrated through *Vap Magula*.

In Kandasamy's narrative, I identify the values that became foundational to PLOTE through food parcels and sharing and eating together. His gustatory writing brings together relational selves and relational bodies by narrating the techniques of the body. He intertwines notions of shame and gratitude associated with receiving food in his account, in an effort to strengthen the ideological base of the group. Since Kandasamy shared his narrative on Facebook, another former PLOTE member wrote on Facebook about caste discrimination in the food parcel practice.[15] Both Ganesan's and Kandasamy's life-writing narratives are public since they both were open to viewers' comments. Sattiri's and Guna Kaviyazhagan's works reveal various aspects of food and food work during war. Together these personal narratives provide glimpses of alimentary activities that take place at different points within a movement. In addition, they illuminate the way food provisioning labour varies from location to location. While the farm is the space for food production, the kitchen at the base is a site where the raw is transformed into food. The supply paths, along which meals are taken to the front lines, become a zone that encapsulates two kinds of danger: the danger of being killed in an attack and the danger of consuming bacteria-ridden food. Overall, the narratives of the

male fighters highlight the growth of the rebel movements, the rice base of Sinhala nationalism, and the food scarcity in the battle zone.

Drawing from the diverse narrative voices, it is possible to ascertain that women's participation in the rebel movements speaks to their fragmented and multiple identities. Their narration is woven together with women's resourcefulness and creativity in food-making, front-line brutality, and bodies that enact masculine war roles. Although battlefront activities and arms training dominate their narratives, they identify with their food work. The writings discussed in this section portray fractured selves, multiple subjectivities, and many femininities that are highlighted in various ways in their articulations. Their interviews and writings depict the tension among their experiences as victims and as perpetrators of violence and multiple femininities. Their verbal accounts and written stories exhibit their postcolonial "decentred selves," (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 1). The female cadres of the LTTE may engage with symbolically charged memories of food and not as reflective of gendered roles of domesticity. As a consequence, their writings are caught between the discourse of power connected to masculinity and femininity in the context of war on the one hand, and the articulation of food as a source of sustenance and memory on the other. In other words, their choice to minimize their reflection on the gendered kitchen labour demonstrates that warfare maleness intentionally forms the core of their voice. Their stories of food deprivation and physical strength move the feminine bodies beyond its boundaries to identify their masculine performances and prowess in the combat zone. At the same time, the female rebels recognized cooking and caring for their comrades and the cause of Tamil nationalism as feminist acts. One could argue that combatant women in the LTTE believed in empowering

women through militancy while also attempting to minimize attention to the gendered experience of food. Their narratives constantly juxtapose their experiences and memories of food, hunger, combat, and the body. Their remembrances of food remove the traditional Jaffna woman from her domestic food space and reinforce sensory memories of food to underscore entitlement, starvation, resistance, and solidarity.

By looking at the writings of the insurgent women—Pushparani, Malaimakal, Thamizhini, and the collective voices of *Vizhuthaki Verumaki*—this section examined the multiple femininities and masculinities performed by women. The embodied knowledge of life in prison and of combat in a war zone expands on the various forms of control over the body. While in Malaimakal's stories, accounts of the battlefield overtake foodscapes (although the body is free to imagine and create food), prison life totally alters the meanings associated with food. In prison, the mealtime experience is removed completely through the control over the bodies of the prisoners (Sukumaran 2023). Thamizhini and Pushparani delineate this realization in their writings on fasting and feeding. By bringing the accounts of the women together, this section provides glimpses of various forms of food memories and narratives associated with the numerous ways women in resistance movements negotiate wartime masculine and feminine performances. In addition, it finds that the life writing of combatant women demonstrates that food does not prefigure gendered memory or narrative of violence, as argued by Das (1991) and Dossa (2014). Female civilians and female insurgents use culinary experiences variously based on their subject positions.

[1] For a more elaborate study of the peasant agrarian land development projects in Sri Lanka, see Farmer (1957), Manogaran (1994), Smith (1979), Jiggins (1979), Kearney (1967).

[2] Sri Lanka's hydraulic projects were aimed at developing the long-lost Buddhist kingdom, culture, and ideal Buddhist society. School history books and mass beliefs in post-independent Sri Lanka were framed to recognize Tamils as foreign invaders who destroyed the fertile rice fields and the Buddhist kingdom. This political propaganda gave birth to ambitious irrigation projects such as the Mahawali project, Padawiya scheme, Gal Oya, Weli Oya, and Muduru Oya. These regions became the invented homes for the Sinhala public (Perera 2011, 229). See also Tambiah (1992), Tennekoon (1988), Hoole (2001), and Bandara (2023).

[3] See http://www.chitranandaabeysekera.com/the%20broadcaster.html. Accessed 6 Mar. 2023. Photo courtesy ANCL.

[4] The *Daily News* reports that in 2003, *Vap Magul* was again celebrated after a ten-year hiatus imposed in 1993. When Agricultural Minister S.B. Dissanayeke stepped into the field for ploughing, a farmer gave him a mug used by J.R. Jayawardene in 1978 (Kumarasinghe 21 Oct. 2003).

[5] Thilakarathne, Indeewara. "Revisiting the Rituals of Ancient Hydraulic Society." *Sunday Observer*, 7 Oct. 2007. https://archives.sundayobserver.lk/2007/10/07/imp01.asp. Accessed 7 Mar. 2023. Photo: Kamal Jayamanne.

[6] Based on the newspaper article in the Hindu cited in https://dbsjeyaraj.com/dbsj/archives/75431. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pOwnj3BSyg. Accessed 11 Mar. 2023.

[7] See, for instance, Blanco (2018), Ehrmann and Millar (2021), Féron and Voytiv (2022).

[8] Contemporary war has seen an increase in women's participation. Although Pushparani was the first female Tamil insurgent in Sri Lanka to be arrested, Tamil women have participated in political protests and provided food and care for the armed insurgents when the movement began in the 1970s. In the later 1980s, women received weapons training and participated directly in armed rebel movements. For detailed readings, see, for example, Balasingham (2001), De Mel (2001, 2004), Maunaguru (1995), De Alwis (1998a, 1998b), Herath (2012), Sangarasivam (2003), Gowrinathan (2012).

[9] Vetriselvi, Guna Kaviyazhagan, Tamilkavi, and Nillanthan are some of the writers in personal conversation who mentioned kitchen work as punishment.

[10] A version of this part of the chapter on women combatant writing has been published in the *Global Media Journal* in 2023.

[11] From the interviews of women combatants in the scholarly essays and dissertations mentioned in this chapter.

[12] The original geopolitical location of the Sri Lankan rolls is not yet clear. Most likely it originated in the capital city of Colombo and then travelled to Jaffna. It was originally associated with elite Christian families and was available only in the Christian settlement area of Jaffna and in Christian homes. Now they are commercially available everywhere. The versatility of the recipe and facility to premake and freeze them before frying makes the rolls an enticing snack.

[13] Thamizhini's observation on women being submissive and without decision-making powers at the highest levels are recurrent arguments among scholars, including Hellman-Rajanayakam (2008), Maunaguru (1995), Herath (2007), Coomaraswamy (2003), Satkunanathan (2012), and Alison (2003). Interestingly, when Alison posed the question about women holding a higher position than Thamizhini, she replied that since men were involved in the movement longer than women, they rose more quickly to such positions (2003, 49).

[14] In his review of the book, journalist and filmmaker Someetharan notes that even though there were several comments about the LTTE within the movement, they never surfaced outside the movement since they would affect its militarized structure and the confidentiality of its operations. He adds that Thamizhini's memoir unveils many of those untold truths and it must be read as a reflection of her experiences (2016, 32).

[15] Kandasamy notes that Siva Sinnapodi recalled in Facebook posts occasions when the food parcels given by low-caste families were tied with thread to be identified separately. Such parcels were only sent to low-caste members of PLOTE. Kandasamy refuses Sinnapodi's claim and adds that caste discrimination never existed within the group. In Sattiri's autofiction, he writes that the leader of PLOTE belonged to upper-caste parents who encouraged their children to join their group. The LTTE leader was from the fishing caste known as Karaiyar.

Chapter Three:

Hunger Strike and Resistance: Thileepan and Annai Poopathy

For fighters like us, our goal is essential, not our life, not water or food ... our goal is our life.…I know my end. Please do not ask me to drink water—it is an insult to me.—Thileepan

This chapter examines the hunger strikes carried out by militants and members of the public during the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983–2009), with a focus on Thileepan of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Annai (Mother) Poopathy of the Mothers' Front. Thileepan's hunger strike took place in Jaffna and his was a protest against the state's atrocities. Annai Poopathy was on hunger strike in the Batticaloa, in the east of Sri Lanka, to demand peace between the LTTE and the IPKF. Their acts of sacrifice occurred at two different geographical locations and junctures. In analyzing the two hunger strikes, I draw on the concepts of open and closed bodies and affect theory and connect the concept of located selves (Moore-Gilbert 2009) to the located bodies through a gustatory lens. Although abundant information about Thileepan is available, and used extensively for this chapter, the same is not so for Annai Poopathy. I have provided as many details about her as possible. First, though, I offer a historical account of hunger strikes as recorded in classical Tamil poetry and connect the act with individual and collective memory, the body, and contemporary political actions.

1. Hunger Strikes, Politics, and War among Early Tamils

Fasting (starving) to death is an ancient practice in Tamil culture. Although modern food research associates the ritual of fasting primarily with women (Bynum 1990; Kumar and Sanyal 2020), classical Tamil literary works show instances of fasting to death among men and women. The reasons vary from religion, warfare, to existential crisis, as do the

terms used to refer to these practices. The Tamil, Sanskrit and Pan-Indian religious, philosophical and cultural traditions have influenced the concept of suffering and death as a valid way of ending one's life. Buddhist and Jaina beliefs held similar notions on fasting until death.These differ from the conventions in Christianity, however, in which suffering and self-torture for the sake of religion are accepted but suicide is considered a sin. The *Purananuru*, one of the texts in Sangam literature, mentions two kings, Cheraman Neduncheralathan and Kopperuncholan, who performed *vadakkiruthal*, which is the ancient practice exclusive to men of starving to death while facing the north (*Purananuru* 2008, verses 214-223). According to the poems about these kings, fasting to death was a familiar act in early times. The first king, Neduncheralathan, was wounded in a battle: a spear pierced his chest to his back (verses 65-66). Ancient Tamils regarded back injuries as an insult to their valour and preferred to die rather than live with the injury. Thus, Neduncheralathan took his life by starving. As the second king, Kopperuncholan, was preparing to go to war against his children, the poet in *Purananuru* (verse 213) advised him that winning or losing the battle would give him infamy because he would be fighting his own sons. Subsequent poems witness the king's decision to fast to death instead (verses 214-216).

The epic poem *Cilappatikaram*, dated fifth century C.E., mentions the death of a female Jain saint through *unnaanonpu* (hunger fast). This kind of fasting is distinct from *vadakkiruthal*, which was carried out only by men as a last resort to solve an issue linked to their disgrace. The Tamil term *unnaanonpu* and the Jain term *sallekhana* (thin out) refer to the practice of suicide undertaken by both male and female Jain saints. Similar to *sallekhana* is the Hindu practice of *prayopavesa*, fasting to death when an individual feels that the aim

of their life is fulfilled. Indian leaders including Vinoba Bhave (Justice 1997, 235) and Savarkar (Jahagirdar) have met their ends by such fasting.

Arunkala Cheppu, the twelfth-century Tamil text on Jainism, was translated from the Sanskrit source text, *Ratnakaranda Sravakachara Sanskaar*, composed by Aacharya Samantbhadra Swamy in the second century C.E. The text is in the form of couplets, and verse 145 outlines the conditions for *sallekhana* (fasting to death): if obstacles, chronic disease, or old age strikes, one can observe s*allekhana* by giving up their four meals and work. In order to protect the dharma of one's life when existing conditions threaten an individual's life, the individual is allowed to fast. *Vadakkiruthal* and *sallekhana* are similar in some ways. Both acts are carried out as an individual's response to an unresolvable (in their view) challenge. *Vadakkiruthal* is also considered an act to protect oneself from a bad reputation and an act of resistance against the prevailing political situation. *Sallekhana* is a form of defiance against personal problems: individuals refuse to succumb to what they perceive as unlivable conditions and instead choose to end their own lives with dignity. *Neelakesi*, the Tamil text on Jainism, argues that *sallekhana* is not suicide because it does not involve passion or weapons to kill. Although the Tamil texts emphasize *vadakkiruthal* as a tradition followed by the king to escape from infamy, one cannot deny the fact that it is a form of resistance interchangeable with the resistance involved in the more religious/philosophical *sallekhana* or *prayopavesa*—although the causes are different. The term *idaiyuuru* in verse 145 of the *Arunkala Cheppu* means "impediment" or "hurdle" and refers to a situation that could have such an adverse effect on an individual's life that their life will no longer be the same. It attests to the notion of fasting as resistance: against the body,

nature, and external/internal circumstances. In Sri Lanka, fasting for the *Kanthasashti* religious festival is popularly observed by men and women. It is one of the most severe forms of fasting, in which individuals abstain from both food and water for ten days.

Self-deprivation of food is best comprehended only when one understands the social context in which it occurs (Ellmann 1993, 7). Considering the examples above, it is apparent that since the second century CE, self-starvation has continued to exist in South Asia, and has its association with defiance. Today, fasting to death is performed not only for personal reasons, but also for political and religious/philosophical reasons: the BBC reports that almost 300 Jains die annually by fasting (Biswas 2015). Next, I would like to explore hunger strikes undertaken for political reasons, in particular in Sri Lanka by Thileepan and Annai Poopathy.

2. Modern Hunger Strikes

Despite a long tradition of starving to death, the hunger strike became a visible political tool only in modern times. It was first used by Russian female political prisoners who went on hunger strikes in Siberia and died during the Tzarist regime in the late nineteenth century. British suffragettes adopted this Russian method in 1909, and the Irish and the Indians transformed it into an anticolonial instrument during the anticolonial struggles (Grant 2019, 115). In colonial India and South Africa, Gandhi used this practice as a tool of resistance for his uprising against the British and his fellow citizens. Women in the UK and the US used hunger strikes in the early battles for their rights.

3. Political Hunger Strikes in Sri Lanka

In postcolonial Sri Lanka, the first hunger strike by Tamils against the sectarian policies of the government took place in 1961 (Ponniah 1963). Men and women fasted in front of the old Jaffna secretariat, alongside teachers, civil servants, and lawyers. The *satyagraha* (holding on to truth) took place in government offices across the north and east of Sri Lanka under the leadership of Chelvanayagam, but the public protests were brutally crushed by army violence within days of their beginnings. The conflict turned into armed warfare, which heightened with the riots of 1983, and the fighting intensified between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Army. As a result, fasting as resistance became more intense too, with death-fasts performed by Thileepan and Annai Poopathy in the Tamil minority regions in 1987 and 1988.

While most political hunger strikes stem from the actions of incarcerated persons in a prison environment,[1] Thileepan and Annai Poopathy carried out their starvation to death in public spaces. As Anderson observes, "self-starvation conceptually and methodologically obtains its significance as a cultural practice not simply in gesturing toward absence, but in viscerally and effectively summoning us to bear witness to the long, slow, wasting away of human flesh" (2010, 2). By performing this slow wasting away in full view, Thileepan and Annai Poopathy made the otherwise bare life of the Tamil body visible to the public as a sign of political resistance. The public location combined the public performance of their strikes to underscore three central aspects of the protest: "The facilitation of non-verbal communication, the embodiment of collective identifications and the disruption of the

dominant order" (Machin 2016, 157). Accordingly, this chapter uses the characteristics emphasized by Machin to analyze the hunger strikes.

3.1 Cartographies of Hunger Strikes, Located Selves, and Bodies

India was involved in the Sri Lankan Civil War by providing arms training and weapons to the rebels. Gandhian starvation also played a pivotal role in the conflict's development and was the deciding factor in the war's turn. India was looked upon as a country that respected Gandhian ways, and for the LTTE, the influence of his hunger strikes became a tool when the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) arrived in Jaffna in July 1987. Hunger strikes connected resistance locations across different historical times: India during Gandhi's life, Jaffna for Thileepan's act, and Batticaloa for Annai Poopathy's civil voice. Because hunger strikes are tied to specific locations and topographies, they are diverse yet carry common traits. Stretching the argument of Moore-Gilbert, who notes an association between displacement and identity in the life-narratives from postcolonial locations is disputed (2009, 66), I assert that narratives of the hunger-strikers' bodies are located in a specific geography and are also dislocated from the very terrain. The hunger striker begins their fasting to death in a fixed place. As the fasting proceeds, the lack of food consumption contributes to the weakness of their body and the resultant loss of consciousness. When their memory leaves the body, the sense of a physical body becomes dislocated from the surroundings. The hunger striker's body and consciousness remain displaced from the very site of the fasting. Food deprivation thus leads to the deprivation of a located self and the body, while fasting still poses resistance to the local conditions.

3.2 Gandhi's Fasts: India

It is impossible to write about Thileepan's and Annai Poopathy's fasting without invoking Gandhi's practices. For Gandhi, fasting was an experiment, a tool, and a path to abstinence and spirituality; therefore, it was a religious act while serving political and social causes. His body was a site of morality because his dietary regulations were entrenched in practising *brahmacharya* (sexual self-control) and the more considerable mastery of the senses (Roy 2010, 97). He was journeying on a spiritual path by avoiding spices, salt, and a wide range of other ingredients. Gandhi wrote extensively about controlling sexual passion through fasting (100), a concept that prevails in much of the philosophical, yogic, and dietary texts of India. His fasting, however, was two-fold: the practice was partly for spiritual growth, but the enactment was for political/social upheaval.

Gandhi held stringent notions about converting self-starvation into a powerful apparatus for revolution. He likened it to a powerful tool and wrote that such a weapon could be wielded "only toward an intimate friend and not an enemy" (Roy 2010, 100). About his prison fast, Gandhi wrote, "My wish is not to fast unto death, but to survive the ordeal" (quoted in Russell 2006, 84); thus, his self-deprivation tool was more about making the fact powerful to overcome: "He rarely fasted against the British" (Russell 2006, 81). Instead, Gandhi's fast was directed toward his countrymen, companions in politics, as he argues, "One should not fast against tyrants" (quoted in Russell 81). Leaders including Ambedkar, Nehru, and Tagore disapproved of Gandhi's hunger strikes but were forced to negotiate with him and quell their differences. Roy notes that on many occasions Gandhi's hunger strikes

were unsuccessful and that the Gandhian scholar Bikhu Parekh finds Gandhi's starvation a defensive measure when all negotiations fail (2010, 103).

Among the long history of hunger strikers worldwide, the emaciated figure of Gandhi stands out because of the number of fasts he observed, even with his ill health, how he managed them, and the results his fasts produced. Gandhi's sacrifice subsisted on the physical techniques he used for his body: sponge baths, enemas, citrus juices, and salts. His fasting practices, which were focused on building inner strength, ultimately helped him starve for longer durations. Gandhi's "practices" of the self symbolized resistance, asceticism, and self-preservation—all of which formed his subjectivity (Lupton 1988, 15). It was far from death, although it was founded on the very notion of self-sacrifice.

Thileepan and Annai Poopathy's fasts digressed from Gandhi's fast and physical techniques to prolong death. Analyzing the everyday survival techniques of the hunger strikers in Turkish prisoners in 2001, Anderson makes a distinction between hunger strikes and death-fasts. The goal of hunger strikes is to preserve the strike by sustaining the body for a long duration. Death-fasts are meant to advance quickly toward death. Each relies on death itself to become a political force of resistance for the state to act upon. The distinction lies in the everyday drink consumed by the protestors: The hunger-strikers used a feast-and-fast method months before the strike; the death-fasters, in contrast, only drank salt water while on strike (Anderson 2010, 131). In 1998, in a striking similarity, the Tibetan hunger strikers followed Gandhian ways of self-preservation when they starved themselves in Delhi, the Indian capital city, demanding the liberation of Tibet from Chinese occupation (McGranahan

2010, 195).[2] In his interview with the Norwegian Voice of Tibet Radio, Thubten Ngodup, who assisted the hunger strikers, states that when he embarks on the self-starvation he intends to do it without "massage treatments and juices or water" to make his strike become more effective (McGranahan 199). He, however, immolated himself when the Indian police intervened and took the hunger strikers to the hospital on the forty-ninth day.

Thileepan's protest did not involve any of the self-preservative methods. By undertaking self-starvation, he refused to participate in the "technologies of the body" to find expression to his subjectivity (Falk 1994; Foucault 1988; Hastorf 2017, 283). Annai Poopathy adhered partially to the techniques of the body by consuming water. Nevertheless, Thileepan and Annai Poopathy drew spectacular crowds and inspired symbolic hunger strikes by several community members, students, and the public.

3.3 Hunger Strikes: Resistance in the Prison and Public Space

While Gandhi wrote and spoke prolifically about his meditation, asceticism, fasting, and hunger strikes, and Irish hunger striker Bobby Sands left behind his writings from prison, Thileepan died uttering only a few words. Hunger strikes in prison are common and do not garner quick attention. Self-starvers protesting on the streets hardly write; Thileepan and Annai Poopathy did not write at all. Nevertheless, as Rahman argues, such self-styled biopolitical technique is a response to "forms of biopower" wielded by the state (2022, 44). If the underfed body is in prison, then the state owns it; Gandhi and Sands wrote from prison since their narratives would not reach the public if they did not write. Their hunger strikes are a form of protest against the Foucauldian panoptical prison control of the captive bodies.

Often hunger strikes demanded paper and pen, as in the case of Gandhi and Wole Soyinka, and at times a radio or television, kettle, or other domestic items, as requested by Turkish hunger strikers in 2000. Feldman notes that hunger strikers in prison regard their protests as acts of emancipation from the prison and their captive bodies, and thus as acts of despair (1991, 250). Moreover, these acts take place under the constant surveillance of cameras, correctional officers, doctors, and other personnel, all of whom are witnesses. The prison staff, however, cannot testify because they are part of the power structure. Writing and communicating to the outside world about the reasons, causes, and processes of starvation is an obsession of every hunger-striking prisoner.

Analogous to the panopticon surveillance proposed by Foucault, Thileepan's and Annai Poopathy's striking bodies were under the public's constant gaze, recreating the image of the Kafkaesque hunger artist. In prison, the observer from the panoptical tower is not visible, although the entire cell is visible to the guard who has been assigned power. Therefore, the prisoner is distanced from the observer, engendering "in the inmates a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of powers," according to Foucault (1994, 201). It is irrelevant to know who or if anyone is occupying the tower as long as the prisoners "behave" as if they are under surveillance. The public gaze, however, differs from this internalized mechanism of power in prison. In fact, the hunger strikers in the public eye relate to their audience as a collective identity and not bound by power relations.

There is a lapse in the communication of prison hunger strikers; they become visible only in a delayed manner or when their act ends, sometimes even posthumously because only when their writings are published is the public able to read them. From a prison, this is seldom possible. Ellmann notes that the starving body is a text (1993, 7). Thileepan and Annai Poopathy held their acts of resistance in public. Their starved dying bodies became their life narratives, concurring with Ellman's argument. It is evident that a hunger strike is an act of violence on the body, and as Siméant notes, it is an act in which "the suffering body and the public as a witness" are present together (2016, 43). Consequently, Thileepan's and Annai Poopathy's emaciated bodies and the Tamil public share a common witnessing. Together, they are observers of political oppression, murder, and suicide. Although neither Thileepan nor Annai Poopathy wrote, as a political leader Thileepan communicated with the public through his speeches, whereas Annai Poopathy's body communicated with the people only through silence.

3.4 Thileepan: Jaffna

Thileepan was born Rasiah Parthipan in 1963 and was raised mostly by his older brothers because their parents died early. In revolting against the Sinhala state's oppressions and murders, he joined the LTTE in 1983 and became its political leader for the Jaffna region. During the Vadamarachchi Operation, also known as Operation Liberation, in which the Sri Lankan Army carried out a massive strike to capture the Vadamarachchi region of Jaffna, he was shot in the stomach multiple times but survived after many surgeries. As murders of Tamils increased, the Indian government under Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan president J. R. Jayewardene signed the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord in 1987. The accord

called for the end of war through the surrender of weapons by the rebels and the withdrawal of the Sri Lankan military. It also enabled the Thirteenth Amendment of the Constitution of Sri Lanka and granted autonomy to the Northern province. Even after the accord was signed, however, the aggression and the injustice faced by Tamils did not cease. The conflict escalated yet again. The home guards of the Sinhala state went on a murderous rampage in Tamil villages on the northern and eastern borders. They demolished houses to resettle Sinhalese in the deserted villages. Videos of such atrocities reached the head of the LTTE.[3] Thileepan demanded that the following aspects of the accord be implemented immediately:

1. Stop the internal colonization of the Sinhala government.
2. Release the Tamils imprisoned under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.
3. Stop all activities of "rehabilitation" until an interim administrative structure is established.
4. Stop opening Sinhala police stations in northern and eastern Sri Lanka.
5. Disarm the home guards under the IPKF and resume the operation of schools occupied by the army. (Vanchinathan 1992, 4)

Thileepan laid down his weapons and began his hunger strike, subjecting his body to another form of violence. Digressing from the Gandhian approach to fasting and sacrifice, in his speech on the third day of his hunger strike, Thileepan said, "If the Indian government does not meet my demands, I will die without water rather than back out of my starvation to protect my life" (*Yarl* 2011). His self-starvation was an act of urgency and generally followed the path of militants worldwide. In particular, imprisoned IRA member Bobby Sands's hunger strike had a great impact on his decision, and Thileepan convinced the LTTE leader to permit him to fast to death.[4] The LTTE announced Thileepan's protest against the Indian government because they believed India could persuade Sri Lanka to abide by the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord because of its history with Gandhi. They saw themselves as a

nation carrying out resistance by starvation. Thileepan's defiance was distinct from Gandhi's abstinence. He did not carry out the carefully mastered, calculated techniques that Gandhi used to control his hunger as a method of negotiation. Instead, he chose to starve without food and water, and his sacrifice was carried out with the goal of self-destruction.

As Ellman points out, in a parallel situation involving the 1980s hunger strikes of Irish prisoners, "The Irish have a long tradition of starvation and the British a long tradition of ignoring it" (1993, 23). The newly formed India mimicked the British in suppressing divisive voices and chose to ignore the self-starving bodies demanding justice. Dixit, the Indian ambassador, met the LTTE leader in Jaffna but refused to meet Thileepan, who was on day eight of his strike at the famous temple of Nallur. Thileepan died on day twelve (September 26, 1987) amid a massive crowd who admired and worshipped him. More than 300,000 people attended his funeral.

Thileepan's death resulted in the Tamil's loss of faith in India's support for their cause. It became a defining moment in which the LTTE gained complete public support, and the movement grew into a powerful and reckless one. This consequence parallels that of Bobby Sands. When Sands was arrested for his IRA activities, he went on a hunger strike to demand Special Category Status, which would allow him to dress in his own clothes, see visitors, and other such rights normally denied a prisoner. He died of starvation on May 5, 1981, after fasting for sixty-six days. Researchers note that following Sands's death, Sinn Féin (a political party associated with the IRA at the time) became the largest political party

in Northern Ireland.[5] Analogous to Sinn Féin's popularity and public support, the LTTE gained command among Tamils in the region.

In her essay about the Indian Mutiny of 1857-58 of the British Raj, Roy notes that the uprising against the colonizer was rooted in rumours that the British had contaminated the wheat flour with cow and pig bones and that the rifles were being greased with beef and pork fat. The soldiers were culturally and religiously disgusted by contact with animal fat and rebelled against the colonial force. The Indians circulated batches of chapatis, the Indian flatbread. When a village received one batch of chapati, the community would make fresh chapatis and send that fresh batch to the next village. The public in the next village receives its batch of chapatis and again makes fresh ones to send to the neighbouring village. The chapati batches worked as a signal to gather support for the rebellion against the colonial order (2010, 31-32). The reaction to animal fat, which was rumoured to trigger the protest, set forth a series of killings of British soldiers in various locations. Kanpur was one such location, where the wives and children of the soldiers were held captive with food rations and poor sanitary conditions before being murdered. Referring to Indian protests, Roy uses the notion of disgust in noting that "the body in its moments of appetite, disgust, pollution and purification was key to grasping the psychopolitical arrangements of the colonial order" (2010, 33). In a similar vein, the crowd bearing witness to Thileepan's twitching, writhing defilement was key to their recognition of India as his killer. His body dislodged itself from his resisting oppressed self, which was shaped by Jaffna's confined zone. The Tamil public realized the wasting body of Thileepan as a "psychopolitical arrangement" of the former British colonies, India, and Sri Lanka. Thileepan's hungry and wasted body prompted a

watershed moment when the LTTE declared an all-out war against the Indian Army. It was this war that set the future for the movement and for militant Tamil nationalism until the LTTE's defeat in 2009.

3.5 Thileepan's Spoken Words and Starving Body

Even without words, acts of the body are understood by others and their meanings are constructed by society through affect. Similarly, Thileepan's hunger was understood by ordinary Tamil people through their own hungry bodies; his starvation, death, and speech became communication devices. The abject body of Thileepan interacts with the public, his witnesses, and his spectators. Rahman argues that in a hunger strike, the individual's body becomes "closed" to ingesting food (2022, 94). It is a "closed body" to the everyday techniques of the body and "open" to the public. Drawing on the concepts of open and closed bodies, Rahman identifies the starving body as a reservoir of duality. The living body of Thileepan continues to affect himself and the people around him. As Machin observes, "The body is not only an instrument and an actor but also the audience of the political spectacle" (2016, 170). Thileepan's last speech demonstrates the above arguments as he becomes a witness to his own martyrdom and his audience, as he puts it, in his almost eight-minute final speech on the fourth day:

> I have spoken three times and repeated the same thing … from my talk you would have understood that I am speaking today even though I could not talk yesterday … I am surprised that I can talk now, so I am repeating that you should be ready to fight and resist. … Soon, I will cease to exist as a human. For fighters like us, our goal is essential, not our life, not water or food ... our goal is our life. …I know my end. Please do not ask me to drink water—it is an insult to me. …To tell you the truth, my mind is not absorbing anything at the moment. I am not sure if it has gone crazy. Please forgive me; I know I am repeating my words…. (Vanchinathan 1992, 19)

As is evident in this speech, Thileepan oscillates between multiple selves: a self that is moving in and out of consciousness, a self that recognizes the othering of his body, a self that is resisting his body's surrender to the challenges of starvation, and a defiant self that readily accepts death. His words reveal the multiple fissured selves occupying a dying body.

In her work on the Turkish hunger strikers, Serin notes that they wanted "to die without ceasing to be an 'I' with full mastery over their bodies and speech" because by remaining cognizant they would be in power to communicate with the doctors and jail authorities (2013, 41). Their starvation was then strategic to keep them as alert as possible until death. Accordingly, they fed themselves with essential vitamins to keep their brains functioning, which also prolonged their lives. By contrast, Thileepan was a fighter, a martyr, who was ready to die for Tamil liberation, a cause above everything else.

There is a fundamental difference between these two approaches: preserving oneself longer to fight for a cause and dying for a cause. Hellman-Rajanayakam writes that the LTTE held in the highest esteem those who died for their goal: a separate Tamil nation. Those who killed their enemies were considered on a different level of self-sacrifice than those who died since the movement was rooted in the Tamil culture of using suffering, suicide, and self-immolation to rise against injustices (2005, 145). Thileepan took the second approach and sought death as a martyr. He was not a body under the prison's disciplinary power and instead was surrounded by friends and members of the movement and was free to execute his plan. His existence as "I" never felt threatened because the Sri Lankan state, bound by the accord, could not access the site of his resistance, and he did not need to hold on to that "I."

As Mbembé argues about life, resistance, and death, "the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred" (2003, 40).

In his final speech, Thileepan's words "I am aware that I will soon cease to exist as a human" attest to the death that had already begun its descent upon him through his dysfunctional organs. He entered a liminal space where he was unable to claim agency over his body when his corporeal existence failed, and his body was taken over by his friends on the stage. His embodied practice was now disembodied. In comparing Thileepan's state to Agamben's concept of bare life, Ramaswamy notes, "Thileepan's hunger strike, his imminent death, Mussulman-like was their own state of living a bare life, in a state of exception" (2022, 194). Thileepan's hunger fasting was thus not a closed body and with its capacity to affect other bodies it became the manifestation of "intercorporeality" and hunger strike's power resides in intercorporeality (Rahman 2022, 94).

Having been shot in the stomach, Thileepan lost about thirteen inches of his intestine, making him more vulnerable during the hunger strike. The LTTE was aware of his fragility, as were the Sri Lankan and the Indian governments (through their intelligence). His body, with its defective digestive tract, was not just "abandoned […] exposed and threatened on the threshold in which life and law, outside and inside, become indistinguishable" (Agamben 2005, 28) by the states alone. The movement also used it for its cause. For Agamben, the camp serves as the institution of bare life. Similarly, the Nallur temple land on which Thileepan was allowed to die became the camp, the zone of exception. It was where Thileepan realized "I cannot live like a human anymore" (Vanchinathan 1992, 6) and his

spectators witnessed his existence as nonhuman, even though it was self-inflicted violence, ignored by the governments. The temple premises was the affective site where the crowd identified their oppressions, insecurities, and their own deaths with Thileepan. On the one hand, it was the site of bare life and the state of exception; on the other hand, it was the zone of weaponization of the body. The public place in the town of Jaffna held the body as the weapon, while the camp was the state of exception where Thileepan was cognizant of his existence as nonhuman. This very zone was both the camp and the site of resistance.

The repetitions in Thileepan's speech demonstrate the memories that occupied his faltering consciousness, and it was these memories that Thileepan wanted people to relate to. His recollectio of Miller, the Black Tiger who was the first suicide bomber of the LTTE, conveyed to the public that he was a martyr like Miller and that there would be many more to die like him. Death and martyrdom occupied Thileepan's address, and his words implied that death is a means to achieve liberation. The repetition became a form of litany since his mind did not engage with anything else to share, and he was unable to convey what else he remembered. His speech bore witness to the memory loss he suffered due to starvation.

In some senses, Thileepan's decision to self-starve could be read more as a form of suicide than as a route to nonviolence because in his first public address before commencing his hunger strike, he invoked Miller. He compared his situation with Miller's last words: "I am happy and content that I am ending my life for my motherland. My only regret is that I will not be there to see the liberation of our people" (quoted in Vanchinathan 1992, 22). Thileepan's analogy is similar to the notions of the revolutionary Turkish organizations that

took part in the revolving mass death-fast prison protests that lasted for seven years (2000 to 2007) in Turkey. The protestors believed that deaths from hunger strikes were consistent with suicide missions and death in armed warfare (Serin 2013, 200). Thileepan's speech continued to refer to his impending death and his hope for a people's revolution since he was powerless as a Tamil body and starvation remained his only choice. By invoking Miller, Thileepan stretched his memories and the public's memories into past martyrdom and reconstituted the self-sacrifice involved in the present starvation and the future struggle. His repetitive speech made him the author of his life narrative through the experience of a political leader of the LTTE.

In drawing the connection between memory and narrative to expand the definition of life narrative. Olney notes that "memory is an adaptive function, with a self-adjusting and self-defining plasticity about it, turning back to the past to position itself and us for what is to be dealt with in future: it adapts continuously to changing circumstances, external and internal, to constitute the self as it is at any given instant" (Olney 1998, 343). He suggests that memory extends in both directions—backward and forward—and as such, it attempts to shape the future. Thileepan's starvation and impending death is the thread that connects both ends: the sacrificial death of suicide missions or frontline deaths of the past and the armed struggle of the future. For both, the body is the base.

M.V.Y. Vanchinathan, another senior rebel, kept an account of Thileepan's last twelve days, which was published in 1992 as *Thileepanudan 12 Naatkal* (12 Days with Thileepan). Ironically, Vanchinathan was in an Indian prison when he wrote his narrative as a

witness, similar to the accounts of the attendees of the Turkish hunger strikers yet different because the Turkish helpers were also carrying out their own hunger protests. Vanchinathan's entries recorded three layered activities—Thileepan's health via heartbeat, pulse, and blood pressure; Thileepan's visitors and the gathered public; developments in the political front. We nevertheless know little about the thoughts Thileepan was engrossed in. In contrast to Bobby Sands and the Turkish hunger strikers, Thileepan's will, and the sacrificial starving body manifested his resistance and performed the message he wanted to convey to the public. Vanchinathan's (1992) account appears as testimony:

> 23.09.1987—9th day
> I look at Thileepan's body. All of his organs are failing. His lips move, but there is no sound. They are cracked and look pale. Two hollow spots instead of the eyes. (58)
>
> 24.09.1987—10th day
> Thileepan's limbs which moved slightly yesterday, are still now, and his breathing is heavy. His eyes are fixed on the ceiling; his body is turning blue. I check his pulse: 52, and his blood pressure, 80/50. They are deficient compared to the average human. (63)

Thileepan's body presents itself to Foucault's medical gaze in Vanchinathan's account. Although starvation and hunger are not visible, the slow withdrawal of the outputs from the body, the deterioration of the internal organs, and the contraction of the muscles are all made visible in the quasi-medical gaze of the author. Vanchinathan, accordingly, is not able to see the affective signs of hunger in Thileepan's mind, which he presents in his hunger strike address to the public.

The weaponization of Thileepan's body is apparent in his words. Thileepan uses his body as an instrument (Shilling 2006, 40), based on the work of Bourdieu (1984). One can see Shilling's contention in Thileepan's use of his body as an instrument. Thileepan's speech draws attention to his declining consciousness, unlike Bobby Sands's narrative of an

extensively pained, battered, and imprisoned body (1998, 25-26). He never refers to his struggle with food and water. The only time he speaks about food is to remind the public not to deter him from fasting. Waismel-Manor argues that a hunger strike should be acknowledged as "a common and legitimate form of collective action—not the act of a crazy individual, but a rational path that follows some deliberation and is based on individuals' socialization and the political action alternatives open to them" (2005, 282; also quoted in Machin 2016, 160). Thileepan's hunger and thirst as such brought the individual and the community together in protesting against the state.

3.6 The Memorialization of the Fasting Bodies: Thileepan

Halbwachs, a French philosopher who conceptualized collective memory (2020, loc 83), argues that the past is reassembled to create an association with the present, and the concerns of the present social realm carve out the way history is used. Thileepan channelled his memory to reflect on contemporary social condition and to mobilize the public toward a long battle for liberation. Although he was fasting to death, he did not compel his spectators to follow suit. Instead, he made it clear to the public that warring against the oppressive forces was the path to independence. It was only after his death that the LTTE gained complete support of the Tamil public to fight against the Indian military. It then turned into a full-scale war. The memories Thileepan shared, including that of his dying body, were transferred to his friends in the movement and the public, shaping Tamil collective memory.

Collective memory and practices are a set of socio-political practices in which particular versions of past events are preserved and often used to address contemporary

political situations. Social groups define collective memory practices to construct and negotiate their identities (Keightley 2010, 58). Invoking collective memory is a common practice of groups that have experienced oppression. In the thirty-six years since Thileepan's death, his hunger performance has been transformed through collective memory practices and is commemorated every year by Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and transnationally. The collective memory is charged with affect and is made manifest in collective customs. Some of the collective memory practices include fasting in solidarity with Thileepan; *kavady* rituals at the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple where he died; songs; speeches; and prayer offerings at his *natukal*. *Kavady* is the practice of carrying across the shoulders a long bar with two pieces of wood or steel attached to it. Sometimes devotees pierce their skin to balance such structures physically, and many kinds of structures exist for this purpose. Devotees of the warrior god Murukan make vows of abstinence from alcohol and celibacy for ten days to carry such structures when they face existential crises or offer special prayers. Even during the war, when the Sri Lankan state barred such memorial events, Thileepan's commemoration continued among transnational Tamils in various countries and across generations. On the anniversary of his death, images of Thileepan's emaciated body and the recordings of his speeches float on the internet and are reprinted in newspapers. In his memorial each year, online news media, blogs, and social media buzz with activities, poetry, and recorded memories of his speeches.

Thileepan's body remains central in these commemorations and collective memorialization. His hunger and thirst are metaphors through which the oppressions and atrocities faced by Tamils are often mediated. A poem written by Nillanthan, one of

Thileepan's friends during his fasting, was distributed to the public as a pamphlet. The same poem has been republished for each annual commemoration (Velicham 2002, 17):

> For us and for our sins
> my brother
> you are hungry, you are thirsty. […] his hunger is fierce
> his thirst is intense
> our anger is even more resolute

Nillanthan's lines capture the way Thileepan's hunger and thirst, bodily suffering, and eventual death become the epitome of Tamil resistance. Poems and songs such as these are often recited and sung during the gatherings as performances of collective memory.

Following his death, Thileepan's body was donated, to be used as a cadaver, to the Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna, fulfilling his wish. Rajini Thiranagama, who was part of the medical faculty, did not use his entire body to teach anatomy; instead, she dissected only a part of his limb and preserved the rest of his body to serve as the epitome of resistance and sacrifice. The LTTE prioritized the recovery of the bodies of fallen fighters and maximized their efforts to bring back the dead for a proper burial at *mavirar thuyilum illam* (the sleeping homes of the great heroes). The heroes are commemorated every year on November 27. The movement called the bodies *viththudal* (seed body). The LTTE's ideology behind the terms was that rebel bodies are not buried but are "sown in the earth" to give birth to new fighters who will continue to war for victory. As the fighter body becomes the sacrificing body, the symbolism of Thileepan and his body was crucial to the LTTE. It is against this background that Thileepan's body was preserved by Thiranagama, who was a staunch supporter of the liberation movement and the LTTE, later shot dead by the same movement.[6]

Because Thileepan's body was such a significant a symbol of starvation, self-torture, sacrifice, resistance, and the freedom fight, the LTTE needed to secure it beyond the reach of the state. They removed it from the Faculty of Medicine during the mass exodus to Vanni in 1995. The corpse was kept for public viewing in Mulliyavalai, within the LTTE-controlled territory (Tamilkavi 20 Sept. 2022). It was later preserved in the Tigers' medical facility until the final war of 2009, after which the body's location remains unknown. Thileepan's body serves as a text that unfolds multiple readings through hunger and thirst. Thus, the essence of his bios and his life—are charged with political meanings and become the apparatus of postcolonial rebellion. In Olney's view, the term bios has two meanings: "the course of a life as seen as a process" or "the unique psychic configuration" that makes up a specific life (1998, 241), and I approach *bios* with the latter definition. Bios as a "psychic configuration," as defined by Olney, is at the centre of the collective memorial practices commemorating Thileepan and his fasting to death. The Tamil community and Thileepan are linked through his performance of the hunger strike. His life as a political fighter and his life in starvation is directly connected to the Tamil community. Similarly, the life of the Tamil community and its trajectory after Thileepan's death is interwoven with his life.

In his essay on war memorialization in Ireland, Leerssen asserts that subaltern groups use another form of remembrance grounded in trauma, pain, and the lack of a public platform (2001, 204–22). This second form of commemoration is usually observed by a community that remembers its loss and defeat annually through repetitive performances (209-215). Groups waging ethnic wars in most postcolonial states memorialize their dead through acts

of perpetual suffering. In the cases of Thileepan and Annai Poopathy, whose memorials are repeatedly destroyed by the state and for whom commemorative practices are denied by the repressive state,[7] hunger strikes, and related practices emerge among the people as corporeal monuments of resistance.

Digital media and social media have allowed for the circulation of photographs of not only the two hunger strikers but also of how their hunger protests have been remembered over thirty-five years. Both Ellman (1993, 9) and Feldman (1991, 250) argue that bodies on hunger strikes can be read as texts, while Feldman adds that they can be disseminated like texts (1991, 7). The body as a politicized object creates and circulates narratives, images, and memorial practices that are shared by a community. For instance, Thileepan's body always appears in public images as the body of a fighter: the male body of a rebel with the capability to mobilize people through his speeches.



Figure 3. Thileepan addresses the public during his hunger strike in September 1987.[8]

Audio and video recordings of Thileepan's speeches on different occasions are available on the internet, while only the audio recording of his final speech is accessible.

In the early 1990s, the LTTE elevated Thileepan to the status of a deity. In his essay on the memorialization of the dead LTTE cadres, Schalk notes that the LTTE reinvented the ancient Tamil practice of *natukal,* which is the planting of a stone in the memory of a dead warrior for worship by the local people (1997, 151-190). In some instances, the stones are transformed into small temples, where the hero stone serves as a site for both offerings and worship. Traditionally, Sri Lanka has been settled by various warrior clans from as early as the Chola period. These clans worshipped groups of warriors for their heroic deaths over the centuries and this practice became meaningful in contemporary war (Schalk 1997, 172). It is possible that the LTTE borrowed these folk practices subconsciously, and later reinvented them for their purpose. Accordingly, Thileepan was worshipped with rituals, recitation of poetry and *kavady*, another form of bodily sacrifice.

Figure 4 shows an image of *paravai kavady* worship for Thileepan. This particular *kavady* is generally undertaken for Murukan, the warrior god and evil destroyer. In this ritual, the back of the devotee is pierced, and the devotee hangs like a bird suspended from a canopy decorated with flowers. The canopy is usually attached to a tractor or a bullock cart, which enables the devotees to circumvent the temple and perform the rituals. The devotees dangle in the air to offer prayers. While *kavady* in general is a violent, painful mode of worshipping, *paravai kavady* is the most intense form and is usually performed by devotees who face crises in their lives. In the photograph, the individual can be seen making an offering to Thileepan, whose cardboard image stands tall. The self-inflicted violence in *paravai kavady* symbolizes not only the individual's suffering, but also the deification of Thileepan.



Figure 4. The thirty-fourth anniversary of Thileepan commemorated with *paravai kavady*.[9]

The ritual memorialization of suspending oneself like a bird is entrenched in self-torture and sacrifice, which is also the basis for hunger strikes. The person performing *paravai kavady* remembers Thileepan's "self-directed violence," to use Feldman's term (1991, 220), through a parallel act of self-inflicted violence.

In Cheran Rudhramoorthy's poem "Nallur," the famous Tamil-Canadian poet unravels his memories about Thileepan's fast and ritual at the Nallur Kandaswamy Temple, now a major tourist attraction.

> I am seeing this place, the back of Nallur temple after eighteen years.
> It was here that they placed the bodies of the Sinhala soldiers for exhibition.
> It was here that the miracle of Murugan becoming Kandan and Skanda took place
> It was here that I saw a smiling Thileepan,
> gun in hand,
> walking around,
> with boots on his feet.
> It was here that I learned the terror of the stench of killed bodies.

‘Yes, my friend. Victor is gone’
says Thileepan.
Now
paravai kavadis, the devotees rolling in the dust
and our public display.
(Ramaswamy 2022, 191-92)

The *paravai* or *thooku kavady,* which was usually undertaken as a vow to the warrior god Murukan by the most distressed, is now reinvented to pay homage to the dead Thileepan. Cheran’s poem draws on the images of the Sinhala soldiers killed and displayed near the temple. The deity was transformed from a Tamil god to a Sanskritized idol and then Thileepan. The poet refers to Thileepan’s memorial near the temple, which was repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt. The *kavady* is now a tourist attraction, and its images mark the unique appeal of the temple festival when one searches for Sri Lankan travel information.



Figure 5. A devotee of the Nallur Kanthasamy Temple hangs suspended from a tractor during the annual festival that takes place in August.[10]

Cheran’s poem refers to the way the space takes on ritual significance and relegates its historical importance in the civil war to secondary status. By juxtaposing historical

moments of political violence and *kavady*, the poem brings attention to tourist voyeurism of agonized individuals in the performance of their vows at Nallur. Temple rituals replace Thileepan's political activism; therefore, *kavady* becomes a symbolic ritual as well as a remembrance. It remains a ritual when it is performed on auspicious days for Murukan, the presiding deity of Nallur; it turns into a commemorative ritual practice when performed on September 26, the death anniversary of Thileepan. Of course, Sri Lankan tourism promotes the images of *kavady* performed for the temple festival, displaying them at the Colombo airport and other high-traffic areas. In the above image, the individual, suspended from a tractor, has also pierced his tongue with a small spear. The colourful display invites visitors to study the violent, exotic, and primitive ritual.

The memory of Thileepan has been commemorated over the years in various ways. Newspapers in Sri Lanka and the connected diaspora have announced various organizations' and schools' events—including *kavady*, speeches, poetry readings, lighting lamps, and fasting—where families, including schoolchildren participate. These commemorations have been transgenerational within the local region, and anonymous people have shared their memories in newspaper columns. For instance, the newspaper *Eelanatham* carried a column in 2002 by a writer with the pen name Pathasari (Pedestrian), who shared personal memories of Thileepan's final unconscious days. Pathasari notes that Thileepan was unaware of a mother who sat in starvation near his fasting dais. She was there because earlier, when she had lost her son to the war, Thileepan had personally communicated with the mother, asking her to consider him her son. Such personal histories have dominated the local news media, and the newspapers have become repositories of individual archives in which the individual

identities remain invisible, similar to those of the mother and her son. These are life narratives that come to light in remembering an influential political figure such as Thileepan.

In their annual remembrance columns in September, most Tamil news websites from Sri Lanka and the diaspora republish the episodes of *Thileepanudan 12 Naatkal* (12 Days with Thileepan), the biographical journal written by Vanchinathan. Often the image of Thileepan's famished body, as in figure 6, accompanies these columns during the week-long commemoration.



Figure 6. Thileepan lying unconscious during his last days.[11]

Words such as *hunger* and *starvation* dominate the columns. Those who died fighting for the LTTE are martyrs and are often known as *mavirar* (great heroes). Thileepan, notably, is always referred to as *thiyagi* (martyr).

In the diaspora, Thileepan's commemoration often includes symbolic hunger strikes and local food drives. These bodily commemorations hinge on the gustatory. The food drive attempts to ascribe a new meaning to Thileepan's hunger and self-starvation. Such drives are

organized by the second-generation Tamils or involve their active participation. The transnational activities of remembrance illuminate an argument that memory is an affective thread to present the "embodied living connection" (Hirsch 2008, 104). In 2021, for instance, the Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action, in collaboration with several Tamil organizations in Canadian cities, used Thileepan's commemoration to draw attention to local food insecurity. The food drive collected about 15,918 cans of food to match the number of minutes Thileepan had starved and continued for twelve days to coincide with the duration of Thileepan's fast.



Figure 7. A Tamil grocery store in Quebec participating in the 2021 food drive.[12]

Thileepan's memory is intrinsically invested with food, hunger, and thirst. The food drive connected embodied memories of starvation and political resistance to issues of diasporic inequality in food distribution and resulting hunger.

3.7 Annai Poopathy (Mother Poopathy): Batticaloa

Unlike Thileepan, little is known about Annai Poopathy, who died after a thirty-three-day hunger strike approximately six months after the September 1987 death of Thileepan.

Annai Poopathy hailed from Ampara, a small town in eastern Sri Lanka. As a young widow with children, she remarried Ganapathy Pillai, a widower with his own children, thus becoming the mother of ten children. She was an active member of the Jaffna (or Northern) Mothers' Front movement of the Batticaloa-Ambarai district. At that time in 1984, the women's group protested against the arrests and the military occupation of the region with rallies and picket lines (de Alwis 2008, 152-174). In 1986, the eastern branch of the Mothers' Front began street protests against the IPKF's atrocities toward women. In 1987, a few months after Thileepan's death, the group decided to voice its concerns against the ongoing war. The members with Indian Army officials to complain about the sexual violence perpetrated against women by the IPKF. Since Ampara was the bordering region between Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking areas, women there faced the war's harsh cruelties (Jeganathan 28 Feb. 2022). On the one hand, they suffered as the sole heads of their household because their husbands had left home to join the LTTE. On the other, because the women were alone, they became easy prey for the Indian Army.

It is against this backdrop that the Indian Army sent the Mothers' Front back without heeding their concerns. As the fierce battle between the LTTE and the IPKF continued, a large number of families was displaced. It was the first time the community witnessed such large-scale violence. In many families, the men left to fight, and the women were forced to face the gravity of the situation single-handedly. Under such circumstances, the Mothers' Front—which was already observing rotating hunger strikes—announced Annai Poopathy's two demands for the IPKF: stop the war immediately and start negotiations with the LTTE. By that time, Annai Poopathy had already lost one son to the war and the IPKF had

imprisoned another. Prior to her hunger strike, the women's group had chosen another member, Annamma David, but within a few days of David's hunger strike, the Indian government threatened her family and forced her to discontinue her fast. When Annai Poopathy began her strike, she had already signed letter stating that she was doing it of her own will and that even if she lost consciousness, her family should not take her to the hospital.

Because Annai Poopathy started her starvation in the midst of fierce fighting between the rebels and the Indian forces, personal accounts of her final days are limited. The fact that her fast-to-death started about six months after Thileepan's death in northern Sri Lanka made her death more predictable than Thileepan's. Thileepan's death served as a precursor to Annai Poopathy's end. Although there are no written records of her deteriorating physical condition, doctors attended to her daily and she subsisted on fluids. Since she consumed water throughout her protest, she was able to extend it, remaining unconscious longer than Thileepan until her death on April 19, 1988. Even during the war, thousands attended her funeral procession.

Annai Poopathy's strength, resistance, and resolve came from her social positioning as a Tamil mother in Sri Lanka, the prefix *Annai* (Mother) is permanently attached to her name. South Asian women's experiences in each country and region have varied historically and continue to do so. The lives of Tamil women in India and Sri Lanka differ significantly, while certain traits are shared among them. Generally, women in Jaffna had better social positioning than Tamil women in India (Thiruchandran 1998, 76). Thiruchandran asserts that

because northern Sri Lanka was never under Brahmanical hierarchy and instead followed the Vellala hegemony (land-owning caste), Brahmanical gender ideology, which restricts widow remarriage, and other oppressive religious practices never took root in the country's Tamil-speaking regions. In Jaffna and Batticaloa, motherhood was a dominant gender role (79). Tamil women enjoyed power within the family structure; their potential existed in their roles as nurturing mothers (Thiruchandran 1998; Thiranagama 2011; Thamizhini 2016). Motherhood, nevertheless, kept them restricted to the domestic space, a type of gendered Tamil subjectivity. The oppression faced by Tamils eventually caused women to enter the public arena. Maunaguru categorizes various constructions of womanhood: "brave mother," "warrior woman," "new woman," and "social mother" became descriptions that were applied actively during the Tamil nationalist struggle (1995, 158-75). Annai Poopathy and the Mothers' Front drew their strength primarily from their domestic experiences. Women often used hunger strikes in the familial setting to protest against oppressive patriarchal practices such as domestic violence, control, and disagreements. As the mother of ten children facing a tough economic situation and being a witness to the extreme suffering of women in the border villages, Annai Poopathy's hunger strike was her sacrificial outburst against the prevailing injustice. She used a domestic tool that was familiar to her.

Although women had actively participated in the Tamil political cause since the 1970s and joined the various Tamil rebel groups by the late 1980s, the LTTE emerged as the most potent movement, absorbing the most insurgent women. The LTTE's approach toward the "gendered reconstruction of womanhood" liberated women from private domestic space (Schrijvers 1999, 308) and allowed them to access the restricted public space through

militarization. Their sexuality, nevertheless, was controlled by the movement to keep the cultural norms of Tamil society intact. Beyond the fighter women, the LTTE mobilized motherhood as a potent catalyst to send their children to fight against the state. Maunaguru notes that while the "brave mother" supports the war, the "social mother" works toward peace (1995, 172-73). To reconstruct the "brave mother," the LTTE used poems from ancient literary texts such as *Purananuru* and *Silappadikaram*, in which mothers who send their sons to war are praised as valorous. When the death of Thileepan resulted in the escalation of a full-fledged war, such mothers played pivotal roles in allowing their sons and daughters to join the movement and in supporting the insurgents by providing safe homes and meals.

Annai Poopathy was one such mother whose sons were in the LTTE. While one of them had already been killed, the IPKF imprisoned the other. Against this backdrop, she exists as both a "brave" and "social" mother who had lost her sons. The Mothers' Front began to protest, demanding a ceasefire and negotiation. While Thileepan was a militant and was already prepared for death, Annai Poopathy's voice was a civil one. The power of her sacrifice resides in her position as a housewife and mother.

3.8 Annai Poopathy's Starved Open Body-Text

A hunger strike is identified as a feminine mode of resistance (Ellman 1993; Kumar and Sanyal 2020; Bynum1990; Grant 2019). As mothers and wives, women are used to religious fasting, sacrificing food, and remaining hungry for longer hours. They can endure longer hours of food deprivation when compared to men. Studies on hunger strikes largely connect female hunger strikers with anorexia nervosa (Ellman 1993, 2; Probyn 2000;

Anderson 2010). Drawing from Ellmann's reading of an Irish woman's hunger strike, Nicholas calls anorexia a limited and loaded psychiatric term. She questions the Western scholarly engagement that reads even political self-starvation through the lens of illness, which denies the women's act the recognition as a political tool (2008). The illness does not define Annai Poopathy's hunger strike since it is entrenched in the body of motherhood; as body of nurturing and care it defies anorexia, the Western paradigm of gendered hunger strikers.

Through her resistance, Annai Poopathy reinforces her identity of motherhood. Scholars have noted the various ways motherhood and kitchen space have become tools of defiance (De Alwis 2004; De Mel 2001; Maunaguru 1995). Unlike Thileepan's closed body of a rebel, Annai Poopathy is the open body of the global south that speaks from a familiar zone—domesticity, conflict, poverty, sacrifice, sustenance—all of which are the common connectors among women caught in civil wars. Unlike Thileepan, whose identity remained a rebel fighter, Annai Poopathy's constructed body of motherhood produces a political subjectivity. The power of her motherhood existed outside the "valourous motherhood" mobilized by the LTTE to influence mothers to send their children to war (Maunaguru 1995) and challenged the movement by calling for peace. Her gendered body is subjectified through the everyday gendered performance of food work. Her self-starvation implies her refusal to succumb to the docile body inscribed on her. It does not allow for a reading of anorexia, given her positioning as a Tamil mother. And it is precisely this motherhood that has the capacity to affect the bodies that witness her.

The body of motherhood moves beyond its parameters to flow as affects "sometimes ambivalently but always productively—between and within bodies (of all kinds), telling us something important about the power of affect to unravel subjectivity and modify the political body" (Rahman 2022, 95). The relational quality of Annai Poopathy's body finds expression in her hunger and becomes the text. Her tongue remains silent while her gendered body, in its refusal to attend to the techniques of the body and the gendered task of food, acquires speech, "effectively summoning us to bear witness to the long, slow wasting away of human flesh" (Anderson 2010, 2). Her act shifted her from the interior space of a home and a kitchen to the exterior space of a political activist. The performance of self-starvation remade her body. The body that was framed through repeated acts of domesticity to inscribe her gender now contested her social and political world and emerged to emotionally embody her witness, the gathered public (Foucault 1988, Butler 1990). In conceptualizing "affective economies," "emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space" (Ahmed 2004, 119)—in this case, the emotion of starving motherhood forms a collective voice.

In drawing on Spivak's "withheld autobiography" (1998, 10), Gilmore (2001, 12) and Hammack and Polecki's (2012, 78) assertion on a single narrative voice becoming multiple, I approach life narratives and the body narrative of hunger strikers: the affect of their starvation is internalized by the bodies who gather to see them. In that sense, not only the life writings but the resisting postcolonial bodies and psyches of the strikers belong to the community as much as they belong to the individual. In drawing on Fox (2013) and Ahmed's (2004) conceptualization of affect, the death-fasters are affective, politically charged open

bodies that become relational to represent a community. Self-starvation, which is an individual technique that becomes public during a hunger strike, becomes the index through which relational selves, and bodies of the hunger striker and the public identify with each other. As Fanon writes, the body is "not something opposed to what you call the mind. We are in the world. And long live the couple, Man and Earth" (Fanon 2008, 96). Accordingly, Thileepan's and Annai Poopathy's bodies agitate the Western notions of mind and body through their suffering from *food trauma*, a phrase I borrow from Holyck Hunchuck (2012, 140). The agony becomes the performance of the corporeal and "body writing;" it removes the dichotomy of mind and the body as both are distanced from their functions. "The suffering bodies, neither dead nor alive, walking corpses" refuse to participate in the "economy of sympathy" (Rahman 2022, 89). While shifting between life and death, the starving bodies draw the bodies of the spectators. The open bodies participate in the flow of affect through their hunger and present themselves for public reading. Fanon's most often quoted words "O my body, make of me a man who always questions" (2008, 181) could be employed by the Tamil hunger strikers who challenged the hegemonic states of India and Sri Lanka through their deaths.

3.9 The Memorialization of the Fasting Bodies: Annai Poopathy

Annai Poopathy began her hunger strike about six months after Thileepan died. By then, the entire Tamil region had been transformed into a war zone as intense fighting between the LTTE and the IPKF escalated. Due to the large scale of the war, more young men and women were joining the movement. Mothers like Poopathy often supported the young militants by providing food when they were on the run. Pushparani, the first female

insurgent, records many such women in her book (2012, 250). Following Thileepan's death, it became apparent that the Indian government would also ignore Annai Poopathy's protest and let her die; nevertheless, she starved herself to register her voice of resistance. Unlike Thileepan, Annai Poopathy was not a speaker or a rebel fighter, yet the silence and defiance of her motherhood had an enormous impact on Tamil women. While the public, including school students, have participated in her commemoration locally and throughout the diaspora, there have been no rituals such as *kavady* to remember her sacrifice. Prayers, though, are offered at her memorial. She is constructed as a paragon of sacrificial motherhood, and it is this image that the mothers of "the disappeared" continued to use as they protested the Sri Lankan state.[13]



Figure 8. Mothers of "the disappeared" on the 790th day of rotating hunger strikes holding a banner with Annai Poopathy's likeness in Vavuniya.[14]

Figure 8 shows the protests of the mothers of youth sons and daughters who were made "to disappear," likely at the hands of Sinhala authorities. The women were on a rotating hunger strike for more than a thousand days from 2017, demanding action from the Sri Lankan government. Annai Poopathy's act still has a strong impact on the women who

currently go on hunger strikes, insisting that the Sri Lankan state provide an answer for those who were made to disappear and restore military-occupied properties (Reuters 2020). At present in northern and eastern Sri Lanka, Tamil mothers have been vehemently protesting against the government, appealing for the return of their properties and information concerning the whereabouts of the disappeared. The mothers have been protesting tirelessly through hunger strikes, picketing, and other forms of action. They have emerged among the strongest postwar activists.

Tamil political analyst Nillanthan (2022) notes in his blog that even now women undertake different forms of hunger strikes and protest on the streets while hoping for their loved ones to return. He adds that the political activism that shaped the Tamil liberation struggle included women who protected the rebels with food and shelter. Annai Poopathy's hunger strike must be looked at against this background. Her starvation is a voice located in the silence of the mothers who shaped and gave agency to present-day women's acts of defiance in the north and the east of Sri Lanka.

In contrast to Thileepan's legacy, photographs of Annai Poopathy's famished, unconscious body are rarely circulated and only one displays her starving body. Figure 9 shows Annai Poopathy's starving body alongside the background banner that displays the image of a nurturing mother and child.



Figure 9. Annai Poopathy lying in an unconscious state during her hunger strike.[15]



Figure 10. Annai Poopathy in the early days of her strike.[16]

As figure 10 demonstrates, Annai Poopathy, a mother figure, is often seen as a nurturer of hope and care.

4. Chapter Three Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the way the affect created by Thileepan and Annai Poopathy through hunger strikes became inscribed in collective movement and collective memory. Their closed and open bodies (Rahman 2022, 94) called for different forms of actions through "affective economies" (Ahmed 2004, 119). When Thileepan lost consciousness after the fourth day of his hunger strike and could no longer speak, the silence of his body was magnified by the repeated playing of the video of his earlier speeches. His

stillness was juxtaposed with the moving and speaking live body on the big screen. Thileepan's open stage, providing visual access to his body and the space, allowed spectators to identify him as one among them. In other words, the live politicized body on the screen was in the past. His dying body represented the Tamil bodies of the audience who lived in the "state of exception," to be murdered by the state (Agamben 2005) and in Ramaswamy's words, the Tamil body is a "bare life" that does not matter to the state (2022, 194). At the same time, Thileepan was also a reminder of a Tamil body that resists the state through its own destruction. The performance of his starving body was amplified by the constant presence of the words coming through the loudspeakers. Thileepan used hunger as a metaphor to communicate with his audience, and the LTTE used this communication to turn the conflict into a full-blown war against the IPKF.

Annai Poopathy, who was not an orator like Thileepan, depended solely on her body to send the message of defiance drawn from gender practices of fasting (Ellman 1993; Kumar and Sanyal 2020; Bynum 1990; Grant 2019). Poopathy's gendered hungry body represents the collective identity of motherhood for collective action, a general concept advanced by Machin (2016, 160). Political hunger strikers across nations have taken painstaking measures to communicate with the public through writing or speech. Such efforts could also be viewed as steps taken to control the starving individual's cognizance and the constant need to prove their existence. Even when Thileepan lay unconscious, his recorded speech was played repeatedly to convey his unwavering mind. Annai Poopathy, however, never relied on her speech, allowing instead her body of motherhood to communicate from the beginning of her protest. The affect created by the symbol of universal motherhood continues to influence

mothers to become political activists. As her body continued to disintegrate, her silence grew louder and louder; and this silence continues to connect the gendered bodies and political subjectivities. Annai Poopathy's silence created a huge vacuum that could not be filled by words. Her body narrative created the affective force for contemporary protests held by Tamil mothers in Sri Lanka.

The hunger strikes of both Annai Poopathy and Thileepan's presented a collective protest and became symbols of resistance and community protests through their public deaths. On Thileepan's part, starvation transformed the LTTE into a powerful organization that decided much of the war in Sri Lanka. Even though the armed struggle is now over, Thileepan's demands continue to be restated in his commemorations since Sri Lanka is still colonizing Tamil areas. On Annai Poopathy's part, her hunger strike created a collective, nonviolent civil voice. Her hunger strike and death continue to encourage and embolden women to defy oppression. Women hold Poopathy's legacy in high esteem and emulate her example in their protests against the state. Their public starvation and suffering end have become catalysts for the various ways the Tamil community in Sri Lanka and the diaspora enact protest in their actions and commemorate them.

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[1] See, for instance, the research on Bobby Sands: Shah (2022), Feldman (1992), Serin (2013), Anderson (2010).

[2] See Carole McGranahan (2010) for a detailed discussion on nonviolent protests and hunger strikes. A detailed interview on self-starvation and self-immolation as modes of resistance by Ishani Dasgupta can be found on: https://politicalandlegalanthro.org/2020/06/05/interview-with-ishani-dasgupta-2019-graduate-student-paper-prize-winner/. More information of the various hunger strikes held by Tibetans in India, Nepal, New York, and elsewhere over the years can be accessed at: https://savetibet.org/tag/hunger-strike/.

[3] These details are from a personal communication (20 Mar. 2022) with R, a senior LTTE member who accompanied the Indian Army to the border villages and was a witness to the mass murders committed by the Sri Lankan Army. As a close friend of Thileepan, he holds the view that Thileepan became helpless and used the hunger strike as his last resort.

[4] In the 1980s, the various rebel movements as well as magazines and newspapers engaged in publishing political resistance activities in the global south countries. Magazines such as *Alai*, *Puthusu*, and *Sarinihar* published debates on Tamil protests. Their columns triggered large political mobilizations of the public. Translations of poems and writings of resistance from Palestine, Cuba, and Ireland dominated the articles and discussions that shaped Tamil resistance against the Sri Lankan state. Bobby Sands was one such powerful figure watched by the Tamils. A Tamil poem by Indrajith was published in solidarity with Bobby Sands (*Puthusu*, Nov. 1985, p. 3). Thileepan was influenced by such figures and political insurgence.

[5] It is a well-established fact that almost all works on Irish hunger strikes state that the prison starvations helped Sinn Féin become the largest political party in Northern Ireland. For instance, see Dingley and Mollica (2007).

[6] Following her criticism of the LTTE's murders and totalitarian grip, the group shot her.

[7] The Sri Lankan state repeatedly denied commemorations for both Thileepan and Annai Poopathy and repeatedly demolished their sites of remembrances. A glance at the newspaper reports of their anniversaries in Jaffna and Batticolao reveals the history of the state's interruptions.

[8] "Remembering Thileepan's Sacrifice 33 Years On." *Tamil Guardian*, 26 Sept. 2020. Photo copyright: Photography unit of Liberation Tigers. https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/remembering-thileepans-sacrifice-33-years. Accessed 5 January 2023.

[9] See, for instance, https://www.vvtuk.com/archives/338894. Accessed 15 Jan. 2023.

[10] This is the image used to promote and represent the Jaffna region for tourism: https://www.srilankanexpeditions.com/complete-sri-lanka.php. Accessed 1 Feb. 2023.

[11] Nedumaran, Pazha. *Tamileelam sivakkirathu*, 1993. All copies of this photograph were confiscated by the Indian government and the author was arrested. https://www.srilankanexpeditions.com/complete-sri-lanka.php. Accessed 11 Feb. 2023.

[12] "Tamil Canadians Donate Over 18,000 lbs of Food in Thiyagi Thileepan Food Drive." *Tamil Guardian*, 22 Oct.2021. https://www.tamilguardian.com/content/tamil-canadians-donate-over-18000-lbs-food-thiyagi-thileepan-food-drive-0. Accessed 23 Jan. 2023.

[13] The mothers of disappeared youth took up rotating hunger strikes and demanded answers from the state. Their protest continued for over three decades and still continues intermittently.

[14] "Annaiye viyantha annai poopathyai ninaivil niruthi valinthu kaanaamal aakkappattorin uravukal porattam." *Eeelamnews*, 19 Apr. 2009. https://eelamnews.co.uk/2019/04/அண்ணையே-வியந்த-அன்னை-பூப/. Accessed 13 Feb. 2023.

[15] Eelaventhan, N. “Annai Poopathy: The Mother of Tamileelam.” *Telilibrary*. https://telibrary.com/en/annai-poopathy/. Accessed 18 Feb. 2023.

[16] Ibid.

Chapter Four:

Food Narratives for Life: Rebel Governance and Civilians

Are we going to make excuses to give up agriculture and die of hunger when the enemy aims to extinguish us through embargo? Or are we going to participate in the war on food production and succeed? This is today's question. — Aathaaram, Issue #10, 1993, 14

This chapter looks at forms of resistance and trauma in the foodways narratives of separatist groups and of individuals. It offers a close reading of the writings by rebel groups, published interviews of individuals, newspaper reports, and a novel by Thamaraiselvi. The information embedded in these materials provides a glimpse of the farming practices and culinary activities when the Sri Lankan state attempted to control an ethnic group through food embargoes. Confronted with the government-imposed food insecurity and the resultant threat to their lives, the public and the insurgent movements engaged in effective techniques of food production and consumption. I call the accounts published by the Tigers, in which are woven embodied food practices, "food narratives for life." The chapter is divided into narratives from two time periods: 1985 to 1995 and 1996 to 2009. This division is made because of the 1995 exodus of civilians and the armed group from the Jaffna peninsula, which shifted not only the publications but also the food narratives for life. This chapter studies culinary activities of all sections of society—combatants and non-combatants, women, men and academics—toward the sustenance of a community. This chapter begins by examining the available critical paradigms used to analyze the printed propaganda materials of the LTTE and the role of rebel governance. It then traces the history of writings by academics and civil servants on economic development, which formed the basis for later publications by rebel groups on the food economy. This is followed by a study of translated excerpts from insurgent publications studied through the lens of gastronationalism, biopolitics, necropower, imagined community, the concept of *thinai*, and nation-building.

1. Food Narratives for Life: 1985 to 1995

1.1 Explaining Food Narratives for Life

At times, a contemporary state uses multiple forms of weapons to create "death-worlds" and render the people "living dead" in unlivable social conditions (Mmembé 2003, 40). This form of necropolitics, as defined by Mmembé, is the phenomenon at work in the Sri Lankan context. To counter these forms of subjugation, rebel groups create diverse avenues to protect the lives of people in the death-worlds. I use the phrase food narratives for life to refer to the LTTE's printed materials, whose aim was to prepare the civilian political bodies for living in a rebel-controlled region, bound by the movement's doctrines on food production and consumption. An insurgent movement engages in some form of governance when they are able to win over land through violence. Rebel governance can then be defined as "the set of actions insurgents engage in to regulate the social, political, and economic life of noncombatants during civil war" (Arjona et al. 2015, 3). The extent to which each rebel organization rules the private lives of civilians through their writing varies widely.

I ask how one looks at the narratives of rebel organizations and take into account that the genre of life narratives from the postcolonial world continues to expand and elude representation (Moore-Gilbert 2009, xiv). Such narratives are frequently categorized as propaganda without truth or value and regarded as the voice of power that controls the public. Often, the totalitarian system of political mobilization by militant factions applies tactics such as recognizing only those who comply, using fear and belief of external violence, crushing defiant voices, and so on. Yet the rebel group discourses speak from both subaltern

and dominant positions since they often identify as both victims of state violence and educators of community welfare.

The Tamil rebel groups' engagement with civilians brought forth published material on socio-economic developments, nutrition, food systems, and health care. Such publications sometimes moved beyond the usual rebel discourse and at times worked within the parameters of the rhetoric of propaganda. Such publications pitch everyday food activities as resistance against the state embargo, itself a biopolitical weapon, as Foucault contends, to "let to die" (Foucault 2003, 256). The printed materials provide micro-narratives on the way the movement regulates individual diets, alters food production, and secures the longevity of life through food management by the marginalized humans disowned by nation-states. These are archival narratives entrenched in Indigenous food systems that are often labelled rebel propaganda and are largely ignored. Subjected to "epistemic violence," the accounts remain obscured in the larger terrorism discourse (Spivak 1988, 280) orchestrated by the colonizing state. Due to such shrouding of the narratives of a totalitarian rebel narrative, there is no existing framework to study these materials.

1.2 The Background of Publications on Economic Development

The agro-development projects of the Sri Lankan state employed the ambition of an ideal Buddhist state in which minority geographies were occupied. Since Jaffna is a region dependent on groundwater, Tamil professionals in various technological and agricultural fields were engaged in developmental studies of the Jaffna region against the backdrop of misguided development projects of the state and state-published articles.[1]Their efforts became increasingly challenging as the state's repressive measures threatened independent

research and publications. The 1983 riots altered the political environment totally and militancy gained momentum. It is against this backdrop that publications faced more challenges and insurgent organizations began their own publications focusing on the social and economic causes espoused by the Tamil community. Scholars, scientists, and academics also began to contribute to the publications of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and Eelam Revolutionary Organization of Students (EROS).

EROS's publication wing, *Aayvu Niruvanam* (Research Organization), published many texts with leftist ideology and Tamil translations of leftist writers and thinkers that focused on the issues of social and economic development. Two quarterly publications under the title *Aayvu* (Research) are important to record here. Published in January and April 1987 respectively, they were based on four seminars conducted by the organizations. The seminars included the presentations of intellectuals from different fields and the public on topics such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, and related industries.

1.3 EROS's *Aayvu* Magazine: Building Food Narratives

The editorial note in the first issue of *Aayvu* magazine lays out its scope of the issue. The following is an excerpt in my translation:

> Alongside consolidating research works, articles and data that are spread out, undertaking local economic field research is the main goal of the Aayvu organization. And we conducted seminars on agriculture, animal husbandry, and industries. We will soon hold a seminar on fisheries. Through our activities, we aim to bring effective socio-economic changes to our ethnic regions. The organization is committed to introducing the technologies necessary to implement these changes … when the cattle-rearing community, agrarian community, and artisans lived separated in the ancient society the invention of the plough brought them together for a coexistence. The introduction of the plough laid the foundation for many more inventions … and these inventions were rudimentary for socio-economic relationships, producing history, establishing

> governance, creating art and culture. This is fundamental for the Aayvu organization's activities. Aayvu is the instrument to publish research-based articles by employing these elements in our region….
>
> The essays on history, studies in settlement, and the nature of communities are also published in this issue. Our history, which has been told through Buddhist monasteries and culture, has moved beyond that. It uses archeology, place names, and statistics as evidence to approach this history.… Essays on growing fruits, coconut, fishing and making milk products will be included.…
>
> The Aayvu organization hopes to build on its work following your feedback as careful readers and the resulting discussion. (January 1987, 3-4)

The excerpt begins by establishing the necessity to publish a research magazine first on the basis of what was not available in previous research works. It then establishes the publication's developmental goal. The narrative tone builds on the alternative history of the country using early Tamil settlements as archeological evidence. Amid growing fear of the uncertainties of violence and death, the editors attempt to educate the civilians on ways to attain self-sufficiency. *Aayvu*'s voice recognizes civilians as partners and collaborators and aims to achieve economic development through the people. Although the articles in this first issue do not engage with Tamil nationalist ideas directly, through its essays on developmental programs for ethnically identified regions, Tamil identity is evoked.

1.4 LTTE Publications: Food Narratives for Life

After 1983, the LTTE established itself as the sole rebel group, annexing some groups and crushing others. The publishing houses of various groups were threatened by the state as well as the Tigers. The LTTE took over such publishing houses since this was the time they came into close proximity with the public and expanded their operations among civilians. Accordingly, they engaged with some form of governance, and to reach the public the Movement published a wide range of propaganda newspapers, magazines, books, and so on.

The Research Organization of Tamil Eelam (ROOT), which later became the Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR), was the movement's division that focused on the food system. The organization brought out several publications to create a self-sustainable economy in the regions under their control. Such printed material included propagated doctrines through magazines and special issues on farming, food, and domestic production. An analysis of the narrative voice in these texts highlights the multiple ways the public was mobilized against the state and coerced to comply with the rebels. In addition, the texts provide resistance accounts of recipes, food alternatives, and public participation in related activities. The narrative is multilayered, with notions of several forms of nationalism—gastronationalism, military nationalism, decolonized nationalism—and provides a complex reading of human-environment encounters in a localized territory occupied by the LTTE.

TEEDOR is the administrative division responsible for the economic development of war-torn northern Sri Lanka. TEEDOR's projects involved cattle-rearing and milk production, food preservation, maintaining the health and nutrition of the people, increasing agricultural production, and so on. Tamil experts and intellectuals in relevant fields from the diaspora and within Sri Lanka were involved in TEEDOR projects. TEEDOR published the *Aathaaram* (Resource) magazine to build a self-supporting economy and produce healthy citizens. Constructs of Tamil identity and Tamil nationalism through food activities were embedded in the magazine's narrative.

1.5 *Namathu Porulathaaram:* Food and Life

In 1985, ROOT published the thin book *Namathu Porulaathaaram* (Our Economy), which constitutes one of the first instances of propaganda material on self-sustainability, agricultural production, and self-sufficiency used to organize the public against the state. It was the first time the LTTE encountered the public after the impact of the 1983 pogrom and the resulting power the movement was able to gather as a result. Insurgent movements cannot survive merely by fighting and controlling the public in conflict zones through fear, and by "creating systems of governance," militants persuade civilians to cooperate with them to effectively command the civilians (Arjona et al. 2015, 3). Accordingly, the narrative voice of *Namathu Porulathaaram* creates an awareness toward the political economy of northern Sri Lanka and form a collective identity. Embedded in the voice are warnings of imminent attacks, fear of the enemy leading the region into starvation, and a protracted fight for liberation:

> The economic strategies provided below will be part of our fight to achieve Tamil Eelam. The economic activities initiated by us and acted upon are toward our final goal. Therefore, it is the prime responsibility of every individual to play an active role for the success of our economic plans. Our economic planning should be in such a way that it should ensure that every individual has a significant role in our economic plan and at the same time, it should fulfil every individual's need.…[A]s the fighting intensifies, we need to concentrate on efforts to handle emergencies of situations of war … we need to plan to protect our people from starvation and diseases … at some point goods, fuel, and electricity may be blocked … we have to research ways to enable the public to survive these embargos and cannot be allowed to be affected by the embargos … the whole of Tamil Eelam has enough rice, produce, and seafood to feed the entire population of the region. Yet due to war when transport becomes challenging, goods will not be available to all and hence every region of Tamil Eelam should aim to achieve at least the merest level of self-sufficiency.
>
> Objectives:
>
> 1. During a crisis, every citizen of Tamil Eelam should attain their basic needs at the least.
> 2. By increasing consumer levels, increase the standard of living.
> 3. To fully utilize the economic resources for local production.
> 4. To identify all the resources and use them to the maximum. (1985, 4)

In addition, Tamil nationalism as promoted by the LTTE builds itself on the improvement of agricultural products. Especially since electricity was expected to be blocked by the state, *Namathu Porulathaaram* advocates a revamping of farming techniques by altering windmills and handpumps and using alternative energy and fuel sources such as sunlight and kerosene (1985, 10). The doctrine advocates for an increase of farmland through using land around individual houses for home gardens. An excerpt of the instruction follows:

> A. Land around houses: Every household should grow vegetables for their family needs. It is best to grow supplement foods such as purple yam, moringa, pumpkin, greens, and papaya and choose vegetables such as okra, eggplant, and bitter gourd.
>
> B. Dry, arid lands: In which cash crops including chillies, onions, and tobacco were grown should be reduced and instead, potato, cassava, and other yams, corn, and soya should be grown since rice cannot grow in these regions.…
>
> C. Farmlands: During the seasons when rice is not grown in the paddy fields, native grains such as finger millets, little millet and kodo millet can be grown instead of chillies. In addition, the fields should also be used for lentils and peanuts.…
>
> Finally, when we achieve our local production according to our economic planning and distribute to the public, it is important to make sure everyone gets their share. If we are able to make necessary arrangements to provide the necessary goods at a reasonable price, the consumers will be satisfied. The cooperative society form of procuring and provisioning the goods produced will be the suitable method in our economic situation. By distributing goods from the producers similar to the distribution of mails, there will not be shortage or wastage of foods. (1985, 7-10)

This book marks the beginning of a set of narratives from the LTTE that reflects the significant moments of the long-drawn-out war, the trajectories of the war, and the way the struggle shaped and reshaped food provisioning of a group. Of all of its objectives, providing the basic necessities (which includes rice) was the main one that the Tigers strove to achieve until the end in 2009. It is within this context that one has to look at the *kanjikottil* (rice gruel shelters) provided by the Tamils Rehabilitation Organization (TRO) during the final war (see also Chapter Four). The above narrative is laced with control, intertwined and regulated use

of human bodies, soil, and natural resources to form an imagined nation. The conformity of human bodies was essential to achieve this culinary nationalist project. Toward that end, the LTTE mobilized fear and resistance in the already traumatized community.

1.6 Food Narratives in *Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum*

Published in 1992 by ROOT, the book *Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum* (Food Requirement and Production Goals) opens with a preface by Dr. Nachinarkiniyan of the University of Jaffna's Faculty of Medicine. He sums up the circumstances in which the book was published:

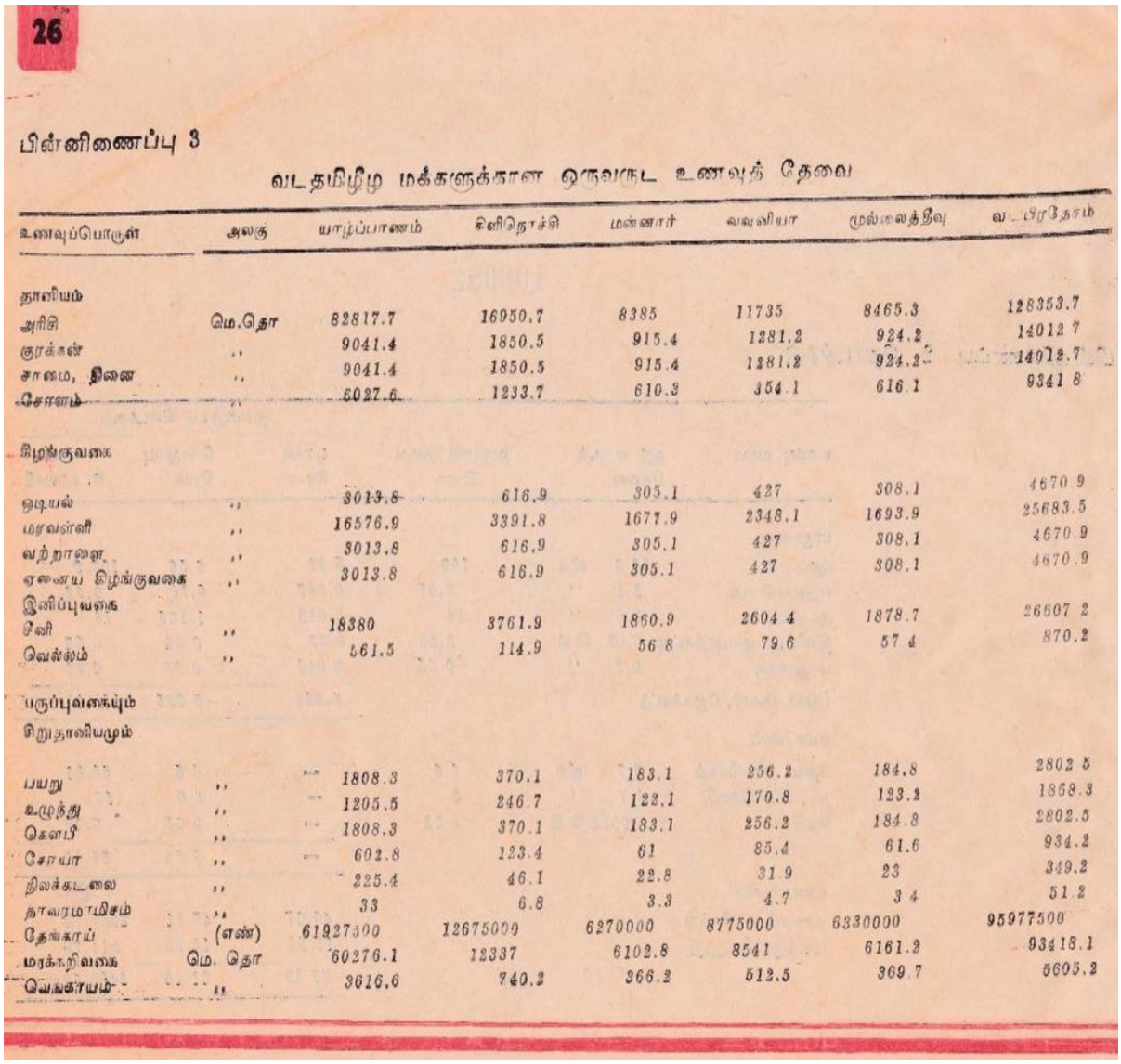
> In the regions where Tamils have lived for many years, state-sponsored crisis of food shortages resulted from supply issues due to road blockages, curfews, and restricted transport. In addition, shells, bombs, and military manoeuvres have forced Tamils to flee from their farmlands. Now with the embargo on fertilizers, fuel, and pesticides, agriculture in the rest of the lands has also become impossible. If we have to protect ourselves and our society, we need to use our resources … and produce food with nutritional value and it is important to provide knowledge about foods that need to be grown locally. (1992, 2)

Nachinarkiniyan's preface illuminates the real-life histories and experiences of the people in the region. It is an anecdote that reveals traumatic moments of displacement faced by the public, resulting in inaccessibility of food for procurement and consumption. All kinds of writing, including anecdotes and digital media posts, are narratives of experiences (Leader 2015, 1) Accordingly, Nachinarkiniyan's preface registers resistance to the experience of food blockade. Drawing on Erikson's concept of collective trauma, the sudden prevalence of food insecurity that is revealed in the above passage is a "blow to the basic tissues of social life" (1991, 187), and the doctor's voice highlights the biopolitics of a civil war: the way the state uses food as a tool to weaken the rebel hold and the way food production and its related activities are seen as everyday acts of resistance.

Foucault notes that modern states use economic policies as the base for biopower, which is exercised by achieving the "subjugation of bodies and the control of populations" (1980, 140). Extending his argument, he poses food provisioning as a biopolitical tool in the formation of modern states, scarcity, and population (2007). Building on his division between population and people, Foucault argues that "let to die" is a way to "eliminate biological threat" (2003, 256). Echoing Foucault's biopolitical discourse, modern techniques of food provisioning have become a tool to control the unwanted in a group, and the Sri Lankan state began to use such techniques after the rebels gained control of part of the land. Nachinarkiniyan's preface refuses to surrender to the trauma of food insecurity; instead, it becomes a voice of resistance, calling for action. His anecdote is amplified by the editors' note written by the Tamil Eelam Research Centre team, in which they state that the movement does not acknowledge the collective trauma that Nachinarkiniyan wrote about. Instead, the LTTE focuses on its claim that it carries on the war with the military on behalf of the people. As Kasfir notes, in order to succeed, rebel governance should include "three scope conditions": effective control of the land, the existence of civilian population and violence (2015, 21). The LTTE uses such types of tools to ensure that a favourable environment is created for their rule. Their publications on food systems are one such instrument.

Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum is a comprehensive guide on the Tamil population, land and sea resources, individual dietary needs, alternative foods that provide the same nutrition as can be grown locally, and so on. The LTTE division responsible for the

publication used available data from the government census and researched further to provide more details. Figures 11 and 12 show tables listing the food requirements for one year for the people of northern Tamil Eelam. The Tamil diet is categorized under grains, yams, legumes, vegetables, meats, seafood, dairy, and oils that are native to the geographical location. The tables demonstrate the multiple factors used by the LTTE to wield its biopolitical approach on the Tamil civilians—humans, landscape, foodscape, and seascape—all of which are intertwined to illuminate the foodways of a region. The tables also display notions of gastronationalism coupled with militant nationalism since none of the foods originate from outside the rebel-governed Tamil region. Through the dietary requirement, the movement dictates the techniques of the body and subjugates them to adhere to their biopolitics.



26

பின்னிணைப்பு 3

வடதமிழீழ மக்களுக்கான ஒருவருட உணவுத் தேவை

உணவுப்பொருள்	அலகு	யாழ்ப்பாணம்	கிளிநொச்சி	மன்னார்	வவுனியா	முல்லைத்தீவு	வடபிரதேசம்
தானியம்							
அரிசி	மெ.தொ	82817.7	16950.7	8385	11735	8465.3	128353.7
குரக்கன்	,,	9041.4	1850.5	915.4	1281.2	924.2	14012.7
சாமை, தினை	,,	9041.4	1850.5	915.4	1281.2	924.2	14012.7
சோளம்	,,	6027.6	1233.7	610.3	854.1	616.1	9341.8
கிழங்குவகை							
ஒடியல்	,,	3013.8	616.9	305.1	427	308.1	4670.9
மரவள்ளி	,,	16576.9	3391.8	1677.9	2348.1	1693.9	25683.5
வற்றாளை	,,	3013.8	616.9	305.1	427	308.1	4670.9
ஏனைய கிழங்குவகை	,,	3013.8	616.9	305.1	427	308.1	4670.9
இலிப்புவகை							
தேவி	,,	18380	3761.9	1860.9	2604.4	1878.7	28607.2
வெல்லம்	,,	561.5	114.9	56.8	79.6	57.4	870.2
பருப்புவகைகும்							
சிறுதானியமும்							
பயறு	,,	1808.3	370.1	183.1	256.2	184.8	2802.5
உழுந்து	,,	1205.5	246.7	122.1	170.8	123.2	1868.3
கௌபீ	,,	1808.3	370.1	183.1	256.2	184.8	2802.5
சோயா	,,	602.8	123.4	61	85.4	61.6	934.2
நிலக்கடலை	,,	225.4	46.1	22.8	31.9	23	349.2
தானமாமிசம்	,,	33	6.8	3.3	4.7	3.4	51.2
தேங்காய்	(எண்)	61927500	12675000	6270000	8775000	6330000	95977500
மரக்கறிவகை	மெ. தொ	60276.1	12337	6102.8	8541	6161.2	93418.1
வெங்காயம்	,,	3616.6	740.2	366.2	512.5	369.7	5605.2

Figure 11. Grains, yams, and pulses for one year for the people of northern Tamil Eelam.[2]

DeSoucey's concept of gastronationalism (2010, 433), although drawn from the context of nation-states, is applicable in the context of rebel governance as we have already seen that insurgents replicate state-governing models. Although the LTTE did not use gastronationalism in the strict sense that DeSoucey defines it, I use the concept in conjunction with Anderson's imagined community (1991) and Chatterjee's postcolonial nation-building (1993, 6). While the context of these arguments is nation-states—the

European Union in DeSoucey's case and postcolonial India in Chatterjee's example—for a rebel group controlling a territory and a people who challenge the state, the state becomes the colonial power and colonial powers regulate food supply.

As most postcolonial states follow colonial methods to suppress insurgency, Chatterjee's assertion could be rekindled to understand the food provisioning of the LTTE as a decolonial performance of a de facto state. The movement's narrative mobilizes people into everyday acts of resistance by constructing fear for life through the use of violence by the state and through the state-issued embargo. It is in this narration of peril that the LTTE brings into existence an imagined community, which challenges the state and lives outside of the state. The movement's efforts to regulate the population and its ability to produce food are another aspect of challenging the Sri Lankan government. Through food and the embodied practices associated with food, communities perform national identity.[3]

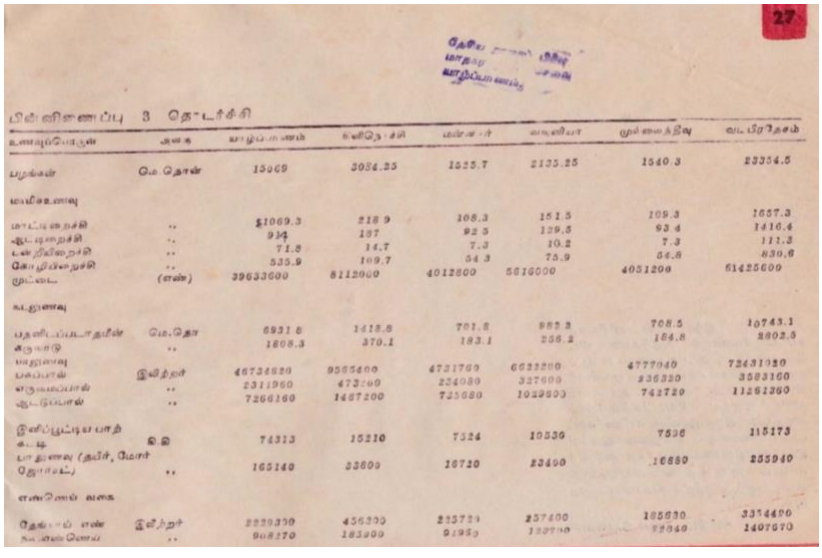


Figure 12. Fruits, meats, seafood, dairy, and oils for one year for the people of northern Tamil Eelam.[4]

In delineating the way that the LTTE coerces the public to construct food identity, I emphasize the connection between the construction of national identity through resisting food cultures (Ichijo and Ranta 2015, 8-11, and Gvion 2006, 309; quoted in Ichijo et al. 2015, 9).

In the early pages of *Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum*, the movement's narrative reaches back to premodern Tamil foodways to construct Tamil life under rebellion to build an imagined community (Anderson 2016). It is common for rebel movements to use history to legitimize their claim to identity, nationalism, and culture and to motivate action. The IRA, as an example of a political group attempting to mobilize a group for a common cause, uses history. The LTTE, in a similar effort, constructs Tamil martyrdom using ancient Tamil practices (see Chapter Two). In the following excerpt from the book, we can see the movement's attempts to revive historical food practices:

> Our ancestors lived a long life without diseases because of their diet. While researching their food, we learn that their diet consists of finger millet, kodo millet, dried palmyra root, porridge, foxtail millet, little millet, and pearl millet. The strength of their body was the base to fulfill their necessities…. Newspapers report that recently when thousands of people were trapped in small islands off Jaffna peninsula during the army maneuver, they only survived consuming various preparations of palmyra tubers and fruits. This proves the fact that the resources of our land are the lifeline of our lives. Realizing this, we have to increase local foods in our meals. (1992, 12)

The LTTE also makes use of the historical narratives of valour, motherhood, and martyrdom to construct and reinforce community, directly and indirectly, borrowing from ancient Tamil poems. In the passage above, the Tigers have done it through the recalling of ancient "forgotten foods" of a community (Sharma and Lambert-Hurley 2023).[5] The use of

elements of the lifestyle of the past, however, is most profound in the food provisioning of the movement since it is rooted in spatial and temporal connections.

1.7 *Thinai*, Food, and Landscape: The LTTE Narratives

As stated earlier, the LTTE consciously and unconsciously drew on the classical texts of war to construct Tamil bodies of valour, strength, and identity. To grasp the way that foodways of the past are employed, it is essential to understand the *thinai* concept of ancient Tamil poetry. Classical Tamil writings, known as the Sangam literature, were written between the third and fourth centuries BCE and have two major divisions: *akam* and *puram*. *Akam* refers to the interior, describing love and its feelings and relating it to various social and geographical milieus. *Puram* refers to the exterior, including extensive accounts of war and other feats of kings and chieftains. The poems from this time, known as the Sangam period, entrenched in orality, were sung by bards, and share common features with classical Greek, Celtic, and other such early works, a fact that illuminates their universality. *Tolkappiyam*, the grammar treatise on Tamil classical poetry, dated fifth and sixth century BCE, describes five kinds of landscapes, referred to as *thinai*: *mullai* (forest), *kurinji* (mountain and adjoining land), *marutham* (agricultural land), *neythal* (littoral), and *palai* (desert). These divisions are applied in both *akam* and *puram* poems in their various settings.

Although *thinai* may appear to correspond to landscape, it also relates to human behaviour, food, the flora and fauna of the region, and space and time. A reader who is familiar with Tamil classical poetry will identify *thinai* from the set of symbols that constitutes the following poem, even though *thinai* is not explicitly stated:

As the cassias blossom
in small chains,
long red anthills send forth winged ants,
the animals have no appetite,

the season of rains
is on,
my dear girl,
and your man
who was in love with battle
has remembered
and come home.
(Ramanujan 1996, 80)

The *thinai* for this poem is *mullai* (forest), since the human behaviour pattern is "patiently waiting," cassia is the signifying flower, and the season is the monsoon. The *Tolkappiyam* identifies three central attributes for *thinai*, which the text primarily sees as a literary convention. They are *muthal* (primary attribute), *karu* (native attribute), and *uri* (appropriate human behaviour and experience). Time and space constitute *muthal*; plants and animals, food, occupation, and music belonging to the forest landscape are features of *karu*; and all conventions of behaviour are subsumed under *uri* (*Tolkappiyam Porulathikaram* 1953, 3). In context, classical Tamil poetry mentions the different foods consumed in the Mullai region. Since people inhabiting the region were herdsmen, their dietary habits were dependent on farm animals. Bharathi states that kodo millet, pearl millet, pigeon pea, milk, yogurt, ghee, goat, pork, turkey, mouse, deer, rabbit, and birds were part of their diet (2021, 63). In identifying *thinai* as much more complex than landscapes, due to its interconnection with people and environment, Cheran contends that *thinai* creates a sense of "micro identity by carefully and artfully weaving people, their environment and their collective imagination and fantasy" (2001, 23).

Embedded in this literary landscape is the description of food consumed by communities in the five landscapes. This is similar to the notion that the food system is a structure of interconnectivity between humans and ecology resulting in complex social, economic, and cultural relationships. Musacchio defines the cultural dimension of ecosystem services as the "psychological, cultural, and social relationships that influence people's connections to biodiversity and landscapes as well as to what benefits they consider useful and relevant" (2013, 1025). She draws on the works of previous researchers to analyze the relationships between humans and landscapes (Liu et al. 2007; Ostrom 2009). The list of foods established by the LTTE is connected to the landscape of northern Sri Lanka and to the early Sangam tradition. The millets, palm root, and fruit are all mentioned in the poems alongside porridge, and the poems reveal food practices of premodern Tamils, as in *Purananuru* 225:

> தலையோர் நுங்கின் தீங்சோறு மிசைய
> இடையோர் பழத்தின் பைங்கனி மாந்தக்
> கடையோர் விடுவாய்ப் பிரிரொடு சுடுகிழங்கு நுகர …
>
> The front section of the army drinks the palm juice
> while the middle convoy eats the palmyra fruit
> and the last section consumes roasted palm roots …
> (2008, 75-76)

The landscape and livelihood are closely interwoven with the people inhabiting the land and form the core of Tamil Indigenous food systems. Each *thinai* is thus a biosphere with its own food practices and is tied to the local identity.

Even a perfunctory reading of the classical Tamil poems points toward a crisis or conflict present in them. Most poems are about the human behaviours of waiting, anxiety, and quarrel due to separation between lovers on the grounds of battle, infidelity, and travel

for economic reasons. To put it succinctly, the external conflict and internal crisis that dominates this immense body of work illustrated through these genres is characteristic of Tamil literature. The integration of landscapes and people's relationship to them is unique to Tamil literature. War and conflicts are ingrained in classical Tamil poetics. By recollecting the Indigenous foods mentioned, the narrative of *Unavuthaevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum* reconstructs an identity that has been in existence since classical times. Interestingly, the northern and eastern regions under the control of the Tigers encompass all of the *thinai* landscapes: seacoast, fields, forests, and drylands, with the exception of mountains. The LTTE does not use the concept of *thinai* consciously, yet in their publications, landscapes are often referred to in terms of classical *thinai* concepts. *Aathaaram* magazine uses the term *Neythal* to refer to a village by the seashore (Issue #14 1994, 14). The Mullaitivu district in the Northern province is known for farming and cattle-rearing, a continuation of the Mullai terrain as identified in the Sangam literature.

Accordingly, in order to endure the war, civilians are reminded to embrace their premodern lifestyle dominated by wars and revive older food practices. The insurgents' narrative for life not only connects ancient foodways, past and present crises, and solutions, but also rejects modern foodscapes of colonization. Such studies located in the human geography of Sri Lanka were not prominent during the 1990s.[6]

1.8 Foodways Printing, Embargo, and Narratives

In 1990, the Sri Lankan government issued a ban on most consumer goods and medicine, which was in effect until 2002. Alongside food items, the embargo included goods

such as fuel, ink, and paper. It was during this time that several divisions of the LTTE continued to publish their narrative materials. *Aathaaram* was published by TEEDOR, and only about twelve issues, printed between 1990 and 1995 in Jaffna, are available now. Since the publication happened in the rebel-controlled area that saw less interruption from the state, printing and distributing of the material still continued. The printed booklets contain evidence of forms of resistance rooted in the everyday acts of food. They also illuminate the biopolitical control in the hands of both the state forces and the rebel army. Due to the embargo, the task of printing also demanded innovation (Karunaharan 25 May 2023). Some of the issues were printed in Tamilnadu, India, and smuggled into the rebel-controlled northern Sri Lanka. Because of supply shortages, ink was made locally with coconut oil and charcoal from trees, while even wrappers were used in lieu of paper. Printing blocks were made from wood, and at times papers from notebooks were also used to print.

In 1995, the Sri Lankan Army attacked the capital city of Jaffna, and the movement was pushed to the forest regions of Vanni and Kilinochi, which served as their headquarters until 2009. When the LTTE moved to Vanni, thousands of people left Jaffna and moved to the forest, where even the most basic infrastructure for a resettled community to thrive did not exist. As a result, the movement had to put in efforts to provide basic needs while also waging continuous battles against the army. *Aathaaram* stopped printing from Vanni.

The magazines are sites in which "competing biopolitics"—a concept advocated by scholars Brenner and Tazzioli—are performed (2022, 4). Following Brenner and Tazzioli, who argue that Chatterjee's notion of postcolonial governmentality offers a way to study

rebel governance, I would like to approach LTTE's governance from the perspectives mentioned above. Rebel organizations often constitute a people group whose existence challenges the nation. Most ethnic minority groups in the nations of the global south fall under "competing biopolitics" of rebel governance, and this is where Chatterjee's assertion becomes relevant. Within this framework, the LTTE engaged with a wide range of food provisioning activities that subjected individuals to disciplined dietary practices as advocated by nutritionists and doctors.[7] Such activities aimed at agroecological sustainable solutions to optimize people's lives in the region that they controlled via publications under these categories:

1. New seed and crop varieties
2. Techniques of substitution
3. Native flavours and making of cold drinks and ice creams
4. Home gardens
5. Narratives of traditional knowledge and experiences.

These categories emphasize the features of the LTTE's competing biopolitics.

2. Decolonization of the Food System as Life Narratives

As detailed above, *Aathaaram* is an important research-based magazine published by TEEDOR. Only a few issues of *Aathaaram* are available now, and each issue focused on a particular concern, such as water (#16), food preservation (#8), agriculture (#10), and animal husbandry (#6). Most issues typically begin with a note by the rebel leader, Prabhakaran, or the editor's note. Here, for instance, is an example of Prabhakaran's narrative voice from Issue #14:

> We are a small community facing genocide. We do not have anyone to voice our concerns or lend a helping hand. We stand alone on our own legs. Powerful enemies have surrounded us to extinguish us. The whole world has united to support our enemies. As a helpless community surrounded by danger, we have to collect all our resources and use all strategies for our war of self-defence. We cannot ignore this need and obligation. If we do, we cannot escape from being cleansed as an ethnic group. (1994, 1)

Prabhakaran's words echo Kasfir's contention that rebel governance begins with mobilizing the public in the rebel-controlled areas toward a common cause (2005, 24). Prabhakaran's tone sets the stage for elements such as nationalism, patriotism, food conservation, and self-sustainability. Excerpts of revolutionary poems and speeches were translated from the works of Mao, Che Guerra, and Russian novels and interwoven in *Aathaaram* to represent the decolonial Indigenous farming practices as a mode of survival, struggle, and resistance. Issue #16, for instance, published the Tamil translation of the famous letter or speech of Chief Seattle, who was a Suquamish and Duwamish chief (1995, 4-8). Although the current form of the letter's authenticity is in question, that he gave a speech to Isaac Stevens about respect for Native American rights and environmental values is a fact.[8]

TEEDOR members followed ecological activism and organic farming in India and visited several farmers and organizations involved in reviving traditional farming. Issue #10 provides the story of how the seeds of pearl millet, which was never previously grown in Sri Lanka, were brought to Jaffna from Tamilnadu. The experience of the journey to southern India begins as follows:

> This is one of the grains that holds a significant place among the food grains of southern India. Since it grows well in drylands with less water and gives a good yield, this grain is suitable for lands with less water supply. TEEDOR was looking to find the grain that would give more yield and consume less land, less effort and low cost. Pearl millet is the first grain that promised all of these conditions. Millet seeds were brough from southern

> India with great difficulty in the thick of loss of lives and properties. The seeds were planted and tested and then the seeds were produced in the farms belonging to TEEDOR and carefully prepared for distribution....
>
> Nutrition: Pearl millet has more nutritional value than finger millet since it has 11.59% of protein, 4.99% of fat, and 2.65% of minerals. Additionally, all foods made from wheat flour can be made from pearl millet flour. Tiffin or snacks including puttu, laddu, biscuits, and tasty porridge can also be made from this millet.
>
> Insect repellant: Since this millet is new to our region, it will not be affected by insects that can cause financial loss. It is possible that birds could attack these plants. By making noises using fluttering papers, cloth screens, the birds can be driven away. (1994, 9)

The excerpt interweaves landscape, valour, the sacred, life, blood, trauma, and longevity. The seeds are sacred because they are considered life-giving. They are soaked in blood, given the perilous boat journeys that members of the movement had to make. A fact to remember is this issue was printed two years after the LTTE assassinated Rajiv Gandhi, the former prime minister of India, following which India banned the movement. The newness of the millet signifies new life in the Tamil landscape. The notion of valour is being used outside the battlefield. Here, the reference to the "journey made among loss of lives and materials" reveals the way the LTTE constructed heroism as a necessary trait to engage in sustainable agricultural activities, and it is prepared to use its courageous soldiers not only in wars but also to provide life to the civilians. The excerpt exemplifies Fanon's "combat literature" since it propels people towards action for nation-building by glorifying the "Indigenous landscapes" and food systems (2004, 159).

The excerpt also reveals the way Tamil bodies are regulated by notions of health. It illuminates how the movement's governance is invested in Foucault's technologies of the self, in which individuals practice a set of disciplines voluntarily or coerced. The introduction of pearl millet, which had not existed earlier in the Sri Lankan food system, meant that the

food would become part of the Tamil "self " and body through ingestion (Lupton 1998, 17). Incorporating unfamiliar foods coupled with the dangers of a war zone poses increased risk and food anxiety because it now becomes the self. Such incorporation of unknown seed as food, consumed and expelled through the body, also creates a Tamil subject with unbiased trust in the Tiger discourse. To create trust, the movement constructed the acquisition of the new seed around the dangers of annihilation. Thus, the fatality of the fighters and the mortality of Tamil civilians are tied together.

Millet was considered a common food until the green revolution swept through Asian countries in the 1950s and 1960s.[9] Following the revolution, the production of hybrid rice varieties increased and the consumption of millet gradually decreased. From the 1990s the LTTE actively promoted millet as a nutritional diet for civilians, and the revival of these crops promoted the creation of a contiguous Tamil landscape by connecting the coastal Tamilnadu with northern and eastern Sri Lanka. By germinating the millet seeds, the LTTE constructed a Tamil geography and a Tamil way of being in a newly configured nation.

2.1 The Narrative for Food, Land, and Life

The following excerpt is from the editorial column of Issue #10 of *Aathaaram*:

> … In the Jaffna district when almost 9 lakh people live in a congested 1 lakh hectare land. In the Vanni region, almost half of the population of 4 1/2 lakh people live in almost 8 1/2 lakh hectare land. Because of this, in Vanni, our land resource is not used properly and wasted. To increase the resources and for the people and the nation to develop together to settle in Vanni is the only option we have. (1993, 3)
>
> … When the markets, technologies, and communications are closed and when raw materials for production cannot enter our land, it is imperative to return to traditional methods of production. At a time, during this period of war, when we face economic embargo and food shortages, it is not acceptable in any way when land is left unused and

> when people look for land for farming. That is why TEEDOR is engaged in the distribution of unused land. (4)
>
> When each and every citizen produces a part of their food, then the regular farmer's land will be saved. Instead of farming vegetables for everyone, the farmer can reduce their vegetable production and use that land for jute or plant seeds for oil…. (5)
>
> Today's need is food for everyone.…
>
> With the military occupation of the land and planned destruction in Tamil Eelam, there are thousands of pregnant women and children without nourishment. Only when our young generation grows up healthy and intelligent will our future economy grow.… In order to maximize the use of residential land, the home garden competition has been converted to home agricultural competition. This year, 16,000 people are engaged in home agriculture. (5-6)

The excerpt exemplifies the way human bodies are made subjects of biopolitics through the management of labour, hunger, individual food production and consumption. Not only humans, but land use is also actively controlled by the LTTE to maximize their agricultural produce and in turn their economy.

Another article in Issue #10 describes the traditional practices of biodiverse farming and lists the crops that are usually grown together for economic and ecological benefits. The narrative consolidates epistemic knowledge of biodiversity, such as the mixing of jute with sesame and broad beans after the paddy harvest is finished. The experiential knowledge is that when jute plants grow tall and move vigorously in the wind, the crop protects the sesame and beans from birds as they move vigorously and noisily in the wind. The jute produces a lot of nitrogen that replaces its loss during the growth of sesame. While passing down this ancestral knowledge of ecology, the article introduces contemporary scientifically and commercially proven crop combinations for biodiversity. The entire article amplifies the impact of these methods against the backdrop of army attacks and embargoes on fuel, pesticides, and fertilizers.

With the ongoing war, the movement of goods between the rebel-held territories and the rest of Sri Lanka was restricted. As a result, farmers in the north and the east were not able to sell their produce and grain to the rest of Sri Lanka. The warring region experienced surplus agricultural production of cassava for instance, which did not yield good prices because of the challenge in transportation. Through public input, the LTTE devised ways to support the local farmers, and this led to innovations in recipes, food production, and preservation. Issue #8 brings forward the necessity for preserving foods. The overarching narrative promotes growing local fruits, preserving the juice, and selling bottled juice produced from these fruits. (See figure 13 for an advertisement from the issue's back cover.) In addition, products such as "Colombo soda" (bottled Coca-Cola and other artificially flavoured drinks from global producers) were discouraged by using several arguments: on the grounds of health, nation-building, and supporting local produce. The commercial demonstrates the way regional ethnic foods are constructed to contest the prevailing modern food and drink patterns of a nation, a point raised by Gvion (2006) and Ichijo (2020). At the same time, the propaganda aligns with "cultural nationalism and food" (see Kim's work on Korean identity and cuisine 2010; cited in Ichijo 2020).



Figure 13. An advertisement for a locally made juice from locally grown fruits on the back cover of *Aathaaram*. The caption reads: "Juice made from the sweet fruits of the fertile soil of Tamileelam."[10]

These everyday activities surrounding the production and consumption of food are locations where a decolonized nation comes into its own using traditional knowledge. The narratives in the magazines draw upon such skills concentrated among individuals with a variety of experiential knowledge.

Based on the archives, one can contend that the LTTE's nationalist project constitutes the following steps:

1. Maintain the fear of enemy attacks and the reality of losing the land.
2. Mobilize and regulate bodily labour to employ traditional knowledge to procure food.
3. Reinvent alternative, self-sustainable, localized, and decolonial methods of farming.
4. Combine traditional and modern cuisines to create new foods and beverages.

Food and food production was at the heart of the rebel movement, which saw it as an integral part of Tamil nationalism.

2.2 Food Narratives for Life: Civilian Voices

Several of the recipe ideas published in the issues of *Aathaaram* came from public input. Raviraj, the magazine's editor from 1992 to 1995, mentioned in a personal communication that the public, faced with the challenges of embargo, countered the shortage of food by pioneering alternative ways to manage life. Their resilience was rooted in the memories of everyday embodied practices of food growing, biodiversity, culinary heritage, and agroecology (3 Aug. 2024). The issues often carried interviews of individuals engaged in agriculture and sustainable food production. Communities living in long-term conflicts collaborate with armed groups to gain basic survival tactics and skillsets (Kalvyas and Kocher 2007) and sometimes the groups tap into traditional food and farming knowledge of the community. Such mechanisms are influenced by sociopolitical, cultural and financial traits of a war-torn community and shaped by the armed groups ruling the region (Justino 2012). In Issue #8, for instance, an older farmer shared his knowledge of the traditional mode of farming and the traditional foods he grew up on:

> In the mornings we had fermented rice water. Our lunch was either kodo millet or little millet. I still relish the taste of kodo millet with deep-fried eggplant. At night we had finger millet *puttu* and cassava curry. *Odiyal koozh* (soup made from palm root flour), *panaattu* (dried pulp of palm fruit), and *elluppaaku* (sesame jaggery sweet), shredded coconut, puffed rice … were our snacks … we ate white rice only once a week … famines in those times lasted fifteen days at the most. On those days we boiled rice in excess water. We drank the rice water and dried the rice in the sun. The next day we cooked the dried rice again and then we dried the rice again. This is how we survived famines. (1992, 14)

Recalling the intergenerational farming knowledge passed down to him, the farmer adds:

> We collect the dry shrub of Pinari and press it down with the heavy axle of the bullock cart. Then we make a fence with pressed down shrub and palmyra leaves and make an enclosed space where we allow goats to feed and drop the pellets. Every night we watch the goats. When enough pellets are collected, we mix them with herbs, palmyra leaves, moss from the ponds, cow dung and dry leaves to make manure. Goat manure is the best for paddy. (1992, 10)

The following is an excerpt from an interview with the owner of Tasteline Industries, a food production company:

> We started by making pickles for exports. Then with the embargo in 1990, transport was affected. Our export products could not be sold and at the same time, sweets, soda, sauces, and jams became unavailable here. We revamped our production and started making jams, juices, chocolates, pickles, and such. (1992, 22)

A baker who switched from wheat to locally grown grains in his products speaks about his experience:

> When wheat became unavailable because of the embargo, the baking industry was affected, and people suffered without baked goods. In a situation like this, a solution became necessary. With the limited supply of wheat, part of the ingredient was replaced with finger millet flour to make bread. When even the limited supply of wheat flour was stopped, we tested making bread with other types of flour. We attempted making bread with rice flour and it came out sticky. The same happened when we tried with finger millet flour. So now we mix finger millet with wheat flour and the bread is fine. Then we used various millets to make biscuits and snacks, which were in great demand. (1992, 29)

A housewife, Thiripuranayaki, shares her gendered-knowledge of home remedies and healthy meals using locally grown greens:

> In the current situation when we are surrounded by war, with shortages of foodstuff and soaring prices of groceries, we are unable to secure healthy food needed for our bodies. At such a juncture, it is important to learn the food practices our ancestors followed. *Ilaikanji* (gruel made of leaves and spices) is one such recipe that will help us now. *Ilaikanji* is an ancient food and its medicinal qualities will protect us from diseases.…

> [O]ur region is covered with several kinds of herbs and greens…. Most of these can be used to make this gruel. (1992, 32-33)

In Issue #10 of Aathaaran, another farmer shared scientifically innovative methods he used to draw water for the fields without electricity. These life narratives provide a glimpse of the defiance entrenched in the quotidian activities of food production and consumption. Following Hoppers's definition of Indigenous knowledge as a complete skill set rooted in the local landscape, the narrative voices of the women, the farmer, and the baker illustrate the way this knowledge is used (2005, 2). The making of goat manure and biodiverse cropping of sesame, jute, and lentils manifest the intergenerational sharing of agricultural techniques. The excerpts emphasize culturally appropriate and nutritional crops that promote biodiversity. These individual labours in the kitchen and on the farm are acts of resilience against the traumas meted out by war, hunger, famine, and food insecurity.

In associating long-term trauma and everyday resilience in the South African context, Colvin notes that individuals unearth survival strategies to deal with trauma and even to overcome the challenges and pain caused by trauma (2008, 223-234). Similarly, in northern Sri Lanka, the abovementioned farmer draws on the repository of knowledge of sustenance. Emerging studies on armed conflict and foodways unearth the way communities living in long-term war zones adapt farming practices as coping mechanism (Arias et al. 2019; Bozzoli and Brück 2009; Justino 2012). For instance, in Africa, where a large proportion of the population is agrarian, change in patterns of land use, crop diversity, subsistence farming, and other agricultural activities are practiced to minimize loss and maximize food territories (Vlassenroot 2008; Verpooten 2009; Justino 2012; Paul et al. 2015). Rural households

engage in subsistence farming as a mode of resilient agriculture to survive the war as demonstrated by research in Mozambique and Rwanda (Bozzoli and Brück 2009; Brück 2004; McKay and Loveridge 2005).

The current shortage of food resulting from the embargo triggered memories of food insecurity and survival tactics from previous famines. It is not clear exactly which famine the farmer refers to, since famines in colonial Sri Lanka, as in other former colonies, have been a common, continuous occurrence. For instance, in his notes under the year 1877, Martyn writes "a form of famine diarrhea succeeds the real epidemic of Cholera and carries off large numbers. 20,000 deaths reported in the Northern province" (1923, 39).[11] The fact that the famine lasted for only fifteen days meant that a quick government intervention was made to procure food aid. The farmer's narrative highlights the way remembrance of childhood food starvation shapes resilience during a current food crisis. Scholars studying food trauma and famine note the way memories of past food anxiety are inscribed on current food practices of elder men and women. "Maximization of ingredients and zero waste practices; central role of bread; conspicuous consumption at particular times of the year; food taboo" are some of them (Conde-Caballero et al. 2021). The account demonstrates the notion of embodied alimentary memories of lived experiences felt in the body (Sutton and Williamston 2014; Johnson 2019; also quoted in Ruiz 2023). The farmer's long interview focuses not on food trauma, but on the everyday food practices that formed the core of coping mechanisms for long-term trauma (Colvin 2008, 223-234)

The approaches of members of the public demonstrate their resilience to food anxiety rooted in human geographies, gendered and general transmissions of agroecological knowledge, and traditional cuisines to deal with unexpected atrocities. The experiential stories noted above also demonstrate the ways individuals' knowledge became the basis for the LTTE's food narratives for life.

2.3 Women as Food Makers

During the war years of the 1990s, a local production unit was set up in each village and seeds were revived (Selvin 19 June 2023). The new grains and beans introduced by the movement's efforts required creative ways to incorporate them into meals. Articles that addressed women with instructions for recipes and innovative substitutions became the channels of biopolitical control. The soya bean, for instance, was a plant newly introduced to Jaffna civilians, and an article in Issue #6 of *Aathaaram* details the procedure of cultivating and harvesting soya. It mobilizes women to make milk by pounding or grinding the beans and then separating the milk from the bean pulp. It advises people on how to integrate the milk into everyday cooking. Women were provided with information on incorporating soya products, which was newly introduced to the region, into their everyday cooking. Issue #6 also includes an excerpt from the Tamil translation of Chingiz Aitmatov's *Mother Earth* to promote the embodied domestic food labour of women (2). Women were employed in factories that made sweets from native products and were encouraged to create home gardens.

The LTTE used Indigenous knowledge of sustenance practised by women. "Cuisines of poverty," as Gvion argues, is gendered knowledge of food sustenance that is passed down through generations (2006, 300). The knowledge system is intrinsic to a community's social food practices and is closely connected to identity and place. Such knowledge, accordingly, varies for each culture and geographic location since it is dependent on the resources available from the land. As mentioned, the palmyra is an integral part of the northern Sri Lankan people's food culture. Various parts of the tree contribute to everyday meal preparation and have been a source of numerous publications, from symbolic representations to economic uses. For thousands of years, women have been associated with preparations involving palmyra roots, tubers, and fruits to feed their families. While men help to secure fruits, roots, and other parts of the tree, women make various dishes using different preparation procedures. In the book *Unavuthevaiyum Urpathi Ilakkukalum* (Food Requirement and Production Goals), the editors note:

> The newspapers report that in the recent military manoeuvres in the islands off Jaffna, thousands of people trapped in the region survived on *panaattu, odiyal, puzhukkodiyal,* and such palmyra recipes. This proves that the resource of our soil is the base that protects our life. And so, realizing this, we should increase the use of local products in our foods. The Karpaga paan available now in the stores uses 30% palm pulp. Through this, the use of 30% of wheat flour is being saved. Similarly, juices, jams, and sweets produced here are relished by the people. If we learn to consume such foods, local products will increase alongside employment opportunities. This way, our land resources will be fully utilized, and the money spent on imports will be reduced and circulated within our economy. (1992, 13)

This paragraph records the lived experience of a community and the innovative ways to create bread, sweets, snacks, and juices. However, the narrative does not mention women explicitly as the reservoirs of the domestic knowledge from which the food preparation originated. Although published narratives of women's food work were hard to obtain, in every casual conversation I have with friends and families, specific food alternatives

continue to surface. One also has to factor in the fact that women are at the forefront in the kitchen striving to provide meals for the family and women's bodies are the sites on which the biopolitics of health and nutrition plays out. I expand on this aspect of gendered ecology and cuisines in the next chapter.

The bakers and factory owners found alternative food products. The LTTE, in conjunction with supporting individual efforts, introduced their own alternative breads and food products. *Karpaga paan* is a native bread made by replacing 30% of the wheat flour with palm flour. The bread symbolized food preparation that reduced the dependency on wheat imported from "Sri Lanka" while promoting a local palm product. The bread was introduced during the week commemorating the lives of the LTTE martyrs. See figure 14 for a related advertisement from *Aathaaram*'s back cover.



Figure 14. An advertisement on the back cover of *Aathaaram*, with the words "a new palm-food introduced in the week of martyrs … agencies promoting local products please contact us."[12]

3. Food Narratives for Life from 1996

3.1 The Challenges

The "food narratives for life" of the movement and of the individuals reveal sites of everyday resistance on which the performance of Tamil nationalism took root. This phase of the long war lasted until 1995, when the Sri Lankan army captured the capital city of Jaffna. As mentioned, the Tigers moved to Vanni and coaxed people to move with them. About 280,000 people—mostly families of cadets, parents with young girls and those who believed they would be safe with the Tigers—moved to Vanni. As seen above, the LTTE interwove both the newly constructed Tamil nation and the fear of violence from the enemy, as performed in its narratives for life, to exert pressure on the people to move with them to Vanni. The movement identified Vanni as a fertile landscape in which their ideas of self-sustainable farming, fishing, and manufacturing industries could be developed for nation-building. Writing about the relationship between civilians and the guerilla army in *On Guerilla Warfare*, Mao Zedong notes that "the former may be likened to water and the latter to the fish who inhabit it. How may it be said these two cannot exist together? It is only undisciplined troops who make the people their enemies and who, like the fish out of its native element, cannot live" (1937, 93). Mao's discourse on warfare proposes that rebels should learn to coexist with the public and they cannot live without the public. The LTTE, who were heavily influenced by Mao's doctrine, believed in taking civilians with them who could serve them as human shields and be part of the emergent nation headquartered in Vanni. Vanni, however, was a thick forest with mosquitos, insects, and diseases common to any tropical wild region. It did not possess the infrastructure that the Jaffna Peninsula did,

and the movement had to concentrate on providing basic needs to civilians while also facing continuous wars with the army.

In Vanni, the LTTE began its operations much like a conventional army burdened with providing infrastructure to the public. Efforts regarding food-related activities took a back seat for a few reasons. Focus shifted to fighting, constant displacements, and lack of infrastructure. Thus, the development plans could not be acted upon. The movement and the public were dependent upon the dry food supply from the government, Red Cross, and other NGOs. A witness report on the people displaced to Vanni in *Sarinigar* magazine states that with the ongoing war, there was a shortage in agricultural yields and land was still without proper irrigation systems (25 Jan to 7 Feb 1996, 8-9). Added to that were the scores of people who had been displaced there. *Sarinigar* reports on famine, lack of housing, healthcare challenges and lack of hygiene that the civilians faced in the Vanni region. With the increased population in Vanni, the LTTE left the maintenance of schools, hospitals, and many of the public services to the Sri Lankan government, and employees were paid by the government. Food distribution was also provided by the government and NGOs. The Sri Lanka *Monitor* published a special feature titled "The Food Aid Weapon" in 1999, claiming that the state's food aid was insufficient and was being used as a weapon. The state often refused to acknowledge the exact number of refugees and sent only half of the quantity required for aid. When the fighting intensified, the state blocked the food supply and increased the use of various methods to starve the public in Vanni (1999, 1-2). In her paper on the non-profit service of the LTTE, Flanigan notes that the Tamil Tigers, who are known for their political killings and murders of those who do not comply with them, attempted to

handle health care and social services. They took control of these services from the government and international aid agencies by effectively controlling and directing the services through their various departments and portrayed to the public that the aid came from the movement (2008, 499-519). Such provisioning helped the Tigers earn goodwill from a community suffering from continuous wars and displacements.

The LTTE newspapers and magazines of the period, beginning from 1995, had less coverage of food-related activities and instead wars, victories, celebrations, obituaries, and mourning dominated the publications. Tiger-run newspapers such as *Eelanatham*, *Kalathil*, and *Eelanadu* increasingly published details on the ongoing war. Agricultural and food-related announcements and columns by TEEDOR shrank to shorter pieces.[13] In 1991, with intense battles at various locations in the north, *Eelanadu* published on page one the news on the war and on page three an announcement on the home garden competition, columns on natural pesticides and seed availability, and reports on increased agricultural production (18 Oct. 1991). News covering both war and farming, and food activities, was common until 1995; however, recurring news, beginning from the 1990 embargo until 1995, and after 1995 until 2009, was about food distribution, rationing, and negotiations on quantity. In 1991, detailed reports of food shortages, free food packets, and food distribution arrangements appeared regularly (*Eelanatham* 30 Oct. 1991; *Eelanadu* 9 Nov. 1991).

In her essay on nutrition in the conflict zone of Trincomalle, Kent notes that households in the rebel-controlled areas had more access to rice, and better storage for the same, partly because their labour was paid in kind: through grains (2014, 70). The families,

however, did not have access to a balanced diet. Kent's fieldwork, which took place between 2001 and 2002, was not exactly in the Vanni region. Apparently, some kind of farming activities were possible in Vanni, and they were controlled by the rebels. The public and the Tigers managed their food needs with the minimally cultivated rice and the meagre food supply provided by the government and the NGOs.[14] Since the government always sent a reduced supply, the limited quantities were insufficient to feed everyone. To balance the shortage, the Tigers inflated the number of people for food provision. By providing food, the Sri Lankan state exercised its hold on its citizens because otherwise, the region under the movement's control would become a separate country. Thus, food served as a political tool for both the LTTE and the government.

As Flanigan notes, all service-related activities were controlled by the Tigers (2008, 499-519). With the food that was received, the Tigers took a portion to feed their cadets and the rest was equally distributed among the civilians. The distribution of food, therefore, often occupied the most important sections of the newspapers. The information gathered from newspaper reports and scholarly essays points to the fact that the Tigers' plans for a self-sufficient Tamil nation could not succeed. Their movement to Vanni, ongoing wars, the resulting displacements, lack of transport, disruption of water supply, and other conflict factors contributed to the constant dependency on relief food programs and lack of nutrition. This situation continued until the end of the ethnic war in 2009. Yet, rice gruel became the staple nourishment that the TRO was able to provide. At the same time, greens from home gardens and wild vegetables became the culinary additions that sustained the people a fact

that demonstrates feminist geography and stock knowledge of cuisines (Thamaraiselvi 4 July 2023). Both are further elaborated on in the next chapter.

3.2 A Food Counter-Narrative in *Pachaivayal Kanavu*

Thamaraiselvi's novel *Pachaivayal Kanavu* (The Dream of Green Fields) is based on life in Kilinochi, the capital city of the de facto LTTE Tamil state. Situated adjacent to the dense forest of Vanni, Kilinochi is known for its fertile lands and agricultural activities. Rice cultivation is one of the main activities. The novel spans the period of post-independent Sri Lanka to the temporary ceasefire in 2002. The author notes that the story is based on the lives of farmers in the region, and the book traces the life of Sivam, who moved to Kilinochi in the 1950s as part of the Sri Lankan state's agricultural and land development plans. Sivam's Kilinochi life begins with worship offered to the soil:

> After lighting the lamp, Velayutham mixed the rice and curry on a banana leaf. Everyone sat in a circle around the leaf and Sivam gave the mixed rice and curry to everyone. He took his share of the leaf with the rice. "This year Velayutham will get a good yield," Sellathurai said.… "This earth will give us life." The words wrung in his ears for a long time.

Sivam's life prospers in Kilinochi and his family expands with his children grown up, and the story moves to the late 1980s when the war began between the military and the IPKF. Trucks stop arriving to pick up the rice harvest and the rice is piling up. The season for short-term cultivation has begun. The leftover paddy after it is burned in the shelling attacks could not be sold. People still sowed the seeds, and the fields were again lush green with good yield. And yet the paddy could not be sent to the markets and people were left to starve. Sivam's daughter and son who live abroad write to Sivam, asking him not to do rice farming since it will incur loss because of the continuous bombing in the Elephant Pass and they will send

him money. He still sowed in a small area of his land, aware that he would have to flee, leaving the paddy field if the army proceeds from Elephant Pass.

> Sivam opened the doors of his paddy storage room, four displaced families began to live there … it was good that he sold the car and the tractors, now there is so much more space in the verandah. The families cooked there and the men slept outside at night while the women and children slept inside … it was another sowing season and no one ploughed the land … how many times they have left the fields and fled. […] (2004, 262-263)

Finally, between 2002 and 2004, there was a temporary ceasefire and Sivam and the rest of the villagers were allowed back into their village:

> With tearing eyes Sivam looked at his fields and house. Wild bushes and trees occupied his fields. The paddy storage and house were replaced with a few bricks and grass grew tall covering rest of the bricks. His heart ached … he sat on the earth spread with grass, stones, and sand. It was very quiet and his mind raced through millions of thoughts. He leaned forward and spread his hands on the soil. The house, buildings, resources—all were lost, but the earth came back to us.
>
> Everything came from this soil, life, prosperity, happiness … this soil will continue to give even now. Tears trickled down his cheeks and he slowly got up. "Thambi, clean the land with the help of labourers. Let us quickly build a house and come back here. Arrange for the fields to be cleared and ploughed. Let us sow the seeds this season." (303-304)

Through Sivam, the author narrates the trauma of the war and the continual displacements from 1986 to 2002. Her storytelling is interspersed with paddy fields and farm activities on one hand and the military/rebel manoeuvres on the other hand. She captures the adverse effects of the war on the farmlands and the farming community. Sivam, who is almost on the verge of giving up farming, is forced to relocate from one village to another, finally returning to his own village following a ceasefire. Although the fields have become barren with bushes and wild creepers, the soil gives him hope to start farming again. The narratives for life created by the Tigers were confronted by the lived experience of the farmers. The author states that the dream of green fields is only possible when peace prevails.

It captures the reality that existed in the Vanni region and serves as a precursor for the destruction yet to come. The novel bears witness to the way the public is caught in a nationalist war and the way it affects their identity as farmers. Thamaraiselvi unsettles the LTTE's constructs of Tamil national identity and their propaganda for war through farming, as suggested in the anecdote at the beginning of the chapter. The novel is an account of the lived experience of farming amid continuous battles between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan military. The author produces a counter-narrative to the LTTE's notions of self-sufficiency, sustainability, and food nationalism.

4. Chapter Four Conclusion

As argued in this chapter, the period between 1985 and 1995 was primarily the duration in which plans for food provisioning and economic development were devised. The public was mobilized through publications on food production, locally sustainable solutions, and agroecological resources, which formed the basis for the Tigers' food narratives for life. The chapter draws attention to the need for scholarly attention to the content of rebel publications. I find that the narratives in the insurgent archives and the everyday embodied acts of food procurement were drawn from local knowledge systems and gendered ecological memories to implement a decolonized food system. In addition, I note that the gathering of knowledge systems became modes of resistance against the traumas of large-scale war, displacements, embargoes, and food insecurity. I conceptualize the movement's publications as "food narratives for life" since the archival materials attempt to protect the lives, which countered the necropower of the state. The writing and the corporeal labour became sites of gastronationalism, which constructed Tamil identity drawn from the *thinai* concept in

classical Tamil poetry. By examining Thamaraiselvi's *Pachaivayal Kanavu* and news articles of the period, this chapter demonstrates that despite the movement's mobilization of knowledge and the implementation of biopolitical regulations, the Tamil community survived only on minimal food. The group was largely dependent on food aid. The agricultural and localized food security projects for nation-building were implemented with only limited success in Vanni because of the continuous war. In my understanding, it is the life narratives of the public and of the movement that offer a glimpse of the way food became weaponized between an oppressed community and a repressive state. Notions of gastronationalism and food provisioning plans construed by the LTTE could not be fully effective in an increasingly warring environment in Vanni until the war's end in 2009.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

[1] The list includes Thurairajah, a civil engineer who held several academic positions and became the vice chancellor of the University of Jaffna. He founded the *Ootru* (spring) organization along with Dr. N. Natesan and several scholars and professionals. *Ootru* is one of the earliest to engage in such social and developmental issues. The list also includes Professor Tharmaratnam, Dr. Krishnanthasivam, and several such scholars with committed interest in the community and the north region in Sri Lanka. As well, Dr. Dhuruvasangary is another eminent scholar with a PhD in agriculture who published a monograph of research articles on palmyrah.

[2] *Unavu thevaikalum Urpaththi Ilakkukalum.* Tamil Eela Aayvu Niruvanam. 1992, 26.

[3] See Ichijo and Ranto (2016) and Colás et al. (2018) for a comprehensive list on various scholarly approaches to food and nationalism. See also endnote 14 in Chapter One.

[4] *Unavu thevaikalum Urpaththi Ilakkukalum.* Tamil Eela Aayvu Niruvanam. 1992, 27.

[5] As seen earlier, Sri Lanka's food crisis was a direct result of colonization and a plantation economy, which altered the food habits of both Tamil and Sinhala communities. Writing about the forgotten foods of South Asia, scholarly works on the impact of colonialism and local food practices began to appear in the 1980s and 1990s. In Sri Lanka, however, Sirimavo's push for cultural foods was the beginning of the shift toward forgotten foods.

[6] Studies on nutrition, diet, and health are abundant now, and most of the studies are situated in the Sinhala regions and focus on ethnic food habits. See, for instance, Mihiranie et al. (2020) and Bandara et al. (2021).

[7] In the conflict region controlled and influenced by the Tigers, several officials, intellectuals, social workers, and doctors were brought together to meet the dietary needs of the civilians alongside the reliance on international food aid programs. Divided views exist on how successful the plans worked after the exodus in 1995 (personal communications with Tamilkavi 20 May 2021 and Selvin 10 July 2023).

[8] The speech was given in 1854 to Isaac Stevens, the governor of Washington Territories, and its written version was published twenty-five years later in 1879, in the *Seattle Sunday Star* by Dr. Henry Smith.

[9] Green revolution is a period of technological innovations to produce high-yielding paddy and wheat varieties. The initiative was introduced to developing countries in the 1950s to produce more grains with the help of chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Initially, it was a huge success in Mexico, India, and the rest of South Asia.

[10] Advertisement on back cover, *Aathaaram*, Issue #8, 8 Aug. 1992. https://noolaham.net/project/184/18338/18338.pdf. Accessed 30 Jan. 2022.

[11] For a more detailed account on famines in Sri Lanka, see Chapters One and Two.

[12] Advertisement on back cover, *Aathaaram*, Nov.-Dec. 1990.

[13] For instance, see issues of *Kalathil* and *Eelanatham* available at noolaham.net.

[14] Several newspapers published between 1995 and 2006 report about dire poverty in Vanni. Although civilian deaths due to starvation were not too common, *Uthaya*n reported twenty-two deaths due to anemia over a period of three months in 1997 (25 Apr. 1997, 8). The question of balanced nutritional diet was impossible.

Chapter Five:

Eelam War 2009: *Mullivaikal Kanji* and Recipe-Life Narratives

Paal kanji was always given in the temples on Chitra Pournami. When we were kids, we used to find the largest coconut shell to receive the kanji. We can drink up any number of shells filled with kanji.—Eelapiriyan (*Yarl* 2006)

This chapter analyzes food narratives that surfaced during the final phase of the war in 2009. In this phase over 70,000 were killed, more than 250,000 were displaced, and thousands of people were trapped within a narrow strip of land. Food narratives of this period are recorded in the poetry and life narratives of the women and men who survived. In this Eelam War IV, the Liberation Tigers Tamil Eelam (LTTE) held civilians captive while the state continued to advance with heavy shelling—even in safe zones, pockets within the conflict area that the Sri Lankan government had announced as no-firing zones. This final war of 2009, often known as the "war without witness," continued for months as the state army, in an effort to defeat the Tigers, advanced with the use of modern weapons, including cluster bombs, without differentiating between the rebels and the public. Only the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Red Cross were given limited access during this time to deliver food supplies. People were continually displaced without food, water, medications, and other essentials for survival. This situation contributed to increased food insecurity in a conflict that was already burdened by government sanctions and chronic violence between the LTTE and the government troops. The narratives are intertwined with memories of traumatic war experiences, tastes of traditional foods, starvation, and food shortages.

The final pitched battle was concentrated in a small landscape during the last months of the war. A basic knowledge of the area is necessary to comprehend the everyday

displacements and the attendant atrocities. Accordingly, this chapter includes maps of the locations and attack points of the SLA, which drove the people toward the seashore. In this context, I look at life writing such as Tamilkavi's *Oozhikaalam* (Time of Deluge) (2013), Nillanthan's poetry collection *Yugamudivum Pinnarum* (End of an Age and After) (2023), and a few life narratives from social media and blogs.

1. Background of Mullivaikal 2009 to Eelam War IV

A peace period was brokered by Norway beginning in 2002, in which both the LTTE and the state ceased battling for four years. Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected president of Sri Lanka in 2005, on a campaign to end terrorism. By early 2006, however, attacks between the military and the LTTE resumed; and with the assassination of Member of Parliament Lakshman Kadirgamar, the LTTE was banned by the UK, the US, and international communities. This created a situation of distrust on both sides, and the rebels and the state were soon getting ready for a full-blown war. With increasing violence, further peace talks were postponed to October 2006. The Tigers withdrew from the talks, citing the proscription of the movement and the ensuing perils in travelling to the meeting, which was to be held in Europe. Both the Tiger leadership and the state believed in war as their final solution. The LTTE hatched a plan to drag the state military into the final combat by closing the gates of the Mavil Aru dam, which suspended the water supply to the paddy fields of the Sinhala farmers in the east. More than 15,000 farmers were affected. The Tigers reported that their action was in retaliation to the government-sponsored pogrom in Mutur. In her memoir, Thamizhini notes that the movement calculated that, with their action, they could engage the

army for a battle and then win over the lands that were now in the army's control (2021, 101-122).

The state army defeated the rebels and set out on a march to capture the rest of the rebel territories. The blockage of the Mavil Aru waterway became the catalyst for the Eelam War IV. This battle was fought over the protection of paddy-based activities, which were necessary for sustenance and for ritual purposes ingrained in the consciousness of the Sinhala Buddhist state. Beginning from here, the Sri Lankan Army continued to squeeze into the rebel territory with unabating shelling and heavy fighting from the south, the west, and the east. With every victory, the SLA captured more and more land, which forced civilians to flee and the Tigers to retreat deep into the forest of Vanni. The rebel movement, however, pulled back, coercing civilians to move with them, ostensibly to be used as human shields. Harrison notes that during the last months of the war, there were no international journalists or aid workers to provide information on the conflict that killed more than 70,000 civilians (2012, 6-9). Land-grabbing and paddy cultivation thus shaped, and continue to shape, the protracted ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka.

2. Cartography of Food Insecurity in the Final War

Toward the final days of the war, various divisions and special task forces of the Sri Lankan Army surrounded the region of Vanni illustrated in figure 15. The map illustrates the army's standpoints in 2008. With the eastern stronghold of the Tigers already won by the army following the battle of Mavil Aru, the offensives in the north continued. More than 250,000 people were displaced from the eastern and northern battle zones and began to move

further north as there was no other safe passage for civilians. See figure 16 for the SLA army positions. The rebels and the state could not come to an agreement on ways to safeguard the public. Witnesses recount that as the war heightened when civilians attempted to cross over to the military-controlled area, the Tigers shot them (Harrison 2012, 25). At the same time, the SLA took them in, but later shot most: they were "made to disappear," with families today still demanding an answer about their lost loved ones (Harrison 2012; Sivamohan 2016a and 2016b, 296-399).

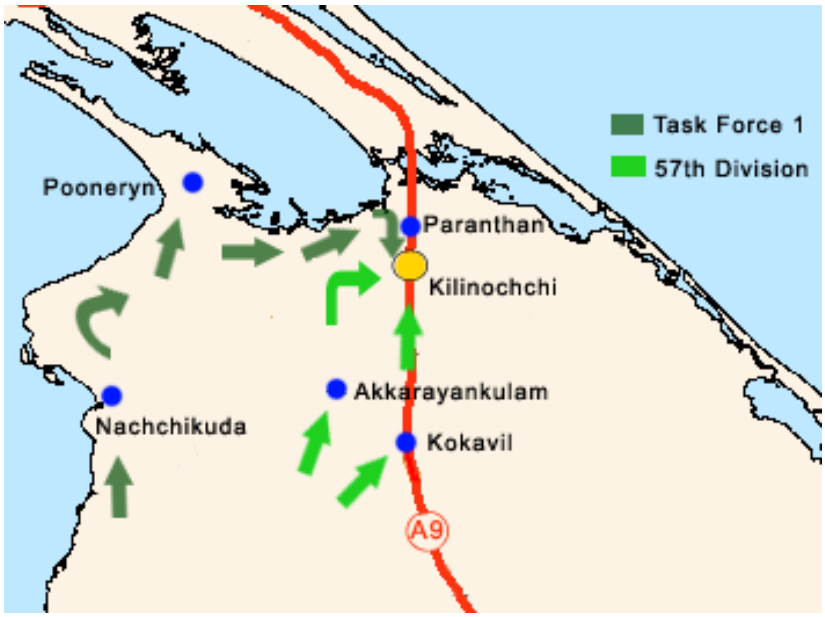


Figure 15. Sri Lanka military positions in 2008 targeting the Kilinochi, the headquarters of the LTTE de facto state.[1]

By January 2009, the LTTE headquarters fell, and the army proceeded relentlessly with aerial attacks and heavy ground fire. The state forces allegedly used white phosphorous bombs known as cluster bombs (BBC.com 2011). The Tigers prevented civilians from crossing over to the military-controlled lands and deployed their soldiers in the densely populated areas. At the same time, the state manipulated the movement's tactics of using

civilians as human shields to defend its attacks on civilians by claiming that the public (who were boxed in inside the small land) were supporters of the LTTE and that they would be treated as militants (Human Rights Watch 2009). The Tamils in the north, having lived through decades of war, were already leading displaced lives and had managed to cope with the everyday struggles of the war. In all these years, there were times of displacement and "quiet" times, when people found opportunities for their livelihoods until the ground shook again with tanks and shells. This final war, however, forced civilians to move every day, shifting hospitals and aid offices continuously, with supplies running out in every location, until they crossed the Nanthikadal lagoon and reached the Mullivaikal shore.



Figure 16. Sri Lankan Army unit positions on January 9, 2009.[2]

The army proceeded with their attacks even in the civilian safe zones, where the public was driven, closing in on the narrow rectangular space. The LTTE-occupied area continued to decrease while the population increased, with the displaced public pouring in on foot from different locations recaptured by state LTTE control. Each time new safe zones were announced and each time people flocked there, the area was bombed.

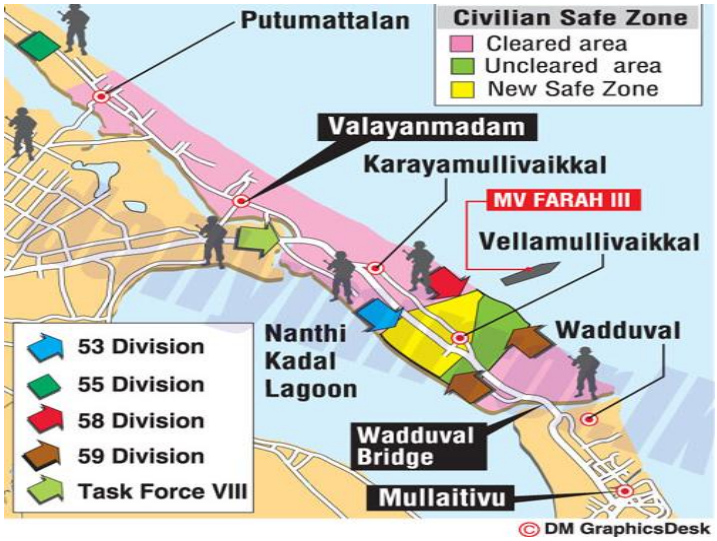


Figure 17. A map showing the Sri Lanka Army positions in April 2009.[3]

The map in figure 17 shows that the region stretched barely a few kilometres yet held more than 250,000 displaced people in 2009. In September 2008, the Sri Lankan state refused to protect international aid agencies, including the UN, and most were expelled. The state managed the responsibility of supplying medicine, food, and other essentials, allowing only minimal intervention by aid agencies. The state could not provide sufficient humanitarian aid to displaced people, and neither the LTTE nor the government created safe passage for the public. Those who managed to escape were caught and sent to internment

camps and silenced so that they would not reveal information about the situation (Human Rights Watch 2009).

For the most part, the humanitarian aid comprised of flour, sugar, milk powder, vegetable oil, and lentils with skin. In my personal communications with Nillanthan (23 July 2023) and Guna Kaviyazhagan (19 May 2023), both maintained that there were many deaths among the elderly and children who consumed the lentils with skin. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations describes achieving food security as follows: all people have access to nutritious, affordable, safe, and culturally appropriate meals (FAO 1996). Scholars note that traditional foods and modes of consumption are rooted in ecology, culture, and heritage, and are bound by ethnic and cultural identities (McElroy and Townsend 2015, 180). Tamils caught in the conflict zone did not possess the culinary knowledge to cook the lentils with skin; and even if they did, when people flee for their lives, it is almost impossible to take time to soak the lentils for hours as required to then cook them. Studies about food insecurity in war zones have focused mostly on hunger, nutrition, health, humanitarian relief, and the impact of war (Collinson and Macbeth 2014). The deaths highlight two pertinent issues in the interventions made toward wartime food shortage: one is the impact of culturally inappropriate foods, and the second is the practicality of cooking foods that involve longer processing times in a war zone.

Even though Tamils in the north and the east had been displaced for decades, this final war put the public through unimaginable crises, pain, loss, and trauma, generating unspeakable memories. The territory left individuals utterly dehumanized. With tens of

thousands of civilians displaced without homes, shelters, and toilets; the seashore was used for human defecation to the extent the shore was bordered with human feces. Writings that emerged from the Eelam War IV experience repeatedly mention the seashore and the human feces (Tamilkavi 2012; Kaviyazhagan 2016; Nillanthan 2022). They also mention the way silk sarees were used to make sandbags since the state had ordered all fertilizer bags and empty food sacks to be returned, so they couldn't be used for protection in bunkers (Tamilkavi 2012; Nillanthan 2022). For such reasons and owing to the extremity of the final war, all accounts of this experience recall specific geographic locations, villages, forest paths, and gravel roads. The very description of it resonates with descriptions of famine.

3. Cartographies of the Gendered Food Narrative in *Oozhikaalam*

Oozhikaalam (Time of Deluge) is the life writing of Tamilkavi, whose real name is Thamayanthi Suntharalingam. She worked in the political division of the LTTE and is a mother of two sons who lost their lives fighting in the same organization. The book, in the form of creative non-fiction, narrates her survival of the war's end, with details of food provisioning interwoven among the sites that marked the availability of certain foods and the absence of others. Her account reveals her gendered knowledge of the landscape in its connection to food. In addition, it details the gendered food work during wartime as she struggles alongside her daughters and grandchildren to feed a large family. The book was written in 2012 after her imprisonment and subsequent release. The narrative voice belongs to Parvathy an older woman involved in the political work of the movement, which closely resembles that of Tamilkavi herself. To provide a sense of the geographical region, following

the narrative passages I have included images that show the paths taken by the family and the changing landscapes of local vegetation until they reach Mullivaikal.

The opening chapters reveal the advancing army in different regions in Vanni. Its operations do not distinguish between civilians and rebel fighters. As the war proceeds, Parvathy, the elder woman of the household, is in her backyard, pondering how to continue to live in the seventeenth house she is currently occupying. Yet the bulk of the land is still under the control of the SLA, with scores of civilians driven out of their heritage properties and still unable to claim it. Parvathy's fence comprises tall areca nut trees, coconut, and a rose plant brought from the previous house. On the side are plantains, and in the pit below grow vibrant red chili peppers. The front and backyards are home to cattle and two hen houses for eggs and chickens, followed by an L-shaped bunker protected by cement walls. The backyard has moringa, guava, lime, and jackfruit trees. By the fence, there is cassava too, and the front of the house is surrounded by jasmine, marigold, and *nithyakalyani* (Tamilkavi 2012, 36).

The houses are usually bordered by *Uyirveli,* the Tamil equivalent of a living fence or live fence. The phrase, however, does not fully correspond to the Tamil word *uyirveli,* since this kind of fencing uses medicinal plants and trees, wild greens and vines, and herbs that provide sustenance, nutrition, and natural medicines. Drawing on Odebode's definition of the home garden—which includes livestock, multiple cropping systems complete with fruits, vegetables, yams, greens, herbs and medicinal plants—the life-fence and the backyard are integral parts of northern Sri Lankan Tamil home gardens (2006, 49; cited in Josephkumar et

al. 2019, 2). Similar to most women in rural areas, rural women in Vanni engage in subsistence farming to sustain their families; for this reason, I like to use the term *life-fence* instead. The English term *live fence* is usually associated with ornament plants and shrubs that provide biodiversity and not necessarily food. The life-fence is somewhat similar to the vegetable patches described by the Afghan women in Dossa's work. Dossa argues that the patches are landscapes of gendered food skills and repositories of resources that lay hidden in the "inner recesses of life" as a "lived landscape" (2014, 107).

The L-shaped bunker is a standard fixture in the domestic spaces under women's control and is used for sustenance in a war zone. Parvathy's words echo the way the home, as the domestic gendered space (Domosh and Seager 2001) has been violated. It reflects the effects of contemporary wars on the gendered bodies upon which the violence of the conflict inscribes itself (Mayer 2004; Giles and Hyndman 2004). Parvathy does not describe the loss of an intimate space. Rather she is gripped by the fear of the loss of "foodscape" (Dossa 2014). Memories of the lived experience of continual displacements haunt her with food anxiety as she is the Jaffna mother responsible for her family's well-being and nutrition. As the war proceeds, the family is forced to leave this house in Kilinochi too, which is their last. Henceforth, they stay only in makeshift shelters.

Parvathy's family leaves Kilinochi, carrying with them seeds of chillies and other vegetables, and finds a temporary shelter in Visuvamadu. In figure 18, I have included a section of the Google map that shows the route on foot to give a glimpse of the forest path trodden by the civilians that ultimately landed them on the sandy seashore:

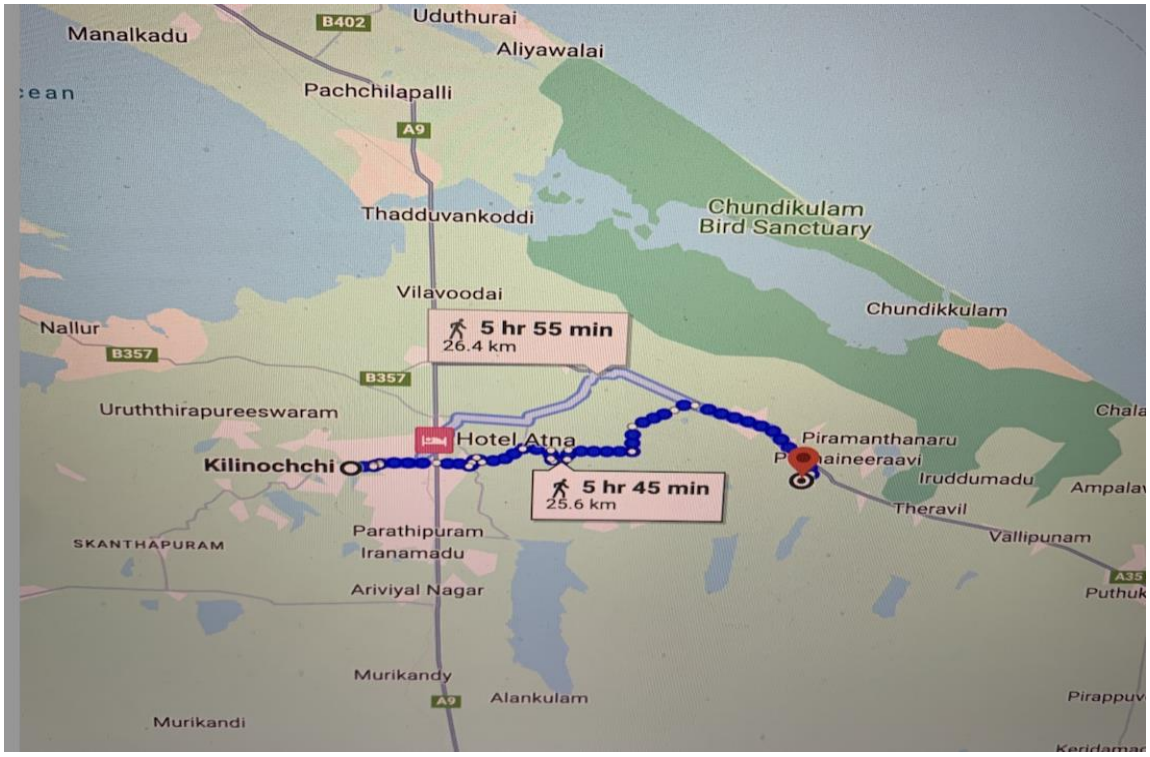


Figure 18. Part of the foot path taken by civilians as they are forced to migrate to the seaside.[4]

In Kilinochi and the larger Vanni region, a vast majority of civilians were employed by the LTTE for various works, although they were not combatants. The Tigers also provided a livelihood for fishermen, farmers, female home gardeners, cooks, firewood providers, and those engaged in cottage industries. Although the rebels generated income, the public was heavily taxed for their products, the goods they bought, and the income they made through services. With the fall of Kilinochi, people lost their only income source and were dependent on food aid. In Visuvamadu, Parvathy looks at the empty lands around her:

> The adjacent land is meant for tank irrigation and yet the owners had cultivated plantains and such other kitchen garden plants. Before we go back to Kilinochi after the war is over let us grow chili plants. Ask them if they will give us land. The next day the landowners tell Kala, her daughter, that the soil is worn out and not suitable. Parvathy asks Kala to

> sow the seeds they have at the moment and adds "There in Mayilvahanapuram and Puthukkaadu lots of lands are available and we can get half an acre from someone and start chilli farming." (Tamilkavi 2012, 36)

Chillies, introduced in Jaffna during colonial rule, have come to define Jaffna cuisine alongside coconut milk. Parvathy's and Kala's effort to grow chillies even while displaced demonstrates the lifestyle of rural women in the Vanni region. Most women in the region belonged to farming families. They farmed either for daily wages or farmed in their own lands. They were knowledgeable in livestock rearing, preparing seeds, and home gardening. Some also sold cooked food (Wanasundera 2006). Even with the limited land resources during the conflict, they continued to engage in agricultural activities.

As Parvathy's family settle in Visuvamadu, they find adjacent land, sow the seeds, and manage a poultry shed for the family. Even before they reap the benefit of the plants, they are on the run again (75-76). As they move, they are only able to cook onion stalks and tender eggplants. Since the Vanni and Kilinochi regions are noted for paddy cultivation, rice is mostly available to families who own lands there and there are a few rice mills. Families who are forced by the LTTE to move in from border regions, fearing army attacks, have no rice. Women in these families spend many hours trying to find rice, sifting through the rice hull and bran layers from the rice mill to find the "fine broken." As a result, heaps of a mixture of rice hull, bran layers, and broken fine surrounded by women is a common sight at the rice mills (232). The gendered labour of finding food in a zone of food insecurity is mostly endured by women. A parallel example is offered by Epp in her essay on the Mennonite women's narrative of survival in Russia following the Second World War. Epp

notes that there, women swept the floor of granaries to collect every grain and food provisioning consumed most of their everyday existence (2016, 372).

Every location the women move to beyond Kilinochi is scoured for food. Parvathy finds an open place to build a tent, yet she cannot get a tarpaulin. Early on, the movement provides them with fertilizer bags that serve as cover instead. Later they are ordered by the state to be returned, as previously mentioned. Parvathy then trades in about twenty-five bags in exchange for relief aid cards, which she uses to buy sugar and fish (Tamilkavi 2012, 244). The movement makes temporary sheds, known as *kanjikottil* (rice gruel sheds), to supply rice. Tamilkavi writes:

> Hunger chased like a beast. To escape from hunger people chopped sugar palm trees and young palmyras to get the tender leaves and began to eat them. They looked for more young palmyras. Children who could not remain hungry got used to consuming raw tender leaves. Even if one could run and hide from death, one could not escape hunger. More than death, hunger is cruel. Death kills the same day; hunger waits to kill. (267)

We see that Tamilkavi compares hunger with a beast as she writes about the way wild leaves are turned into food.

The family moves from Visuvamadu to Vallipunam and walks through the woods to Thevipuram, Ananthapuram, and finally reaches Iranaipalai. They then edge closer to the sea and move through Ampalavanpokkanai, finally reaching Valayanmadam, which borders the sea. Within this narrowing landscape the flora and fauna change drastically, and the locations are usually scarcely inhabited. The names of the villages are familiar to the fleeing group and yet the landscape in those locations is alien. Often Parvathy is left wondering, or desperately attempting to discover, what the local region can offer. The map in figure 19 shows the

conflict region in which civilians were displaced as they went on foot toward the Nanthikadal lagoon.

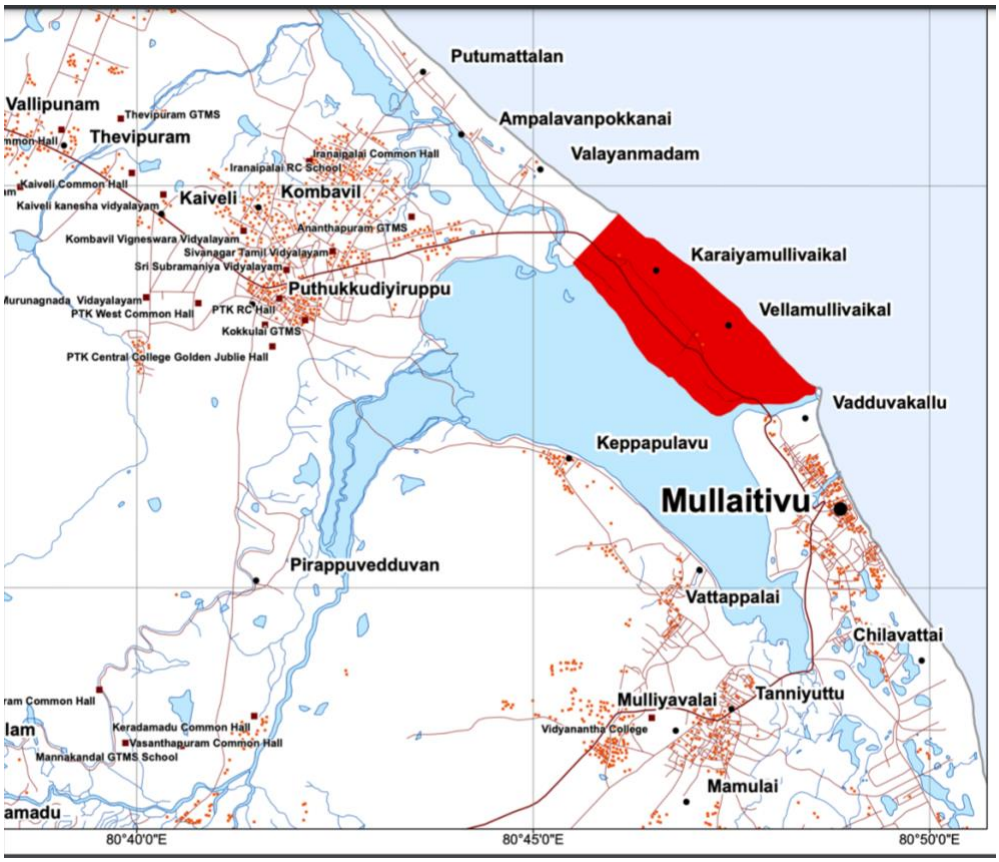


Figure 19. A map of the route: Vallipunam, Thevipuram, Iranaipalai, Ampalavanpokkanai, Valayanmadam, and Mullivaikal (in red).[5]

In Valayanmadam, the family finds a place to dig a trench and a pit for a toilet. The area is surrounded by a few mango trees and moringa trees with lots of "drumsticks" hanging down. Kala, Parvathy's daughter, remembers their path as she recollects where she ate moringa leaves earlier:

> chey … we saw moringa in Moongil aru for the last time. Then in Iranaippalai. After that we have seen only palm trees, sugar date trees and kaarai shrub until now in Pokkanai. Today we have to eat moringa leaves for sure. (274)

Kala's memory of the landscape is at once of nostalgia and of loss. Tolia-Kelly calls memories of landscapes as embodied experiences of terrains since such remembrances can create a wide range of emotions such as terror, happiness, and certainty (2012, 330). During a personal communication, Tamilkavi revealed that the local knowledge of the environment was transferred to her by her grandmother (18 Jan. 2023). Her grandmother lived through a famine in British colonial Ceylon in the 1920s known as *anjarisi panjam* (five rice famine), in which not a single type of rice was available. The three-century-plus colonial rule by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British converted Sri Lanka's rice farms into a land of cash crops—chillies, coffee, tea, tobacco, rubber and coconut—which left the country dependent on rice imports, especially in imperial Ceylon (Weerasekara et al. 2018). The famine of the 1920s followed the First World War. Tamilkavi's grandmother referred to this famine and narrated her experience of surviving the shortage by drinking water from the boiled rice infused with karai leaves and then drying the cooked rice to save for the next day. The leaf is known to protect the lining of a food-deprived stomach, and this local knowledge is transferred to women through multiple generations. This is identical to the account shared by the elder farmer in his interview in the previous chapter. The prevalence of food knowledge rooted in the local ecology in which wild edible plants play a significant role is influenced by earlier experiences of surviving food shortages (Ong and Kim 2017, 11). Such life narratives were passed down to women who carried this knowledge of sustenance to survive the war.

Kidane et al. note that the transference of regional knowledge of plants is carried by both men and women; however, women hold the responsibility for collecting and cooking the plants (2015, 221) in the context of Ethiopia. Gvion's essay, centring on poor Palestinian

citizens, argues that women who practice "cuisines of poverty" possess agroecological knowledge that provides sustenance and subsistence (2006, 303). Such cuisines and ecological knowledge lived on in the oral transmissions and physical kitchen labour of the women (Gvion 2006). Within the bounds of this dissertation, Tamilkavi's autofiction brings together feminist geographies, embodied epistemologies, and memories of foodscapes to situate the trauma of food insecurity. Likewise, Parvathy's identity is closely associated with the places in which her body performs food procurement and her subjective experience as a provider of sustenance. She echoes the observations made by feminist geographers who argue that women's subjectivity is driven by spaces of the social, cultural, physical, and geographical (Massey 1994a; McDowell 1999; Smith 1994). Her narrative characterizes her identity as a dislocated self and body through the numerous displacements and reproduces a contention that marginalized and postcolonial women's life writing are steeped in experiences of removed selves (Smith and Watson 2010, 57; also cited in Moore-Gilbert 2009, 53).

On its contemporary tourism website, the Sri Lankan state advertises the country as "a land of staggering contrast and spectacular beauty due to its compactness" (Sri Lanka Tourism n.d.). The conflict zones of the north and the east is no exception. Parvathy's narration highlights the various landscapes and the flora of the region. It reveals the close relationship that rural women have with the land since farming and home gardening are their main activities. Her lived experience of ecology provides her with knowledge about soil and seed preservation, which she passes down orally to her daughter, Kala. Scholars argue that the agroecological experiences of rural women contribute to their expert skills in seed

varieties, collection, conservation, cultivation, and pest control techniques (Suma and Großmann 2017; Singh et al. 2012). Parvathy's life narrative speaks from the folds of her memory and her skin covered in soil and seeds. It is an embodied narrative of women's lives and land in the war zone.

Parvathy and her daughter find a good moringa tree without caterpillars and pluck the leaves. Without coconut, cumin, onions, and mustard, the leaves just had to be dipped in salt water and stir-fried in oil, and they still taste bland (Tamilkavi 2012, 275). Finally, as the land shrinks under the advancing SLA, Parvathy's family is driven to Mullivaikal. When Parvathy's family is trapped in Mullivaikal, a small area of 3.5 square kilometres, Parvathy contrasts the locations they crossed en route with Mullivaikal through reference to food:

> Unlike Pokkanai, there are no young palm trees or sugar date trees in Mullivaikal. After Pokkanai was captured, Mullivaikal was besieged by missiles. No. 81 shells and 60 MN shells were fired from the sea, Mullaitivu and Ananthapuram. (283)

Parvathy adds, "After Pokkanai, there are no cattle or goat in sight. Not even dogs. Everything became food" (303). Parvathy's description points to where the land becomes reduced, surrounded by the sea on one side and the LTTE and the military on the other. Parvathy's autofiction recites the trauma of the continuous displacements until they become utterly dehumanized. The land that sustained them throughout their displacements is now covered with missiles and shells. In the thirty years of war, Vanni territory became a field of landmines, categorized as cleared and uncleared, divided between checkpoints of both warring parties, and barren with high-security zones. As Sivamohan notes, not just people, but "the land too is displaced" (2016a, 317). Even as the Tiger stronghold on the land was

receding, it was the everyday acts of food procurement and provisioning through which the women resisted the army that kept their families alive.

4. Food Cartography and *Mullivaikal Kanji* in Nillanthan's Poetry

தென்னைகளாயிரம் பனைகளாயிரம்
தோப்பாய்க் காய்த்த
ஒரு கடற்கரையிலே
கஞ்சியிருந்தது
பாலிருக்கவில்லை
(Nillanthan 2023, 34)

On a shore thick with a thousand coconut
and palm trees, there was kanji—
there was no milk in it.
(Unpublished translation by
Shash Trevett and Geetha Sukumaran)

These lines from Nillanthan's poem "Kanji Song 1," published in his 2023 book *Yugamudivum Pinnarum* (End of an Age and After), describe *kanji,* the rice porridge dish that sustained tens of thousands of people in the final war. In the following excerpt from "Kanji Song 2," Nillanthan again speaks about *Mullivaikal kanji* and through repetition laments its lack of milk.

இதையருந்துங்கள்
பாலற்றது
பசியாற்றாது
உலை கொதிக்காக் காலமொன்றின்
பசியிது தாகமுமிது.

பாலற்ற கடற்கரையில்
பசித்திருந்தாய் நாடே
இதையருந்து.
(35)

Drink this.
It has no milk and will not
quell your hunger.
In a time when cooking fires
are bereft of cooking pots
this is hunger, this is thirst.

Oh my land, you hungered
by the milkless shore.
Drink this.

(Unpublished translation by
Shash Trevett and Geetha Sukumaran)

To fathom the significance of rice porridge without milk and to comprehend what the absence symbolizes, one needs to know the place of *kanji* in Tamil tradition. After briefly describing *kanji*, I will look at *paal kanji* in the Sri Lankan tradition. *Kanji* is a traditional Tamil dish made with rice cooked in a lot of water either sweetened with cane sugar and milk or made savoury with salt and watered-down yogurt. We know that this is a dish that has existed since the early Cankam period, as many versions of the porridge are mentioned as far back as the classical poems. In *Purananuru*, for example, "Poem 64" speaks about a poet who says one can be rid of the poor diet of rice cooked in excess water by singing the praise of the Pandya king, Muthukudumi Paruvazhuthi, in his court (2008, *Puram* 64). The *akananuru* poems describe several types of *kanji*. One of them is horse gram and lentil cooked in milk and is closest to the current *pal kanji* in Jaffna (Akam 37, 12-15). During the medieval period providing *kanji*, buttermilk, or water to serve the public was considered a divine service. Religious and literary texts of this period provide countless examples of such services, which are proof of *kanji*'s significance in religious, cultural, regional, and social contexts of Tamils.

Kanji, in its simplest form of rice cooked in surplus amount of water and salt, is also a reminder of the Sri Lankan famine of 1877. As mentioned earlier, scholarly works engaged in the nineteenth-century famines of South Asia have studied the famines of Sri Lanka with a focus mostly on the Sinhala peasants of the Kandyan region (Rogers 1987). Rogers qualifies his exclusion of the Tamil regions of the north and the east by noting that the inclusion of the

region would affect the cohesive study of the Sinhala-Buddhist regions and would add "another layer to the analysis" (ix). The famine—known as *thaathu varuda pancham* (the famine of the *thaathu* year), based on the name of year in the Tamil calendar—was catastrophic, with between an estimated six million to ten million deaths (Davis 2001, 7). Sri Lanka was severely affected because of its grain dependence on India, although the number of deaths was not as high as in India. The sheer number of deaths in the Indian famines shrouded famine studies of South Asia, which largely neglected the Sri Lankan side, especially since deaths in the Jaffna Peninsula were mostly omitted (Davis 2001; Rogers 1987). An early colonial historian of Jaffna puts the death toll at 20,000 (Martyn 1923, 39). In the first census conducted on the island in 1877, Tamils were recorded as minorities and plantation Tamils and Jaffna Tamils were clumped together. The *Morning Star* published the number of Tamils in the Northern Province as 302,711, out of whom 260,880 lived in the Jaffna Peninsula and the rest lived in Vanni and other parts of the island (Sabaratnam 2010). The number of dead is high when compared to the local population. Interestingly, bouts of drought deaths were always reported as cholera, a point Davis notes: colonial figures disguised starvation deaths as diseases to underplay the enormity of the famine (2001, 38). This is also evident in Martyn's notes on the much earlier droughts of 1846 and 1867 (1923, 23-24, 32).

Arumuga Navalar, the eminent and controversial Tamil scholar of Jaffna who lived through the famine, provides the only colonized account of the disaster in the book *Arumuka Navalar Pirapantha Thirattu* (A Collection of Arumuga Navalar's Writing).[6] Navalar notes that the British rule ignored the starvation and resulting deaths due to the famine (1954, 152).

He opposed the British neglect and the popular newspapers— such as the *Morning Star* controlled by the British—that ignored the famine. He formed shelters to provide *kanji* to the food-deprived community to save lives. His act of resistance through the *kanji* has been recorded in school textbooks, and most Jaffna Tamils remember the provision of *kanji* as an intervention to sustain a dying community.

The *Yaalpaana Vaipava Kaumuthi* records the history of medieval and colonial Jaffna, particularly the skeletal bodies of Tamils, and deaths that occurred because of eating grass (Navalar 1954, 299). The author notes that *kanji* huts were formed in locations such as Vannarpannai to assuage hunger.[7] Although several literary works and folk songs exist in Indian Tamil literature, hardly anything can be found in Jaffna. The famous book *Yalpanathu Caritthiram* (Jaffna History) records the diseases that spread during the period, but the author is silent about the famine. The silence could be due to the colonial grip of the island and the shame of acknowledging poverty. The continuous presence of droughts, coupled with missionary education, was one of the reasons for the early migration of Jaffna Tamils as accountants, clerks, and managers to Malaysia, South Africa, and Singapore (Hodelin 2022, 66). Although the number of droughts was high, compared to India, in Jaffna their duration was shorter since the Jaffna Peninsula was able to secure grains from Southeast Asia through maritime trade.

The *kanji* exists in Tamil collective memory as food of dire poverty and is different from the traditional *pal kanji*. In Jaffna, *pal kanji* is traditionally made with fresh, thick coconut milk. Coconut milk is made in three versions, based on the richness of the milk.

Muthal paal (first milk) refers to the milk squeezed from the scraped coconut, without any water, to ensure that undiluted milk is obtained from the coconut. This milk is also used for making sweets. *Irandam paal* (second milk) refers to adding water to obtain the leftover milk, extracted from the coconut scrapings. *Muunraam paal* (third milk) is the addition of even more water to squeeze out every bit of the coconut. *Irandam paal* and *muunraam paal* are not rich and creamy and therefore have less fat and impart less flavour.

Paal kanji in Jaffna homes is usually made with raw red rice, lentils, and *muthal paal* from the coconut. The basic recipe is as follows, although there are minor variations depending on the regions in Jaffna.

Ingredients
1 cup raw red rice
½ cup green gram
6 cups water
2 cups coconut milk (muthal paal)
salt to taste

Method
Wash rice and green gram and cook in boiling water, adding more water as needed. When thoroughly cooked, add coconut milk. Bring to a light boil and add salt. You can add extra salt or sugar while drinking.

This plain *kanji* is given to children with added sugar and adults with added salt. Poor families often make this *kanji* without the rich coconut milk, sometimes substituting just plain milk or water for the coconut milk.

4.1 *Paal Kanji* in Amman Temples

Spring and summer are seasons that burst with Hindu temple festivals in Jaffna. *Chithirai paruvam,* which is the full moon day in April, is one such festival that holds double

significance. In the temples, the day is important to celebrate Amman, the female deity, while in households, adults who have lost their mothers fast for the day and visit the temple. Temple festivals usually have two layers of cooking: dishes cooked by the temple cooks to be offered to the deity and distributed to the devotees, and dishes cooked by community members in outdoor spaces for communal eating. On the full moon day of April, a version of *paal kanji* known as *chithirai kanji* is made and distributed. This *kanji* is slightly different from the homemade *paal kanji*. In this version, there are no lentils. When the coconut milk is added, usually so are pearl onions, green chillies, and ginger, which are first pounded using a large mortar and pestle. Lime juice is added to this mixture, and then it is poured into the *kanji* with the coconut milk.

Numerous blogs in Tamil by individuals of various villages share the memories of having this *kanji* in temples. Some bloggers typically begin with memories of their mothers, and then proceed to describe the way children and adults eagerly await the temple *kanji*. In his blog, Kana Pirapa remembers the festival in his village and the way villagers take responsibility for various aspects of the labour involved in making the *kanji* in the temple (2021). For months, together they save coconut shells and scrub them to make shiny cups. On the day of the festival, the young and old carry these shells to the temple.

On the Jaffna Heritage website, Sriskanthaluxmy gives the temple *kanji* recipe and states that mixing pounded pearl onions, ginger, and green chillies by hand gives the *kanji* an additional flavour (22 Nov. 2016). In her story, the physical labour of the elders—the hands of the elders in the community, the wrinkles on their skin when folds increase while peeling

the onions, the deft movements of the creased fingers as they deepen when the coconuts are scraped—reveal an "embodied tradition." In a similar way, Kana Pirapa writes on her blog about the way the *chithirai* festival brings together members of the community labouring sequence, as follows: as one individual breaks the coconut into two pieces, another collects coconut shells to arrange for use, and the third individual chops the coconut into small pieces. Another elder chops onions and green chillies while a couple engages in washing the red rice and adding water to the large pot on the hearth (2021). These personal narratives of food memories speak to the sensory food experience as linked to the cultural and social aspects of the living bodies. This is a notion that accords with that of "synesthetic memory" (Sutton 2005, 314). These short instances of life writing share the everyday and ritual memory of *kanji*, celebrated every year on the full moon day of April: embodied labour and embodied tradition. This combination demonstrates the interrelatedness of memory and everyday food practices and rituals, and such food memories represent a "form of historical consciousness" (Sutton 2001, 26).

In his public Facebook post, Karaikavi recounts the temple festival in his village and the way the labour around the food work is divided among women and men of various age groups (28 May 2020). Every family brings fruit, milk, yogurt, rice, or anything that is needed. While the women gather to do the prep work for the *kanji*, young boys take trips around the village to collect dry branches and twigs for firewood. Near the temple, huge pots of piping-hot *kanji* are ready for them, and elders serve the *kanji* to the people lined up (Karaikavi 28 May 2020). The *kanji* is thus a symbol of holiness, combined labour, and generosity, cooked and served in open spaces, on large hearths. The three stories of the

festival are exemplars that demonstrate that both memory and narrative are acts of "weaving" in which the boundaries of private and public, interior and exterior are blurred (Olney 1998, 419). In Olney's words, the weaving displays "the shape of a life as lived and narrated" (422).

The life narratives shared by Karaikavi, Kana Pirapa, and Sriskanthaluxmy delineate the way activities surrounding food become repetitive performance. Over the years, the same acts of prepping the rice, the large pot, and chopping the onions, ginger, and green chillies take place repeatedly on the full moon day in every village.[8] These performances of "habitual memory" are called upon through the physical labour in the food preparation, the ritual offering, the sharing, and the consuming, and all create memories of a culture (Connerton 1989). The narrated memories not only repeat the culture of ritual, but they also repeat the importance of coconut, onions, green chillies, and ginger in shaping the taste of a culture located in a particular geography. The sharing of these nostalgic food memories in the digital media affirms "gustatory nostalgia," which is linked to nationalism, ethnic identity, and social relations (Holtzman 2006, 367). In addition, it is an attempt to record public history through private memories of taste (Holtzman 2006).

Figures 20, 21, and 22 demonstrate the different stages of the community preparation of *kanji* for the *chithirai paruvam* festival in Mannar in northern Sri Lanka. The images display the way the open space is used by the public, the special utensils used, and the way the people come together for a ritual.



Figure 20. The pots and pans stored in a temple premises for rituals.[9]



Figure 21. Extended family members preparing for the *chithirai kanji* ritual in Mannar.[10]



Figure 22. Members of the contemporary, younger generation are served *kanji* in plastic containers instead of the traditional coconut shells.[11]

Although the shared experiences present personal narratives, they reveal the social fabric of a temple ritual, public history, and community bonds. As mentioned, the *kanji* uses everything that is locally grown. The addition of green chilli, a residue of colonialism, is still equally important as a flavour enhancer. *Paal kanji* is also a favourite *kanji* of the home kitchen: a warm meal served by a mother, filled with the rich and creamy aroma of coconut. It is a wholesome meal that evokes flavours, family bonds, commemoration of deceased family members, rituals, summer festivals, and a time of joy.

Uppu kanji, or *kanj thanni*, is a variation of *paal kanji*. *Uppu kanji* is mostly made without coconut milk. It is usually prepared to help with recovery from illness or as a meal for elders. This *kanji* is made with ginger, garlic, and pepper corns, all of which relieve digestive issues and restore gastrointestinal health and overall well-being. When green leaves are added to *uppu kanji* or *paal kanji*, they then become *ilai kanji* (leaf porridge). These

versions of *kanji* serve various purposes. Although this is the basic recipe, subtle variations exist in different villages. These *kanjis* play a central role in homes, families, temples, and rituals; and their communal preparation and consumption reinforce the culture of a people.

In Vanni, when the region was under Tiger control, even amid continuous battles between the army and the movement, temple rituals and religious fasts continued. Pillaiyar temples, Murugan temples, and Amman temples continue to figure in the life narratives as centres of cognitive and emotional refuge, where the rituals provide healing from the traumas of violence and displacements (Thamizhini 2021; Tamilkavi 2013). Amman temples, in particular, provide a special cultural context for the protection of families, homes, and the environment.[12] Lawrence records the way Amman "oracles" or trance mediums as ritual practices help to deal with the suffering of war (2000, 179). Somasundaram observes that by invoking the Tamil cultural practice of funeral rites and also by performing certain collective and individual religious rituals in temples, the individuals and community are able to find some form of closure (2014, 118).

It is in this context that we may look at the memories of *Mullivaikal kanji* in Nillanthan's poems. In this excerpt from "Kanji Song 1," Nillanthan writes:

மாட்டு வண்டியைக் கொத்தி
விறகாக்கிய ஓர் ஊரிலே
நெருப்பிருந்தது
அடுப்பிருக்கவில்லை

In a village which had chopped its
bullock carts
to make firewood, there was fire—
there was no hearth.

தென்னைகளாயிரம்
பனைகளாயிரம்
தோப்பாய்க் காய்த்த
ஒரு கடற்கரையிலே

On a shore thick with a thousand
coconut
and palm trees, there was *kanji*—

கஞ்சியிருந்தது
பாலிருக்கவில்லை.
(34)

there was no milk in it.

(Unpublished translation by
Shash Trevett and Geetha Sukumaran)

Nillanthan's words mark the trauma of survival of the last war through everyday acts surrounding food. The zone he writes about is defamiliarized to the community due to the ongoing violence. The cooking fire for *kanji*, both public and private, has been lost because of the unavailability of ingredients, space, utensils, and such. Nillanthan brings attention to this very crisis that unfolded upon the civilians through the mention of the absence of the hearth (see Dossa 2015, 92, for a discussion of the extinguished hearth). The hearth, which has been in the interior of homes to this point, becomes public during communal rituals and celebrations. In the following excerpt from "Kanji Song 1," the hearth becomes a violated site, and it simply ceases to exist in the nothingness of Mullivaikal:

மலத்துக்கும் பிணத்துக்கும்
விலகிnilடந்தவொரு நெய்தல்
நிலத்திலே
கடலிருந்தது படகிருந்தது
மீனிருக்கவில்லை

ஆலமிலை, பாலையிலை,
பனையோலை தவிர
பச்சையாக இருந்த
எல்லாவற்றையும்
சமைத்த ஓரூரிலே
கஞ்சியிருந்தது வாய்ப்பன் இருந்தது
பசியிருக்கவில்லை
(34)

On the seashore where one walked
avoiding feces and corpses
there was the sea and boats on the sea—
there was no fish.

In a village which cooked every green
leaf
except the banyan, the ironwood and the
palm
there was kanji, there was vaipan[13]—
there was no hunger.

(Unpublished translation by
Shash Trevett and Geetha Sukumaran)

Nillanthan speaks about the nothingness in a two-fold way: the total unavailability of food and the unavailability of the bodies to prepare and eat it, even when there was food. The

lines “there was kanji, there was vaipan / there was no hunger” point to the grief and food trauma over memories of the lived experience in a war zone.

In *Handmade,* a book of Jaffna recipes accompanied by the gendered narratives of war widows’ post-conflict, Ayini testifies “even when we had the necessary ingredients, many of us were not in the mood to make it. Because of the long preparation times and the uncertainty of what would happen next or where we’d be tomorrow, we often didn’t cook” (Eliezer and Roberts 2015, 16). Ayini’s narrative brings together hunger, food scarcity, displacements, insecurity of life, and the way the human body reacts to a perilous situation forced upon it. The angst caused by the incessant violence does not allow her to carry on with the primary function that identifies a home and ties the family together.

While some studies regard cooking as therapeutic,[14] and there are studies on trauma and eating disorders,[15] there is relatively less research on how war trauma negatively impacts the ability to cook. In *The Spectral Wound*, for instance, the rape survivors of the Bangladesh war with Pakistan in 1971 recount their traumatic experiences in relation to the food work they performed when the Pakistani military arrived in their homes. The women are unable to perform cooking tasks such as husking the rice and cutting the fish when the army arrives. These particular tasks must be taken over by their family members (Mookherjee 2015, 115). Although there are volumes of works linking women’s life narratives of slavery, genocide, war, and the power of food work, works that focus on the inability to cook have yet to surface.[16] This inability is a physical reaction to the unspeakable horrors and is a powerful reminder of the way the body becomes numb in the face of trauma. Building on Mbembé’s

contextualization of the wounded body as the first site of traumatic memory in the post-colonies (2011, quoted in Mengel and Borzaga 2012, xiv), it is the gendered bodies that carry the effects of violence in their refusal or inability to cook.

4.2 *Mullivaikal Kanjikottil*: The Public *Kanji* for Survival

In the poem "Recipes of the End of an Age," Nillanthan provides recipes for wartime foods in the final months of the armed struggle in 2009. These are existing recipes that were modified because of the absence of food supplies. Nillanthan's recipe for the *Mullivaikal kanji* marks the dire hunger and starvation of the period:

அரிசியை உப்புச் சேர்த்து வேக வைத்து அதில் பாலுக்குப் பதிலாக இரண்டு பக்கற் அங்கர் பால் மாவைக் கொட்டி ஒரு கொதி அவிய விடுவது அல்லது பாலேயில்லாத கஞ்சி (11)	Rice boiled with salt. Instead of milk, two packets of Anchor powder added and brought to a boil. Or *kanji* with no milk at all.

The *Mullivaikal kanji* is also a stark reminder of *kanji* being a famine food. This was the *kanji* provided by the workers of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO),[17] made from the limited food aid packages that the Red Cross and the UNHCR were able to distribute. The TRO formed spaces known as *kanjikottil* (rice gruel shelters) in public places and cooked *kanji* to provide food to the people trapped in the region, even from the very early displacement after Kilinochi in Visuvamadu. For many, the *kanjikottil* were the only source of meals and sustenance. Thousands lined up for the *kanji*, sometimes waiting for the whole day. Many died as shells fell on the lineups and scores of people lost their families waiting in their tents, while they stood in the line for kanji. In one of the life narratives, a

survivor states that the lineup was one of the unspeakable memories for him because people died waiting for *kanji*. The speaker adds that when the bombs paused, they would move the dead away from the lines and continue to stand in the queue (*Kanali* 2021).

Nillanthan's recipe-poem provides a verbal portraiture of the past through sensory memory. The poet presents the past experience of his "self" through the reality of recipes. Olney argues that poets transcend their personal experiences of the selves beyond space and time to make it universal and to find order in their world and a creative form to speak about their experiences (1972, vii). In other words, Nillanthan's poem speaks from the context of a postcolonial "located self," interwoven with "socio-spatial concerns" (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 66). The poem takes root in the wartime geographic reality of Mullivaikal and creates a group identity in an unsecured space that exists outside of the state. This is a chaotic landscape marked by the presence of the military, and the poem is an attempt to provide a glimpse of the located self through *kanji*.



Figure 23. People lined up for *kanji* in Mullivaikal in May 2009.[18]

In Mullivaikal, the traditional *paal kanji* was reduced to rice gruel, as it was devoid of spicy chillies, onions, and nourishing rich and thick coconut milk. The meaning of the open-space cooking shifted from a holistic ritual place to a site of estrangement. Home as a place of *kanji* ceased to exist and lost its significance. Mullivaikal turned into an open space for the continuously displaced and dehumanized, evoking Navalar's description of the famine of 1877. Even though the *kanji* and the utensils looked familiar, the nourishing porridge was turned into *uppu kanji*: usually reserved for the sick, the aged, and for famine rescue. In Nillanthan's life writing, the *kanji* symbolizes death rather than life. The poem also highlights its tastelessness.

Nillanthan's reference to the milk powder added into the *kanji* to substitute for coconut milk is a new recipe invented in the zone of politicized food. It speaks of the only food supplies commonly available, through aid. The supplies create memories of vulnerable sites of war that, in turn, create memories of unpleasant tastes. In *Tastes Like War*, a memoir written by Grace Cho, for instance, her mother, a Korean war bride who immigrated to the US following the Korean War, refuses to touch milk powder.[19] Nillanthan does not write about the taste of the *kanji* with the Anchor powder, supplied by food aid organizations. His trauma of the conflict speaks through a silenced "palate memory" (Cuadra 2013, 2) and the notion of "synesthetic memory" (Sutton 2005, 314). The attention Nillanthan pays to the absences and substitutes in the *kanji* comes to the forefront through his social and cultural memory of the liquid meal.

The taste of the *kanji* that Nillanthan recalls in silence echoes Sutton's "sense memory," which he conceptualizes as "memory and the senses as active, creative, even transformative cultural processes" (2001, 473). In the following excerpt from the poem "End of an Age 1," Nillanthan draws on this gustatory memory as if it is a distant myth:

பாலற்ற பயறற்ற கஞ்சியைப் பருகு தேங்காய்ச் சொட்டு முன்பு தேவதைக் கதைகளில் இருந்தது ரொட்டித் துண்டு முன்பு பாலஸ்தீனக் கவிதைகளி இருந்தது (18)	Drink this *kanji* without milk and lentils. Shredded coconut existed in fairytales. a chunk of roti previously lived in Palestinian poetry.

It is to this backdrop of accumulated memory of traditional taste that the people's identity is tied, and to which Nillanthan's remembrance of *Mullivaikal kanji* is bound. The eyes, nose, and tongue experience the angst of wartime hunger and food. By recording the alienating sight, smell, and taste of the *kanji* with a poor substitute for coconut milk, these sensory organs allow the mind to remember the suffering of the displacements. Trauma, which has long been theorized in the Western academy as an individual psychological affect, even when displayed in the body, actually distances the body (Caruth 1996; Felman and Laub 1992; Lacapra 1994). Nillanthan's life narrative of the trauma of Mullivaikal contextualizes his war experiences through the senses.

5. Cuisine of Morsels and Crumbs in Nillanthan's Poems

தேவிபுரத்தோடு பிஸ்கற் இல்லை இரணைப்பாலையோடு பழங்கள் இல்லை வலைஞர் மடத்தோடு புளி பச்சை மிளகாய் வெங்காயம் இல்லை (Nillanthan 2023, 19)	They ran out of biscuits at Thevipuram and fruits at Iranaipalai From Valayanmadam onwards there were no more green chillies or onions, no more tamarind. (Translated by Shash Trevett and Geetha Sukumaran, for *PEN Transmissions* 2021)

The lines above from Nillanthan's poem "End of an Age 2" chart a cartography of hunger, taste, and resilience. In this sense, similar to Tamilkavi's life writing, their experiences cannot be spoken about without recalling the sites of food scarcity. Nillanthan's embodied landscape of hunger and deprivation attempts to preserve the topographies of violence and resistance.

Nillanthan's poem "Mullivaikal—Bill of Goods (May 2009)" encapsulates the harrowing final days of Mullivaikal in Sri Lanka in 2009 and challenges the reader. It highlights the everyday struggles of remaining alive by being resourceful in finding alternative sources of nourishment in the local ecosystem. For instance, unripe tamarind, coconut-leaf sprouts, and *muchuttai* leaves are normally not consumed but have become wartime staples. In a zone where food has become scarce and the land and people are incessantly shelled, the price of food supplies balloons until none can afford it because human life becomes valueless. An excerpt of the poem follows.

முள்ளி வாய்க்கால் - விலைப் பட்டியல்

அங்கர் - 2000-6000
சவர்காரம் ஒன்று -10 ரூபாய்
சீனி - 2000
புளி- இல்லை
புளிக்குப்பதிலாக புளியங்காய் - அரை கிலோ - 250 ரூபாய்
புளிக்குப் பதிலாக புளியமிலை - ஒரு பிடி - 50 ரூபாய்
தேங்காய்களுக்குப் பதிலாக ஒரு முச்சக்கர வண்டி பண்டமாற்று
வெற்றிலை இல்லை
பதிலாக - தென்னம் குருத்து அல்லது நாயுண்ணி இலை ஒருபிடி- 50 ரூபாய்
பாக்கு இல்லை பதிலாக ஒரு சிறு குரும்பட்டி - 20 ரூபாய்
ஒரு பிஞ்சு மாங்காய் -100 ரூபாய்
ஒரு பச்சை மிளகாய் - 100 ரூபாய்
சிறிய கீரைப் பிடி ஒன்று - 200 ரூபாய்
ஒரு சிறு பிடி முசுட்டை இலை -100 ரூபாய்
கொவ்வை இல்லை ஒரு சிறு பிடி - 100 ரூபாய்
ஏழெட்டுப் பயிற்றங் காய்கள் - 500 ரூபாய்
தங்கம் ஒரு பவுண் - 1000-5000 ரூபாய்
(10)

Mullivaikal—Bill of Goods (May 2009)

Anchor milk powder 1 kg - Rs. 2000-6000
One bar of soap - Rs. 10
Sugar - Rs. 2000
Tamarind - not obtainable.
Unripe tamarind, as a substitute ½ kilo - Rs. 250
Tamarind leaf, as a further substitute, one handful – Rs. 50
Barter an auto rickshaw for a coconut.
Betel leaf - not obtainable.
Instead, substitute with tender coconut-leaf sprouts
or *naayunni* leaves, one handful - Rs. 50
Betel nut - not obtainable.
Instead, substitute with a small unripe coconut - Rs. 20
A baby mango - Rs. 100
A green chilli - Rs. 100
Tender greens, one small bunch - Rs. 200
Muchuttai leaf, one small bunch - Rs. 100
Ivy gourd leaf, one small bunch - Rs. 100

7-8 long beans - Rs. 500
One gold sovereign - Rs. 1000-5000.

(Translated by Geetha Sukumaran and Shash Trevett, for *Modern Poetry in Translation* 2021)

This poem bears witness to the doomed days of precarious human lives/bodies by revealing the process of procuring food that is scarce in a war zone. This relatively simple act has suddenly turned into a scene of resilience—keeping oneself and one's family alive against the oppressive state forces. Given that an auto rikshaw costs about five thousand dollars, while a coconut is less than two dollars, Nillanthan accentuates the dearth of food in this poem. The former provides a lifetime of sustenance; the latter is perishable and is only part of a meal. The rikshaw is a sign of globalization as it is imported from India, while the coconut is a local produce, available in abundance: the poem shows an unbalanced equation of values. The price of milk powder underlines the desire to live amid the trauma and speak the unspeakable through cuisine. The list also serves as a list of ingredients available to the public through various transactions among themselves.

Nillanthan's poem provides a vivid picture of a lived life during a particular time, poetry as testimony that reflects on the micro-level of the everyday. The list illuminates the survival of a people through just goods alone and their monetary value. The absence of words between the goods and the ruptures in the telling of the history compel the reader to comprehend the chaotic events in the war zone. The poem invites readers to look at the prices of the commodities to draw attention to the lived experience. It is a portrait of the distorted values of life and the commodification of not only food but also of lives and raises questions of economic value by juxtaposing the price of gold with the price of milk powder. The poem

appears as an image that normalizes an extreme situation using the common format of a price list.

5.1 Recipe-Life Narratives

In the following poem, Nillanthan recounts and revises recipes in which he recollects the trauma in the context of tastes, the absence of previous tastes, and the taste of survival.

Recipes of the End of an Age

1. பொரித்த ரொட்டி
நிவாரண மாவை தேங்காய்ப்பூ
இல்லாமல்
குழைத்து தட்டிப் பொரிப்பது

1. Fried Roti

Flour from food aid mixed
without coconut,
flattened with fingers, and fried.

2. கஞ்சி
அரிசியை உப்புச் சேர்த்து வேக
வைத்து
அதில் பாலுக்குப் பதிலாக இரண்டு
பக்கற்
அங்கர் பால் மாவைக் கொட்டி
ஒரு கொதி அவிய விடுவது
அல்லது பாலேயில்லாத கஞ்சி

2. Kanji

Rice boiled with salt.
Instead of milk, two packets
of Anchor powder added
and brought to a boil.
Or *kanji* with no milk at all.

3. வடை
கடலைப் பருப்பை ஊற வைத்து
அதில் உப்புச் சேர்த்து அரைத்து
பச்சை மிளகாய் மற்றும்
வெங்காயத்துக்குப் பதிலாக
செத்தல் மிளகாயை நறுக்கிப்
போட்டு உருட்டிப்
பொரிப்பது

3. Vadai

Soaked lentil and ground with salt.
Instead of onions and green chillies
chopped red chillies are added and
rolled into a ball and fried in oil.

4. கடலை மா உருண்டை
கடலைப் பருப்பை ஊற வைத்து
பொரித்து, மாவாக அரைத்து

4. Bengal Gram Ball

Soaked Bengal gram is fried.

அதில் உப்பும் சீனியும் சேர்த்துக்
குழைத்து
உருட்டுவது

Then ground,
mixed with salt and sugar,
and rolled into small balls.

5. வாய்ப்பன்
னிவாரண மாவுடன் சீனியும்
சேர்த்துக்
குழைத்து உருட்டிப் பொரிப்பது.

5. *Vaipan*

Sugar and salt mixed in
the food aid flour.
Rolled into small balls and fried in oil.

6. காரை இலைப் பிட்டு அல்லது ரொட்டி அல்லது கஞ்சி
காரை இலை சேர்த்த
தேங்காய்ப்பூ இல்லாத பிட்டு
அல்லது ரொட்டி அல்லது கஞ்சி

6. Karai Leaf Puttu or Roti or Kanji

Puttu or roti or *kanji*
made by adding karai leaves
and without coconut.

7. காரை இலைச் சுண்டல்
காரை இலையைப் பச்சை
மிளகாய் - வெங்காயம்
தேங்காய்ப்பூ இன்றி உப்பும்
மஞ்சளும்
சேர்த்துச் சுண்டுவது

7. Sautéed Karai Leaves

Pan-fried karai leaves
with salt and turmeric and
without coconut and green chillies.

8. றால் குழம்பு
றாலை நோண்டி அதன் தசைப்
பகுதியைத் தனியே எடுத்து
நீர்விட்டு பச்சை மிளகாய்,
வெங்காயம் இல்லாமல் உப்பும்
மிளகாய்த் தூளும் மட்டும்
சேர்த்துக் கொதிக்க வைத்து
தூள் வெடுக்கு அடங்கியதும்
பாலின்றி புளியின்றி
இறக்குவது.

8. Shrimp Gravy

The shrimp is first deveined.
Water, salt, and chilli powder are
added, and then cooked without
onions and green chillies.
When the raw smell leaves, it is
removed from the stove without
adding milk and tamarind.

9. றால் சொதி
றாலின் மூஞ்சி, கோது, வால்
என்பனவற்றை பச்சை மிளகாய்
வெங்காயம் இல்லாமல் நீரில்
உப்பும் மஞ்சளும் சேர்த்து
அவிய விட்டு பாலின்றி,
புளியின்றி இறக்குவது
(2023, 11-13)

9. Shrimp Milk Stew

Shrimp head, skin, and tail boiled in
water with salt and turmeric without
green chillies and onion. Once
cooked, it is removed from the hearth,
without milk and tamarind.

Nillanthan's alimentary poems can serve as testimony to the trauma he experienced and the function as life writing. The recipe-poems constitute his past: they explain how something was cooked in his past as opposed to serving as a guide for how to cook in wartime. I use the term *recipe-life narratives* to interrogate these poems. Merriam-Webster defines *recipe* as (i) "a set of instructions for making something"; (ii) "a formula or procedure for doing something or attaining something." The recipe-life narratives reproduced by Nillanthan are not a set of directions, they are "gastrographic" portraits of lives lived in specific moments in specific sites (for a discussion of gastrography, see Smith and Watson 2010). They defy death. They stomach the most unpalatable foods in the absence of tamarind, coconut milk, green chillies, onions, and other conventional food provisions for the traditional recipes. Nillanthan's repeated recitations of these "cuisine of absences," as Balachander calls them (2019), bears witness to the coping strategies of the crisis of Mullivaikal, of wartime food shortages. His act of remembering is akin to what Olney calls an archeological model of memory (1998, 19, quoted in Smith and Watson 2010, 23). The recipe-life narratives are written in the past tense. The tense highlights the hidden message—namely, how to live in a space where food became a weapon—as well as a desire for the horror not to be repeated. Nillanthan's poetry underscores the importance of the body as a site of experience, in this case, deprivation. The narratives, through culinary instructions, demonstrate the importance of the body in postcolonial life narratives (Moore-Gilbert 2009, 34-50).

Theophano argues that women's cookbooks carry their life stories, noting that the cookbook "was a way to demonstrate wealth, prominence and the status of their social network" (2002, 8). In the context of Mullivaikal, Nillanthan's recipe-life narratives serve a different purpose: they display the subaltern positions of the women who cooked these foods resourcefully in the struggle to protect their families from the rain of shells. It is from the women's silenced, embodied memories that these recipes are recorded and reproduced by Nillanthan.

Nillanthan states in a personal communication that COVID lockdowns and the current Sri Lankan economic meltdown brought back memories of the Eelam War of 2009 and his writing began to flow again almost after a decade (8 Aug. 2022). His narrative speaks of the fear of forgetting, and the dual aspect of remembering: that is, how the past is shaped by the slippery course of remembrance from the present (Ricoeur 2004). Nillanthan began voicing his repressed memories of war trauma during COVID, when there was a severe food crisis, followed by the struggle for essential goods and political unrest in Sri Lanka.[20] His war memories are laced with the collective memory of the famine through *kanji* and the current food shortage. He began to unfold them by collecting recipes from men and women who shaped his narrative of the collective trauma of 2009.

In recording the remembered recipes, Nillanthan gave voice to the "communal trauma," (Erickson 1995, 190). The war recipes are collective projections of struggle, resourcefulness, repulsion, and resistance. The act of gathering these recipes is an attempt parallel to creating a community cookbook. These memories of the palate are "communal

documents" that preserve Nillanthan's "community's histories and memories" (Theophano 2002, 8). The community members who remembered the recipes, written on their sensory organs, shift foods from nostalgic memory to memories of disgust. These "sensual memories" are affective and material (Holtzman 2006, 365) and remembered in their bodies. Nillanthan's affect memories of distaste and disgust have then become the tool used in the recipe-life narratives of traumatic war pain.

In a blog that tells of an interview with a pastor who survived the final war and held trauma counselling for the survivors in the internment camp, the pastor describes his approach to trauma healing as follows:

> As part of the healing, I included cooking for the group of men and women. Usually in this session of the therapy only traditional foods gain importance. A list is created from the dishes mentioned by the patients and the number of dishes decide the number of cooking days. For instance, if there are ten dishes, then ten days are allocated for the cooking. I anticipated that the joint labour and the bonding involved in cooking and eating would allow them to heal from their wounds. They started with the list of dishes: *Mullivaikal kanji, Mullivaikal vaippan, Valainyarmada vadai,* and then added the traditional dishes: *pongal, paal kanji, pulisatham, ilaikanji, kozhipukkai* … the day they cooked the Mullivaikal foods they shared their grief of the final war while they cooked and ate. (*Kanali.in* 2021)

In this pastor's trauma therapy, the group's experience of trauma is worked through during their labour and effort of cooking and recalling not only traditional dishes that construct Tamil identity, but also war foods that are now inscribed in the Tamil bodies and memories. The physical kitchen labour becomes the vehicle for remembrance and healing.

6. *Mullivaikal Kanji* as Contemporary Commemoration and Resistance

Mullivaikal kanji is now observed as a ritual of commemoration and resilience by Tamils in Sri Lanka and the connected diaspora. It is an enactment of social and habitual

memory: this *kanji* of commemoration is cooked year after year and lives in the repeated acts of the body (Connerton 2014). In Canada, on May 18 every year, in every location where Tamils congregate, every take-out and grocery store serves this *kanji*. Through this tasteless gruel water, memories of Mullivaikal are transmitted to the next generation. The drinking of this *kanji* builds on sensory memory stored in the bodies to create the affective response of the Tamil diaspora. The *kanji* contributes to a collective memory practice of the transnational Tamil community through the bodily acts of cooking and consuming.



Figure 24. The University of Ottawa Tamil Students Union's remembrance of Mullivaikal.[21]

7. Chapter Five Conclusion

This chapter brings together several forms of life writing centred on food procurement, provisioning, consumption, and preparation based on the most painful crisis of Mullivaikal in the Eelam War IV. The narrative voices of writers Tamilkavi and Nillanthan

create and perpetuate traumatic memories of *kanji* and its significance in nutrition, ritual, and culture, while bloggers share fond memories of *kanji*. Such writings of the past by bloggers demonstrate nostalgia regarding Tamil culinary identity tied to local villages, mother, communities, regions, and ethnicity. In contrast, Tamilkavi and Nillanthan demonstrate the deep struggles for physical survival and nationalism in the descriptions of the foods, their procurement, scarcity, and recipes. Their life writing explores the way outdoor cooking and rituals were altered by the *kanjikottil* (rice gruel shelters) of the war zone. I conceptualize Nillanthan's recipe-poems as "recipe-life narratives" since his account illuminates the everyday physical labour of cooking and records the lived experience of the way food was cooked. Through gaps and silences, Nillanthan speaks of food in the background of the memory of tastes, and it is the sensory memories that locate the horror of Mullivaikal. The body and the senses become the vehicle for both trauma and the site for its potential healing through culinary memories. Food memories of war and resilience move the body and mind beyond the narrow paradigm of being injured sites.

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[1] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Situation_in_the_Northern_Theater_of_Eelam_War_IV_%2831_January_2009%29.png. Accessed 20 Aug. 2023.

[2] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3EDDs9POzC8. Accessed 12 July 2023.

[3] https://thuppahis.com/2014/11/18/cartographic-photographic-illustrations-in-support-of-the-memorandum-analysing-the-war-in-sri-lanka-and-propaganda-debates/#_edn1. Accessed 27 Sept. 2023.

[4] Google map image by Geetha Sukumaran.

[5] https://www.refworld.org/docid/49faac842.html. Accessed 23 Sept. 2023.

[6] Navalar held a conservatist view of Hinduism and promoted patriarchal views of women and oppressive caste practices.

[7] Such *kanji* huts also were established widely in Tamilnadu to provide food, and they are recorded in the Tamil folk songs of the period.

[8] This *kanji* does not include coconut milk, instead using coconut chunks, much like the recipe shared by Kana Pirapa.

[9] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip2pJhhr-Zg. Accessed 17 July 2023.

[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip2pJhhr-Zg. Accessed 17 July 2023

[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ip2pJhhr-Zg. Accessed 17 July 2023

[12] Amman, a goddess in Hinduism and Tamil culture, is worshipped for relief from illness, personal crisis, communal hardships, and anything that could cause angst. In the decades-long war of Sri Lanka, Tamils often found healing in fasting, worships, and rituals at the temple.

[13] *Vaipan* is a traditional fritter made with flour and banana. The *Mullivaikal vaipan* is made only with flour and sugar and fried in oil, as banana was not available.

[14] See, for instance, Locker (2022) and Farmer et al. (2018).

[15] See, for instance, Trottier et al. (2017) and Molendik et al. (2017).

[16] See, for instance, De Silva (2006), Eliezer and Roberts (2015), Katto (2020), Mehta (2022), Dossa (2014).

[17] Originally, the TRO was recognized by the Sri Lankan government but was later banned by many other countries, who alleged that the organization supported the LTTE by redirecting its funds to the movement.

[18] https://www.eelamview.com/2022/05/13/mullivaikkal-kanji/. Accessed 19 May 2023.

[19] The milk powder is given to her as a supplement decades later when she is suffering from schizophrenia. The mother, however, says that "it tastes like war" and rejects it (2021, 19). Cho explains that for Koreans who survived the war, the memory of milk powder remained the cause of weeks of diarrhea and a bitter replacement for the rice they were used to (19).

[20] Following the COVID lockdowns, Sri Lanka drowned in a huge economic crisis, with the shortage of food, fertilizers, fuel, and other such essentials. There were long lineups for fuel as well as frequent long power outages. For the Tamils on the northern island, the situation was a stark reminder of the decades of embargos and food insecurities they had suffered during the wars.

[21] https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=543564077361427&set=pcb.543564124028089 Accessed 14 Apr. 2023.

Chapter Six:

Conclusion

The personal narratives studied in this dissertation provide expression to the experiences of war, trauma, and resistance through the everyday materiality of food, food insecurity, and embodied culinary memories. The study aimed to unearth the way acts of food production and consumption are imbued with remembrances of family, war, and trauma, and work toward human agency for resilience. Existing scholarly works on ethnic conflicts in Sri Lanka have focused on armed insurgency, gender oppression, sexual violence, and trauma. While research exists on colonial hunger and famine in this context, my study interweaved the hunger of the colonized and its impact on the construction of the postcolonial Sri Lankan state. In particular, research papers have focused on food insecurity, supply interruption, food as a weapon, and food aid intervention provided by international agencies such as the UN and the Red Cross. There is limited scholarly engagement on resilient modes of food production and subsistence farming in regions of prolonged conflict. However, research on embodied experiences of foodways of an oppressed group is limited. Extensive studies have taken place about the experiences of women fighters of the LTTE. My dissertation has examined the quotidian acts surrounding food provisioning and the related acts of creativity, sustenance, and resilience.

By bringing together the fields of gender, food studies, memory studies, and life writing in the context of postcolonial engagement, this dissertation has unearthed various meanings of food in a zone of conflict. The chapters were arranged chronologically to follow

the progression of the armed conflict, which took root in the 1980s and came to a violent end in 2009.

Chapter One established the framework I used for my research and undertook a literature review. It offered a brief context of the British colonial background of Sri Lanka and outlined the various phases of the war. I analyzed a collection of public and personal transcripts of rebels, civilians, and the movement—such as memoirs, autofiction as life writing, poetry, along with blogs, archives, social media posts, and newspaper articles—to unravel the roles of culinary labour, memory, the body, and the senses in constructing narratives. In my approach to primary sources, I attempted to use many types of writing in their original language in order to move beyond the paradigm of existing literary food studies.

Chapter Two looked at the life writing of male and female insurgents and the connections among kitchen work, farm labour, weapons training, and fighting. The chapter unravelled the workings of gender on relationship to land, food, and farming in nation-building, rural masculinity and the formation of the Buddhist state, and the evolution of rebel movements. The men's writing revealed the intricate ways in which ethnic tension, colonial famines during British rule, and state repression are closely interconnected with paddy and cultivable lands. I demonstrated that male fighters in particular wrote about food production and farming and borrowed women's gendered kitchen knowledge to extend their food sources. The women juxtaposed their food narratives with battle descriptions. Such descriptions dominated food writing. I have shown evidence that female fighters performed

gendered labour of cooking and caring for their comrades alongside fighting, and they identified these tasks as integral elements of the national struggle and feminism. This section's analysis of women's writing reveals that as combatants, women do not speak about violence exclusively through food experiences. Accordingly, this finding opposes the scholarly views that women largely speak about violence through food (Dossa 2014; Das 1991). I have shown that women applied gendered culinary knowledge and memory to create food for sustenance and apply that resourcefulness to counter war-front food scarcity. The chapter also revealed the workings of gendered identities of masculinity (Cock 1991; Enloe 1990, 2000) and femininities (DeVault 1991; Roy 1972; Meah 2014; Inness 2001) through the techniques of the body and habit memories (Connerton 2014; Sutton 2001, Hastorf 2017) in the context of farming, cooking, and feeding.

Chapter Three examined the Tamil concepts of fasting and built on the modern political hunger strikes by Thileepan and Annai Poopathy. My findings in this chapter are as follows: I traced the connection between death-fasts and politics in classical Tamil literature. I showed that the Tamil notion of fasting has its roots in Jainism and Hinduism. The chapter complicated the public performances of death-fasts as a research area. I demonstrated the way that the defiling and starving of bodies became a public performance of death that had bearing on the trajectory of the war. The chapter revealed the way that the death-fasts influenced the collective action of the Tamils. Thileepan's death was the affective force that decided the future of the LTTE's power until 2009. Annai Poopathy remains the mother who continues to affect mothers' acts of resistance in Sri Lanka. By juxtaposing the hunger strike of a militant and the silenced hunger strike of a mother, the chapter examined the power that

both deaths acquired in the Tamil community. It found that prison hunger strikes rely on written words to communicate and mobilize the public. The public starving to death, however, uses the affect and the body in lieu of the written word to form a collective identity through suffering and to bring forth human agency for resistance. The chapter posited that Thileepan's and Annai Poopathy's hunger strikes work toward Hirsch's theory of "postmemory" in the connected diaspora and actively contribute to present-day activism by relieving hunger through food drives (2008, 2012).

Chapter Four examined the publications of the Tigers to reveal a totalitarian regime working toward achieving self-sufficiency, locally sustainable food production and consumption, and decolonized agricultural practices in the process of realizing Tamil nationalism. The chapter outlined the lack of an existing framework to study rebel publications and made inroads in viewing certain of these as instances of life writing. It looked at the ways the movement used food insecurity to coerce civilians to become active labouring bodies of the farm and militant bodies and conceptualized the publications as "food narratives for life." In addition, I showed the recurrent food suffering and famines experienced by civilians as a by-product of the LTTE's violence and the state's weaponizing of food.

Using Foucault's theory of biopower, I examined how the LTTE resisted state repression (1980). The chapter drew on the Tamil concept of *thinai*, Chatterjee's notion of postcolonial nationalism (1993), and Fanon's conceptualization of combat literature (2004) to explore the decolonial, local food systems through which the movement constructed Tamil

identity and "gastronationalism." It juxtaposed the Tigers' narrative with counter-narratives from newspaper articles and autofiction to outline the challenges for the movement in achieving their goals while waging conventional war in Vanni.

Chapter Five examined the final war of 2009 in Mullivaikal through food preparation, consumption, and food insecurities tied to women's geography during the continual displacements (Massey 1994a; McDowell 1999; Smith 1994). I revealed how the transgenerational knowledge of rural women about seed collection, conservation, and cultivation enabled them to resist the forces that attempted to destroy them (Ong and Kim 2017; Gvion 2006). The chapter explored the resourceful ways women used the gendered spaces of the local ecosystem to provide ingredients for wartime "cuisines of poverty" (Gvion 2006), which are detailed in Nillanthan's poetry of recipes. In addition, this chapter examined the way the war altered outdoor cooking spaces and the role of *kanji* in the Tamil psyche and its association with temple rituals and famines in the Tamil communal memory. I proceeded to conceptualize the recipes of the final war as "recipe-life narratives" since the recipes are not cooking instructions; rather, the words shared the lived wartime culinary experiences. The recipes reveal a particular juncture in human life on how a dish was cooked and consumed without the basic ingredients, and serve as a form of life writing. The chapter interrogated the role of sensory memories (Sutton 2001, 2005), specifically of taste and smell, in remembering the trauma of the final war. It establishes the importance of embodied food memory as opposed to trauma theories focused on injury to the mind and body (Caruth 1996; Felman and Laub 1992; Lacapra 1994).

In sum, this dissertation interlaces the gendered alimentary life narratives of rebels and civilians and the sustainable food propaganda of the movement to generate new knowledge on the collective survival by a marginalized group caught in a long and brutal civil conflict from 1983 to 2009. This knowledge is derived from a combination of existing scholarly contributions and my analysis and application of several fields, among them food studies, memory studies, and life writing. This dissertation provides a nuanced understanding of famines and food scarcities, the materialities of food, the body, consumption, and deprivation. In addition, it looks at how the memories of previous scarcities contribute to gendered resourcefulness in enacting resistance against the state. I analyzed the writing that revealed the roles of forms of masculinities and femininities, gendered spaces and memories, and death-fasting that shaped the Eelam Wars. By studying the everyday food acts in life writing, this dissertation looks at the way personal narrative connects the body and the self. In addition, it reveals the LTTE's foodways in the context of rebel governance during the economic embargo from 1990 and the continued insurgence against the state until 2009.

1. Reflections on the Current Findings and Directions for Future Research

1.1 Reflections on the Current Findings

This dissertation analyzed forms of life writing in its broadest sense, including poetry, memoirs, biographies, autofiction, social media, and newsclips. A limitation to my approach in considering written narratives as opposed to oral history is the fact that not everybody has access to circumstances for writing their experiences. As has been observed, oral history gives everyone a "right to biography" (Passerini; quoted in Portelli 1997, 58); unfortunately, that right is impossible to exercise in a dangerous political situation.

Since this dissertation took shape during the COVID global pandemic, which brought Sri Lanka into another episode of food crisis, it was impossible to do ethnographic research complete with oral histories. If additional reflection and an open dialogic process could be implemented, this research would benefit from the combination of oral histories and life writing. Further directions for future research appear below.

1.2 Potential Directions for Future Research

This study engaged with the northern part of Sri Lanka; therefore, it only explored the cuisine of the north. The study did not take into consideration the narratives of the Muslim minority in the northern and eastern regions of the country, who suffered from the LTTE murders and atrocities and were displaced in large numbers. It did not engage with the writings of Indian Tamils in Kandy and it did not engage fully with the eastern region of Sri Lanka. All of these regions were adversely affected by the war, and the communities survived food insecurities and supply shortages. A comprehensive study of foodways of the conflict would be possible only when these regions are included in the research. One approach to greater coverage of all the war-ravaged areas would be to study the food narratives of the Muslim community and the plantation Tamils from the tea estates. Both communities have specific cuisines, curry powders, and food preparations that are different from those of the north, owing to their settlement histories.

Another angle in which this research could be extended would be to study the forgotten foods and food practices of all Tamil-speaking regions. Documenting such foods and recipes through oral histories of the older generation would be a vital contribution to the

expansion of this study. Also connected to this aspect would be the documentation of the food and famine memories of older generation Tamils, which are already diminishing with their passing

This research could also be extended to study the rebel foodways, a subject that has not been given much attention in the field of rebel governance. Researching the food systems of the LTTE would provide new knowledge on the local resourcefulness, menu, and recipes that fed the fighters for so many years. Even my preliminary research on the rebel publications reveals the intricate web and labour involved in the large-scale, dangerous engagement that could unravel hidden culinary insights. Research into food and farming practices of armed groups can shed light on Indigenous food systems and local markets and could intervene in the distribution of international food aid programs to the benefit of local food solutions. Of the future directions mentioned, I would tackle the gap in my research by extending the study in the eastern region and the hill country of Sri Lanka.

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