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# "We Want Justice!": Transnational Political Activism Among Second Generation Tamil Youth And Identity (Re) Construction Within Transnational Social Spaces

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“WE WANT JUSTICE!”: TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL ACTIVISM AMONG SECOND  
GENERATION TAMIL YOUTH AND IDENTITY (RE) CONSTRUCTION WITHIN  
TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACES

by

Srivany Kanagalingam, Hon. BA, University of Toronto, 2010

A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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Srivany Kanagalingam

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Master of Arts 2012  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the experiences of the 2009 transnational political activism of second generation Tamil youth, this study explores transnationalism among the second generation in Canada and identity construction within transnational social spaces. It also engages in discussions on the importance of recognizing the existence of transnationalism as not just a phenomenon of the first generation. Based on a sample of nine second generation Tamil youths, findings suggest that the second generation is selective in its transnational practices, while expanded forms of transnationalism exists and fluctuates over the life course. Both Tamil and Canadian identities were found to be hybrid, fluid, shifting and situational, marked by a sense of belonging to both Canada and Sri Lanka. The second generation are thus situated between various and opposing ideas and information flows in which they are able to traverse and stimulate transnational engagement, when and if they wish to do so.

**Key words:**

Transnationalism; second generation; transnational social spaces; identity

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The study of immigration has advanced and expanded considerably from its once predominant perspective of examining impacts on only receiving nations through theories of assimilation and acculturation, or multiculturalism and cultural pluralism (Hiebert & Ley, 2003). Given the contemporary flows of migration in an ever globalizing world, the dynamics between host societies, immigrant groups and sending nations have brought forth notions of diaspora, transnationalism and identity politics. We can no longer understand migrants as people who break ties with their homeland the minute they arrive to their new country of settlement. Migrants are now recognized as people who maintain several ties, multiple identities, contradictory loyalties, practices, and forms of belonging (Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007). The movement of people across the globe creates personal and institutional networks that link people and institutions across space and time. With the advancement of communication and transportation technologies, migrants are ever more shaping their lives transnationally to integrate social, cultural, religious, economic and political activities that link them to their home country (Goldring, Henders & Vangergeest, 2003). In Canada, different forms of transnational activities become apparent when, for example, immigrants react to situations or events affecting their homelands, such as fundraising for natural disasters, protests against human rights violations, or the growing interest in foreign music and films belonging to a particular immigrant or ethnic group (Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007).

The concept of transnationalism was developed to describe a wide range of ties and connections maintained by migrants with their country of origin (Lee, 2011). Studies on transnationalism have shed light on the relationships that immigrants maintain with their country

of origin and the implications it has on the immigrant, as well as the receiving and sending countries (Levitt, 2001). Because immigrants are shaped by the dynamics of the relationships they sustain within and across borders, their lives cannot be completely understood strictly within the limits of the receiving nation (Somerville, 2008). The lives of their children, on the other hand, may be less directly linked to a homeland, which, as indicated by its limited scope in the literature, raises questions about the transnational participation of the second generation (Somerville, 2008).

### **Research Problem**

Not until recently has the literature focused on the transnational practices of the second generation (Lee, 2011; Haikkola, 2011; Rumbaut, 2002). As the phenomenon of the first generation's transnational practices have been recognized and researched from various perspectives, the focus shifted towards understanding whether transnational practices of the first generation carry over to those of the second generation (Levitt & Waters, 2002). Research on second generation transnationalism has garnered a lot of attention in the United States over the past few decades, in which scholars such as Levitt (2001; 2002; 2004; 2009), Levitt and Waters (2002), Fouron and Glick-Schiller (2002), Portes (2001) and Rumbaut (2002), are making considerable progress in enhancing our understanding of transnationalism among the second generation. Yet the study of the second generations' experiences of transnational ties and processes are limited and not well documented (Haikkola, 2011), as it remains a small area of interest, especially in the Canadian context, which mainly focuses on second generation immigrants' experiences in adaptation, psychological adjustment, education and occupational achievement, while an identifiable gap in research on transnationalism among the Canadian second generation remains (Somerville, 2008). This study attempts to contribute to the academic

literature on second generation transnationalism in Canada. In addition, while there is a vast literature on identity and transnationalism, the second generation experiences both transnationalism and identity construction differently from that of the first generation. This study will also examine such identity constructions among the second generation within both Canadian mainstream and transnational social spaces.

### **Research Objectives and Questions**

The overriding themes of this research is the exploration of transnational activities within the lives of second generation immigrants, as well as exploring identity construction and negotiation processes of second generation immigrants within transnational social spaces. To children of immigrants who may have a limited understanding about their or their parents' country of origin, the frequency and manifestation of their transnational practices are grossly different from that of their parents' transnational activities. Many studies in the literature have examined transnational practices confined to only certain activities such as sending remittances, political participation in the home country and frequent visits. These studies do not acknowledge other forms of transnationalism that may be more relevant to the second generation, who are exposed to transnational social spaces where they may not remit, visit or engage in political participation in the home country. Instead, transnationalism can be experienced both at a literal and symbolic level, which includes "imagined" returns to their country of origin through cultural rediscovery (Espiritu & Tran, 2001).

This exploratory research study examines the transnational practices of second generation immigrants in Canada from a different perspective than that often found in the literature. Instead of looking at transnational practices represented by frequent visits and sending remittances, this study will analyze transnational political activism among the second generation as an exemplar

of transnationalism within a framework of transnational social spaces. In addition, because the literature shows that transnationalism among the second generation is fluid and malleable (Somerville, 2008); this study will also explore the factors that influence the decision of second generation immigrants to engage and disengage in transnational practices. It will also seek to understand the negotiation process that occurs in (re) constructing and expressing identity.

This paper explores these issues by examining the transnational practices of second generation Sri Lankan Tamil youth in Toronto. In particular, this study applies a transnational social space lens on the political demonstrations of 2009 in response to the culmination of the ethno-political conflict in Sri Lanka, and considers the participation of second generation Tamil youth in such demonstrations as a form of transnationalism. At critical stages in their lives, the second generation is able to activate certain transnational connections received within transnational social spaces, such as information received in households about their or their parents' homeland, and they are able to become such transnational political activists in response to varying situations, such as the 2009 demonstrations (Levitt, 2004; 2009). The series of political demonstrations held in 2009 can be understood as constituting a transnational social space in which these second generation youth are able to mobilize and engage in actions that connect them to their homeland.

Terms such as transnational social fields and spaces generally describe the ties of persons and social relationships, networks and organizations, through which ideas and practices are exchanged across national borders (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Faist, 2000). Nation borders are not necessarily connected with the boundaries of social fields. For example, transnational social fields connect actors through direct and indirect relations across borders, whereas national social fields are those that stay within national boundaries (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). An

analysis of social spaces, both nationally and transnationally within which the second generation functions, will contribute to our understanding of second generation transnationalism, as well as identity construction within these social spaces. Using the political demonstrations and subsequent participation in transnational activities as sites of analysis, this study will explore such transnational social spaces in which second generation Tamil youth are able to engage in activities that link them with their country of origin, as well as the effect of transnational social spaces on identity construction and expression.

Furthermore, in order to understand the transnational behaviours of second generation Tamils, this study will also probe into whether these transnational practices and identities have been continuous even after their political demonstrations ended with the conclusion of the war in Sri Lanka in May 2009 or if their involvement was a simple representation of a selective and expanded form of transnationalism which may fluctuate over the life course. This study attempts to achieve this by asking the following research questions:

- What factors played a role in the decision of second generation Tamils to engage in political demonstrations?
- How did their engagement in the political demonstrations play a role in (re) constructing their identity within a transnational social space? How were these identities negotiated?
- How is transnationalism expressed (if at all) in their daily lives, after their involvement in the political demonstrations? Three years after the political demonstrations, how have their identities changed?

These questions will be explored through an in-depth qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with nine Sri Lankan Tamil youth, allowing for a subjective perspective of how and why second generation immigrants engage in transnationalism.

This study attempts to contribute to academic research in many ways. First, it provides an analysis of transnationalism among the second generation which is currently lacking in Canadian research. In addition, it will contribute to discussions on Canadian national identity and how the second generation negotiates between multiple identities within transnational social spaces. It will examine transnationalism among second generation children within the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Canada, specifically in the Greater Toronto Area, as there is a lack of research concerning this population though there is a relatively large presence of Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto.

### **Structure of Paper**

This research paper begins with a review of the literature on transnationalism and important theoretical concepts relevant to the objectives of this study. Beginning with the task of defining transnationalism, the literature review takes priority in discussing second generation transnationalism, as well as discussions on identity construction among the second generation. The subsequent chapter will contextualize the experiences of the Sri Lankan Tamil community, by providing a brief history of the conflict and the political mobilizations of the Tamil community in 2009. The fourth chapter introduces the methodological structure of the study, providing a rationale for choosing a qualitative approach. It will also outline the characteristics of the sample and data collection methods. Chapter five will discuss the findings of the research study regarding transnational behaviours and identity construction. The paper will conclude with a discussion of the main findings and future directions for research in the final chapter.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature with regard to the definition of transnationalism and the different types of transnationalism found in the literature. It will then narrow down on literature found on transnationalism among the second generation, as well as discuss derivative concepts of transnationalism such as transnational social spaces and fields. The final section of this chapter will discuss literature findings on transnationalism and identity construction.

#### **Transnationalism as a Conceptual Approach**

Transnationalism resurfaced as an analytical tool since the early 1990s, with one of the earliest definitions provided by Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc-Szanton (1994), who described transnationalism as “the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (p.8). Since then, studies on transnationalism emerged from various disciplines in addition to migration studies, such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and political science (Lee, 2011). As a result of the fusion of transnationalism with different multidisciplinary approaches, the idea of transnationalism has become a fragmented and contested topic among scholars, due to its differences in conceptualizations and definitional vagueness (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007; Vertovec, 2009). Other terms used to describe networks that span across borders include; transnational social fields, transmigrants, transnational communities, etc., and are a result of disciplinary influence from different genres such as literature, government documents, popular writing and activist discourse, just to name a few (Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007). While there

are many different definitions found in the literature, the term transnationalism is commonly used to describe people who subjectively feel that they belong to more than one nation-state and organize their lives within transnational social spaces (Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

This research study will follow the definition of transnationalism provided by Basch et al. (1994), in addition to acknowledging that immigrants preserve important commitments (whether it is economic, political or socio-cultural) to their home country while simultaneously integrating into their host country (Lauer & Wong, 2010; Goldring & Krishnamurti, 2007). Although transnational activities have existed in the past, it has become a unique part of contemporary migration, as the opportunities to engage in transnational activities have increased with the growth in technology, easing communication and information sharing across borders (Lauer & Wong, 2010). In earlier studies conducted on transnationalism, it was assumed that transnationalism implied the physical movement of people, as the term transmigrants (Glick-Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992) began to surface, emphasizing a relationship between ‘migrancy’ and transnationalism (Harney & Baldassar, 2007). However, transnationalism can include the movement of not only people, but of goods, money and ideas (Lee, 2011). In addition, Levitt (2001) states that “movement is not a prerequisite for engaging in transnational practices” (p. 198) and argues that physical mobility alone may not be a part of some people’s transnational practices. This is an important point to consider, especially when studying the transnational practices among post-first generation immigrants. This issue becomes particularly salient for the second generation, who may have never visited their or their parents’ homeland and we must consider other forms of transnational activities among the second generation that is not limited to physical mobility.

To study transnational practices as a theoretical concept, Smith and Guarnizo (1998) provide a typology of transnationalism which includes transnationalism from *above* and from *below*. Transnationalism from above refers to activities led by multinationals, including transnational capital, global media, etc., whereas from below refers to activities led by individuals and groups who function within the transnational social space (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Relevant to this paper's discussion of transnational political activism of second generation Tamil youth, transnationalism can thus be understood as occurring from below.

Beyond the issue of mobility, the question of the intensity of transnational engagement further complicates the definition of transnationalism. In earlier discussions of this question, some argued that one must be very engaged with their home country in ways that directly affect their daily lives in the host country (Glick-Schiller et al., 1992). However, it became apparent that many migrants are unable or even unwilling to sustain a strong level of engagement described in earlier definitions of transnationalism (Lee, 2011). As a result, different forms of transnationalism were created, such as economic, political and socio-cultural (Portes et al., 1999). Levitt (2001) contended that each form of transnationalism could be either selective or comprehensive, meaning that some migrants may engage in moderated levels of transnationalism, while others maintain complex ties to people and institutions back home. Levitt, De Wind and Vertovec (2003) further claim that 'not all migrants are engaged in transnational practices, and that, those who are, do so with considerable variation in the sectors, levels, strength and formality of their involvement' (p. 569).

#### *Transnational Social Spaces*

According to Soja (1989), space is created out of social relations and is expressed through those social relations and individual actions. Migration is a prime example of one of the

most significant spatial behaviours of individuals and an illustration of the shifting uses and constructions of space (Voigt-Graf, 2004). As mentioned before, earlier conceptualizations of migration tended to focus on a bipolar relationship between sending and receiving nations, while examination of the post-migration situation was often restricted to the host country. However, the presence of transnational individuals and communities suggests that transnational spaces are produced between migrants and the relations they hold that go beyond nation borders (Voigt-Graf, 2004).

There are many spatial labels given to describe the condition in which two or more societies create a single field of social action as a result of migration. The most commonly acknowledged terms found in the literature are transnational social fields (Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Goldring 1998; Smith & Guarnizo 1998; Itzigsohn et al. 1999) and transnational social spaces (Faist 2000; Pries 2001). According to Pries (2001), transnational social spaces are patterns of ‘social practices, artifacts and symbol systems that span different geographic spaces in at least two nation-states without constituting a new “deterritorialised” nation-state’ (p.18). These terms are valuable for outlining the spaces occupied by transnational individuals, while implying that those spaces also include the homeland or ‘cultural hearth’ (Voigt-Graf, 2004: 29).

The concept of transnational social spaces places emphasis on identities, practices, relationships and institutions that stem from transnational practices (Faist, 2000). In addition, transnational social fields as a conceptual framework allows for the investigation of the larger social, economic and political processes through which immigrants are able to embed and respond to more than one society (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2002). Such a conceptualization facilitates an analysis of the processes by which immigrants and their children are able to

continue sustaining their ties to their homeland, while at the same time engaging in activities of the host country.

As described by Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004), transnational social fields allows individuals to express *ways of belonging* transnationally and *ways of being* transnational, for the purpose of distinguishing transnational identities from specific transnational practices. Ways of belonging refers to practices that indicate or endorse an identity which establishes a conscious connection to a particular group which are real and not symbolic, such as wearing a Christian cross or choosing a particular cuisine. Ways of being on the other hand refers to the actual social relations and practices that individuals participate in within their institutions, organizations and experiences (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Individuals within transnational social fields may combine ways of being and ways of belonging differently in specific circumstances. In addition, for those who identify with a particular group, although they may only have a few or no actual social relations back home, may do so as a way of belonging through memory, nostalgia or imagination (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) point to the importance of considering the degree to which the second generation is raised in transnational social spaces, which can be accomplished by distinguishing between ways of belonging and ways of being in a transnational social space.

Transnational social fields emphasizes the ways in which individuals become part of their home country, including its political process, while simultaneously becoming part of the workforce and contributing civically to the host country, thereby participating in the lifestyle of two or more nation-states (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2001). The idea of transnational social spaces becomes especially significant when bearing in mind that physical mobility is not always possible due to restrictions or constraints linked to social location, such as gender, class,

racialization (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003) or political climate in homeland regions that may have contributed to the generation of exiles, refugees and others (Al-Ali, Black & Koser 2001; Nolin 2006). As a result, the influences, structures and ideas of power, gender, class and race that circulates across borders and within these social fields cannot be ignored. There are differences between, for example, the Tamils living in Canada and those living in different parts of Sri Lanka, and these differences deepen when class, caste, gender and regional differences intersect, all of which can affect the level of access to information and content that flows within transnational social fields (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010; Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2001).

### **Transnationalism and the Second Generation**

Empirical studies on transnational trends of the post-first generation immigrants have left many researchers divided in their conclusions (Somerville, 2008). Some academics argue that transnationalism may be essential to the first generation but may not be so important to their children (Kasinitz, Waters, Mollenkopf & Anil, 2002; Portes, 2001). Other scholars however, argue that the second generation do not completely abandon their parents' native language and do retain some interest in traveling back to the home country, thereby engaging in some forms of transnationalism (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004; Wolf, 1997). It is also important to distinguish between the second generation and the 1.5 generation, as differences in nativity and age at arrival can affect the ways in which they relate to the host country and thus influence the inclination to sustain transnational attachments (Rumbaut, 2002). The second generation is usually described as children of two immigrant parents who are born in the host country; whereas, the 1.5 generation describes those who immigrated to the host country at a young age (Rumbaut, 2002). However, academics are not consistent with the age of arrival that would be characteristic of the 1.5 generation. Rumbaut (2002) argues it is anywhere under 18 years of age, while others argue

it is between 6 and 18 (Bartley & Spoonley, 2008) or 6 to 13 years of age (Colombo, Leonini & Rebughini, 2009).

Kasinitz et al. (2002) studied the transnational practices among second generation youth in New York, through telephone surveys, as well as in-depth, open-ended, in-person interviews with five migrant groups. They also conducted a comparative analysis between the groups. The study found that the groups exhibited different patterns of transnational activity, however, in only a minority of cases did they find sustained commitments to maintaining transnational ties to their homelands, for transnationalism to blossom in the second generation. Portes (2001) argues that the rapid acculturation process in the US has led to the loss of parental languages among the second generation and claims that it is more likely that the transnational practices of the second generation is indirect. Rumbaut (2002) investigated whether attachments to the parental homeland are severed or sustained among the post-first generation immigrants, incorporating both interview and survey methodologies in his study, and found that the level of transnational attachments (such as visits and remittances) were under 10 percent.

The research on youth and transnationalism reveals that they are less likely to be involved in political and economic forms of transnationalism and instead are more likely to engage in social and cultural forms of transnationalism (Lauer & Wong, 2010). Most research on second generation youth have investigated transnational activities such as membership in religious and social groups, regular visits back to the home country and the role of parents in shaping independent identities. For example, Louie (2006) in her study of Chinese and Dominican second generation youth in the US looked at the role of parenting in forming independent identities within the context of a transnational social field. She found that, although both Chinese and Dominican families wanted to include their children in a transnational social field, the results

varied depending on family practices and parenting styles. It was found that open communication across generations was a factor that led to the Dominican respondents engaging in transnational practices, whereas there were minimal transnational practices found among Chinese families. Louie (2006) attributed this to the authoritarian style of parenting reflected among Chinese families. In a study conducted by Kobayashi and Preston (2007) of Hong Kong immigrants in Canada, they found that the relationships that second generation youth kept with their parents was one of the main reasons for engaging in transnational activities, especially for the purpose of prospective employment opportunities back home.

Haikkola (2011) studied the transnational practices among second generation children and youth in Finland and the implications of transnational networks. However, her study emphasized the role of physical mobility as an important feature of transnationalism. Through interviews, she found that transnational practices were guided by family social bonds and visiting back home facilitated the development of new relationships while provoking an interest in the home country (Haikkola, 2011). Other forms of transnational practices employed by her respondents were through frequent phone calling, e-mailing, and internet chats. Another interesting finding from her study was the fact that some of her respondents admitted to involuntary forms of transnationalism, due to the constant flow of information about the home country's political affairs into their homes, making it an unavoidable and involuntary engagement with the country of origin (Haikkola, 2011). Fitzgerald (2000) finds in his study of Mexican migrants in the US that, immigrant parents often sent their children back home for long periods of time as a way of instilling and retaining family and cultural values. The attempt of parents to keep their children connected to their homelands has some resilient effects on the second generation in engaging in transnational practices (Portes, 2001). Colombo, Leonini and

Rebughini (2009) argue that transnationalism does not necessitate actual participatory practices in the life of the home country and could instead be expressed through “curiosity, knowledge, and readiness to stand up for that country” (p. 56). Their study of second generation youth in Italy found that those with a fairly high cultural capital and who are well integrated in an ethnic network are more likely to engage in transnationalism, especially the 1.5 generation youth, as they are well integrated into the Italian society, yet retain a vivid memory of their home country.

Lee (2011) uses the concept of indirect transnationalism in her study of second generation Tongans in Australia. She studies transnational practices as measured through their involvement in contributing to family remittances, fundraising activities and religious donations. These indirect deeds ensures that second generation youth are involved in transnational connections with their homeland, which she adds, can include involuntary or forced transnationalism as well. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) also contend that those with indirect ties are still part of a broader transnational social field. The concept of a transnational social field may be occupied by migrants, but as Lee (2011) argues, it may be even more useful for their children.

Some researchers have found that transnational engagement among the second generation may increase and decrease according to life-cycle stages or as a result of particular incidents or crises (Somerville, 2008). For example, some may act within a transnational social field and engage in demonstrations, organizations and campaigns to influence the government of the host country to initiate actions at the local or international level (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). In this respect, I find it appropriate to refer to the political demonstrations of second generation Sri Lankan Tamils as a basis for the analysis of transnationalism. Regardless of the rate of frequency of transnationalism before and after the 2009 demonstrations, I argue that those second

generation Tamil youth who engaged in the demonstrations exhibited a reaction to civil injustice occurring in their homeland which I consider to be an act of transnationalism within a transnational social space. The fact that the second generation engaged in those events can be thought of as a form of expanded transnationalism in some instances. Expanded transnationalism, as described by Guarnizo, refers to the activities that occur occasionally, such as actions taken by individuals in response to political crises in the homeland (Levitt, 2001; Levitt & Waters; 2002).

Furthermore, Levitt and Waters (2002) mention that transnational practices among the second generation may be selective, meaning that they may not visit their home country on a regular basis and their commitments and activities may vary at different stages of their lives (Levitt, 2002). Transnational practices are also not static throughout the life cycle and may vary depending on the demands of work, school and family (Levitt, 2002). Jones-Correa (2002) notes that this kind of sporadic transnationalism may go unnoticed or may be underplayed in survey results like those reported by Kasinitz et al. (2002) and Rumbaut (2002), which may only be sufficiently captured by qualitative research.

The term “institutional completeness”, as described by Breton (1964), refers to ethnic communities that construct a diverse array of institutions within the community itself, in which members are able to utilize those ethnic institutions to satisfy most of their needs. Levitt (2002) extends this concept to argue that institutional completeness enables migrants, as well as the second generation to meet most of their needs within this social field. Her case study of three different groups of second generation children in the US revealed that children whose parents were not actively engaged in their ethnic “institutional completeness” were generally engaged in fewer transnational practices (Levitt, 2002). Contrary to Levitt’s findings, Louie (2006) and

Vickerman (2002) contend that one must be careful when making assumptions on a linear connection between transnational social spaces such as ethnic enclaves with institutional completeness, and transnationalism among the second generation. For example, second generation individuals from West Indian communities in New York claim an ethnic rather than transnational identity, as they do not necessarily involve themselves directly with the West Indies (Vickerman, 2002). Similarly, Louie (2006) found that the Chinese respondents from Chinese ethnic enclaves in New York did not reveal transnational attachment among the second generation. Therefore, growing up in an ethnic enclave does not necessarily mean that the second generation will engage in transnational practices (Louie, 2006; Vickerman, 2002).

### **Transnationalism and Identity**

Transnationalism and identity are concepts that cannot be separated, as immigrants' transnational networks are formed upon the perception that they share some form of common identity usually based on country of origin and the cultural traits associated with it (Vertovec, 2001). In addition, transnational activities affect the formation, negotiation and reproduction of identities within transnational social fields (Vertovec, 2001).

Considering that political activism among the second generation is a form of transnationalism, it is important to note the role of transnational social fields in shaping identity processes. Identities emerge and are modified, based on cross-border flows. Transnational communication not only facilitates the construction of identities but also their reconstruction. The identity expressions of the second generation reflect the transnational connections that make them possible; they are fluid and malleable, taking on new forms depending on the location of

the migrants and their social networks and the composition of these social networks in terms of nationality, ethnicity, and background (Somerville. 2008).

Earlier research focused on concepts of incorporation options which were limited to; either the second generation assimilating into society (Gans, 1979; Alba, 1985) or resisting it (Massey & Denton, 1993; Levitt & Waters, 2002). It was often assumed that as immigrants assimilate into the host society; their ethnic identities become less important, moving towards an Anglicization of identity (Somerville, 2008; Rumbaut, 1997). However, the degree to which second generation children are constructing their identities spanning across more than one border is less well documented in the literature. Using the political demonstrations as a starting point to my analysis of second generation transnationalism, I consider that the demonstrations were indicative of the fact that they were as much about politics in Sri Lanka as they were about identity in Canada.

Second-generation Canadians are generally exposed to two cultural frameworks at the same time; encountering Western values through peers and media, for instance, and the values from another culture, transmitted from parents and other members of the immigrant community (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). As such, members of the second generation have the potential to encounter a certain level of personal conflict in terms of identity, as they try to identify with and negotiate and reconcile both cultural norms and values (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009). Some studies indicate that in order for some individuals to conform to one culture, they would have to compromise the other culture, yet; on the other hand, it has also been found that being bicultural does not always have to end in conflict (Stroink & Lalonde, 2009).

The idea of biculturalism has gained remarkable attention in the literature on identity construction. According to Jambunathan, Burts and Pierce (2000), biculturalism refers to the “ability of a person to function effectively in more than one culture and also to switch roles back and forth as the situation changes” (p. 396). For example, individuals may identify differences in values and behaviours of the two cultures and transition flexibly between them (Haritatos & Benet-Martinze, 2002), enabling individuals to navigate through two cultural realms (Thompson, 2005). There is evidence to suggest that the second generation is far more dynamic and complex in identity constructions, as they do not necessarily choose to emphasize one identity over the other (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009). Identities are more fluid and multifaceted among the second generation, as they are selective in defining ethnic characteristics from social spaces in which they function, such as families, social networks and school or work environments (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf & Waters, 2004).

Ethnicity can also be situational (Sodhi, 2008). Second generation Sri Lankan Tamils experience a culturally divided lifestyle in which they are exposed to cultural traditions at home, yet spend most of their time absorbed into the dominant culture of the host country. Situational ethnicity provides the second generation the opportunity to select and discard various cultural values and traditions from both cultures (Sodhi, 2008). Postmodern perspectives of situational ethnicity and identity concede that one’s identity is not static and can be altered owing to the continuous interaction between the self and society (Hall, 1996).

In addition, individuals who are exposed to multiple cultures often develop hybrid identities (Ho, 1995). Hybridity refers to the juxtaposition of different cultures, creating hybrid identities as a result of displacement and transnational practices that are influenced by the host and home countries (Hall, 1998). Basically, exposure to numerous cultural experiences may in

fact encourage the second generation to cultivate situational bicultural identities during different stages in their lives (Sodhi, 2008).

This chapter provided a review of the literature on second generation transnationalism and identity construction. From these concepts and theories, we are better able to understand how transnationalism takes form among the second generation and the role of transnational social fields in shaping identity constructions. By applying a transnational social fields lens to the analysis of second generation Tamil youths' engagement in political transnationalism, it will help in exploring reasons why the second generation engages in transnationalism and its effect on identity. As found in the literature, not many studies have been conducted among Canadian second generation immigrants and this study aims to contribute to the literature through its analysis of political transnationalism among a particular group. The next chapter will outline briefly the context of migration of Sri Lankan Tamils to Canada.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Sri Lankan Tamils**

In order to study the transnational practices of the Sri Lankan Tamil community in Toronto, it is important to first consider the circumstances that brought this group to Canada. The aim of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of the conflict in Sri Lanka and the ensuing outmigration forming a Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, as well as provide a discussion on the political mobilization of the Tamil diaspora in 2009. This section will help develop an understanding of the context in which second generation Sri Lankan Tamil youth engage in transnationalism and identity construction within transnational social spaces.

#### **Overview of Sri Lanka's Civil War**

Sri Lanka, previously known as Ceylon gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948. Sri Lanka is differentiated along ethnic, linguistic, religious and regional lines with Sinhalese Buddhists making up the majority of the population, while Tamils are a minority (Sriskandarajah 2005; Wayland, 2005). Discriminatory policies of successive Sinhalese-dominated governments since Independence were enacted, which were unfavourable to the Tamil minority in terms of language, education and employment. Anti-Tamil violence and confrontation became common shortly after Independence and minority Tamils became cynical with conventional politics. In addition, the persistent denial by the Sri Lankan government to accommodate for the requests of Tamils led to a claim for autonomy and self-determination, with a desire to create a separate Tamil state that united all northern and eastern provinces, called Tamil Eelam (Wayland, 2004). The combination of many circumstances unfavourable to Tamils in Sri Lanka produced a sensitive and defensive national consciousness among the Tamil

minority who felt their cultural heritage was being threatened along with the suppression of their civil rights. After many years of non-violent mobilization by Tamils in Sri Lanka, the shift towards self-determination was imminent with the formation of the separatist movement, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) formed in 1976. Violent events between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE in 1983 marked the beginning of a full-fledged separatist civil war (Sriskandarajah, 2005).

### *Sri Lankan Tamil Migration*

The conflict resulted in massive displacements of Tamil civilians, as well as mass emigration of Tamils to India, Europe, North America and Australia. The estimated population of the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora is 700, 000, with Canada having the largest Sri Lankan Tamil population outside of Sri Lanka, consisting of about 400, 000 Tamils (Sriskandarajah, 2005). It should be noted that Canada designated the LTTE as a terrorist organization in 2007 as a result of its armed struggle against a nation-state. Although Tamils in Sri Lanka were deprived of their rights and discriminated in various settings, these factors in and of itself were not necessarily the prime reason for the emigration of Tamils from Sri Lanka (Velamati, 2009). The violence resulting out of the civil war led to more turmoil in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka, making it difficult to remain in the country. According to Velamati (2009), the migration of Tamils after 1983 can be categorized into three groups. First, the migration of skilled professionals and students was facilitated by the use of their education, knowledge and skills. Then it was refugees seeking asylum in other countries and finally those who were sponsored by the Tamil expatriates who were settled and established abroad.

## **Migration to Canada and Transnational Opportunities**

Although a small number of wealthy Sri Lankan Tamils immigrated to Canada well before 1983, the scenario changed drastically after the civil war began. After being turned away from Germany's restrictive immigration policy in 1985, Sri Lankan Tamils began migrating west to seek asylum in Canada where immigration and refugee policies were compassionate to the plight of Tamils entering Canada (Wayland, 2003). Between 1990 and 1999 Sri Lankan refugees became the single largest group seeking asylum in Canada (Sriskandarajah, 2005) with an average acceptance rate of 85 percent (Wayland, 2003). The majority of Tamils began settling in neighbourhoods in Toronto and some in Montreal. Tamils began forming ethnic enclaves and establishing Tamil-based organizations and businesses that promoted a strong Sri Lankan Tamil identity (Wayland, 2003).

The migration of Tamil immigrants and refugees from a place where they were unable to exercise their political rights, to a place where freedom of expression and equality is embraced, has profound impacts on their transnational activities. They are able to benefit from newfound freedoms and rights, allowing for the possibility of political mobilization in the host country to publicize and expose the plight of those affected in their homeland (Wayland, 2004). Similar to many modern Diasporas, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada not only established multifaceted linkages to strengthen the nexus between the diaspora and the former homeland, but established networks and successful businesses in their country of settlement. The development of Tamil businesses that include many community newspapers, radio stations and TV stations allows for the production of cultural capital, as well as opportunities for establishing relief efforts in Sri Lanka (Sriskandarajah, 2005). The resourcefulness of Tamils in Canada also became evident in the solidarity and pride they took in a Tamil identity, while the desire for the creation

of a separate homeland in Sri Lanka persisted. Tamils in Canada engaged in mobilizations in the form of marches, conferences, lobbying and advocacy in the mid and late 1990s, expressing the plight of Tamils in Sri Lanka (Wayland, 2003). These examples are indicative of the existence of transnational social fields, as members of the Tamil community engage simultaneously in more than one space that spans more than one geographic border. By establishing ethnic networks of social, cultural and economic capital in Canada, they are at the same time sustaining and reproducing a politicized identity of Tamil nationalism and developing transnational social fields that provide transnational opportunities for the second generation, such as the political demonstrations in 2009.

#### *Transnational Political Demonstrations of 2009*

The final stages of the civil conflict in Sri Lanka from late 2008 to May 2009 and the ensuing humanitarian concerns in the areas populated by the Tamils in Sri Lanka triggered a series of political mobilizations within the Tamil diaspora. The ethno-political violence between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE came to an end on May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2009. From January 2009 until the first week of June 2009, Sri Lankan Tamils living in major cities around the world including Toronto, staged demonstrations, stopping and diverting traffic flows, chanting slogans and holding sit-ins in public spaces, all in efforts to draw international attention to the human rights violations in Sri Lanka, which primarily took place in northern Sri Lanka. The political mobilization of Tamils in Toronto reached unprecedented heights and became one of the largest demonstrations in Canada (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010). Public spaces all over the Greater Toronto Area became hot spots for these protests, ranging from planned and carefully executed events, to spontaneous and unstructured mobilizations of Canadian Tamils of all ages.

The political demonstrations were reflective of active identity claims made by Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada. Many of those who organized the demonstrations were Tamil community groups, as well as university and high-school students who took part in spreading awareness about the humanitarian injustices in Sri Lanka. They took to the streets expressing their grievances and making several requests for the Canadian government and international community, including: the need for immediate cease fire, international and human rights intervention, humanitarian aid, a separate Tamil state, support for the LTTE, and to make their presence in Canada known to all citizens, as a means of exercising their rights. These Tamil Canadians capitalized on their rights as citizens of a democratic nation, while simultaneously engaging in transnational political activism to influence activities in the homeland (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010; Wayland, 2004).

There is a strong assumption among policy makers and academics to associate Tamil nationalism with the LTTE, which as Vimalarajah and Cheran (2010) argue is untrue. It should be noted that the Tamil diaspora is not a homogenous group, as there are varying divisions within the group in terms of political opinions and allegiances to the LTTE. The Tamil diaspora has often been accused of fuelling the conflict in Sri Lanka with its long distance nationalism and support for the LTTE. Although the LTTE probably would not have sustained itself without the financial, moral and uncritical support from the Tamil diaspora, the pursuit of independence precedes the LTTE, and even after the defeat of the LTTE, there still exists the chase and desire for an independent Tamil state among the Tamil diaspora (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010). The unravelling of the humanitarian catastrophe following the last stages of the war resulted in internal shifts and allegiances within the Tamil population dispersed around the world, as opponents and proponents of the LTTE came together to protest the humanitarian injustices

occurring in Sri Lanka. The union of groups with many internal differences within the Tamil community also created a space for the second generation to replenish long distance nationalism, as this group actively engaged in a high degree of cosmopolitanism, leading many protests and boycott movements (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010).

### *Transnational Political Activism among Second Generation Tamil Youth*

The mass flight of Sri Lankan Tamils out of their homeland resulted in the formation of a Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora comprised mainly of refugees and exiles who were compelled to leave Sri Lanka due to civil war and persecution and as such, even those migrants and especially their children, may be active players in the conflict they left behind (Wayland, 2004). The second generation thus experience, construct and negotiate identities that are a result of not only growing up in Canadian society but also being exposed to transnational social spaces in which identities can be altered based on cross-border flows of information (Brittain, 2009). The second generation within the Sri Lankan Tamil context mainly consists of children of those who were directly or indirectly affected by the civil war and were compelled to flee. Some were either born in Sri Lanka and arrived in Canada at a young age or were born in Canada. The first generation's transnational linkages to Sri Lanka creates spaces in which information about the homeland are constantly reproduced through various transnational actors such as family members who keep in contact with those back home and other agents from the Tamil community that play a part in transmitting social and cultural capital. As a result, Levitt (2004) argues that the second generation cannot be deemed as non-transnational even though they may not engage with the same intensity as their parents, since they are still exposed to such cross-border flows that span two nations. Exposure to transnational social fields in turn can also influence identity

construction, as the second generation can navigate through multiple identities at different times and in various situations.

The transnational social fields that are formed between the sending and receiving country transcend national borders because those who live within them are exposed to information that travels between two nations, cultural values, and patterns of human interaction that are influenced by more than one social, economic, and political system (Levitt & Waters, 2002). For example, an individual may participate in personal networks or obtain ideas and information that connect them to others in a nation-state and across the borders of a nation-state without ever having travelled. Therefore, by conceptualizing transnational social fields as transcending the boundaries of nation-states, individuals within these fields are influenced by many sets of laws and institutions in their daily activities and relationships, allowing them to respond to more than one state simultaneously (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). The second generation can continue to be active in the life of their homeland even as they are integrated into Canada, and they need not exchange one affiliation to a country over another but instead enact various aspects of their lives across borders (Levitt, 2002).

The transnational political mobilization of the Tamil diaspora all over the world in 2009 gained remarkable media attention, as groups took to the streets their collective identity so as to utilize their transnational opportunities to transcend state borders in order to influence the intensifying political climate in Sri Lanka. Tamils in Sri Lanka have a strong sense of identity but are restricted in expressing it due to fear of persecution and discrimination. On the contrary, Tamil migrants living abroad in western countries like Canada are able to demonstrate, explore and maintain their ethnic identity. As such, it becomes possible for members of the Tamil diaspora to form associations and raise families that strive to facilitate and support integration

into Canadian society, as well as maintain ties with the homeland, particularly through supporting the cause for liberation of Tamils in Sri Lanka (Wayland, 2004).

Given the fact that emigration from Sri Lanka occurred predominately during the 80's, the Tamil Canadian second generation is relatively young, most entering young adulthood. This is a pivotal stage in the lives of the second generation to examine transnationalism, especially after engaging in transnational political activism in which they have already acted within a transnational social space, while placed at an interesting nexus; mobilizing along identities of 'Canadianness' and 'Tamilness'. This paper will concentrate on second generation narratives of transnational behaviour and explore identity construction at times of political crises in Sri Lanka, as well as, exploring transnational practices and identity after the demonstrations. The following chapter will outline the methodological framework for this paper.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Methodology**

It is important to recognize that all methods produce results that come with some level of uncertainty, as well as each having its own advantages and limitations. Research that combines complementary methods will be better than research that relies on any one method, however, there may be practical challenges and constraints that make it difficult or it may be unfit for certain research topics to incorporate certain types of methodologies or more than one (Bennett & Elman, 2006; Poteete & Ostrom, 2008). For example, there may be limited available data on a certain topic or there may be difficulties in accessing the data, all of which may affect methodology choice. This chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct this study. This section begins with a discussion of the overall approach and justification for the use of a single qualitative method. Next, sampling, recruitment, data collection, researcher's role, and data analysis strategy will be discussed.

#### **Overall Approach and Justification**

A qualitative methodology was used to conduct this study. Qualitative research, like all research, attempts to strengthen the knowledge base of a respective field of research. In this instance, a qualitative approach was more appropriate and relevant to this study of transnational practices and identity construction, as it is explorative in nature and places emphasis on understanding people's behaviours and experiences. By utilizing a qualitative approach, it allows the researcher to study a particular issue in depth and with detail and does not restrict the study by predetermined categories of analysis which may occur in quantitative research designs (Patton, 1990). Another advantage of using a qualitative methodology is that it allows for

flexibility and modification of the research design if required (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

Flexibility allows the researcher to be active, so that participants can provide detailed answers or elaborate on certain matters, while the researcher is able to respond directly by altering subsequent questions if necessary (Holosko, 2005).

This study incorporated a semi-structured interview methodology to collect data. The data analysis was thus inductive, meaning; I did not test pre-conceived hypotheses. Rather, the analysis and interpretation was built on patterns and themes acquired from the data collected. This method allows for in-depth inquiry in order to understand the participants' decisions, attitudes, and behaviours regarding their involvement in transnational practices and identity construction. The analytical objectives were; to explore reasons for participating in the 2009 demonstrations, to describe variations in transnational practices and identity constructions after 2009, explain relationships to homeland and to describe individual experiences and group norms. In addition, a thorough review of the literature includes both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to explore the phenomenon and extent of transnationalism among the second generation. However, because transnational practices among the second generation are not static throughout the life cycle (Levitt & Waters, 2002), identifying transnational practices through survey and other forms of quantitative research methodologies may go unnoticed or underplayed and may only be adequately captured through qualitative research (Jones-Correa, 2002). In summary, a qualitative investigation allowed for an in depth inquiry about second generation Tamil youths' experiences with their political mobilization, subsequent acts of transnationalism and identity construction.

## **Sampling**

A purposeful criterion sampling procedure was used for this study. This procedure was appropriate for this study, as it allowed for extracting information from participants who meet the predetermined criteria for inclusion in the study. The study sample was confined to the second generation. I define second generation as those who were either born in Canada or came to Canada before the age of 13, as this is the time just before they begin high school and before they really begin to evaluate and question their identity. In addition, I define youth as between the ages of 18 and 25 and therefore, the study sample is restricted to participants aged 18-25 (at the least 15 years old, at time of demonstrations). Because this study uses the political demonstrations of the Tamil community as sites of analysis of transnationalism, the participants for this study had to also be Sri Lankan Tamil. This study sample was also limited to those who considered themselves engaged in the political demonstrations of 2009. The study did not accept participants who would consider themselves as not directly engaged or those who did not attend the political demonstrations. This is an important point of distinction that was required for this study because the study intends to interpret engagement in political activism that relates to home country politics as a form of transnationalism among the second generation. Engagement in the political demonstrations is an indication of a transnational practice which sets the stage for later investigation of transnationalism among the group post-demonstrations. It also allows for probing of identity (re) construction during and after their transnational political activism. All interested participants were assessed against these predetermined criteria before being included in the study. Overall, I conducted interviews with nine second generation Tamil youth who met the above mentioned criteria.

### *Recruitment Strategies*

Many of the political demonstrations of 2009 were organized and led by Tamil youth groups and students who spread awareness at their schools and universities. As such, referrals for participants for this investigation came from the University of Toronto at Mississauga (UTM) Tamil Students' Association (TSA). This source group was selected, as it allowed for narrowing the search by age and ethnicity, as members of TSA are Tamil and between the ages of 18 and 25 (as university students and alumni). A recruitment flyer was created and sent to the president of TSA to distribute to the members database. All interested participants were informed to contact the researcher directly for further information. In addition to recruitment from TSA, snowball method of sampling was also used to obtain additional participants from the recommendation of those who had already participated.

### *Participant Characteristics*

The overall goal was to choose an adequate sample size that was not too large to hinder deep, case oriented analysis and not too small to hinder gaining a thorough understanding of experiences. The goal within this study's methodology was to sample second generation Tamil youth who met the selection criteria. Participants were all second generation Tamil youth between the ages of 18 and 25, and were either born in Canada or arrived before the age of 13. A total of nine second generation Tamil youth were interviewed. They ranged in age from 21 to 25 years old and consisted of five males and four females. Three out of the nine participants were born in Canada, while the rest immigrated before 13 years of age. Participants lived in the Greater Toronto Area, including Toronto, Scarborough and Mississauga.

## **Data collection**

### *Interview process*

The recruitment method stated above ensured voluntary participation, as those wishing to participate had to contact the researcher directly via e-mail provided on the flyer or through referral. The research was introduced to the participant via e-mail, which included a brief summary of the study and the role of the participant and also confirmed eligibility to participate in the study. At the interview, the consent agreement form was introduced. The participant was informed that the study was completely voluntary and ensured confidentiality of the information they provide.

The data was collected via semi-structured interviews with the participants. The use of in-depth interviews was preferred in this study because it provides rich and vivid descriptions of the participants' perspective on their engagement in the political demonstrations and other questions asked. It is an effective tool for eliciting individual experiences, opinions and responses. This method also allows for an interpretive perspective, for example, it allows for the interpretation of connections and relationships a person perceives between particular events, phenomena and beliefs (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). In addition, employing a semi-structured interview style allows for the researcher to be active and flexible, so that the participant can elaborate in their responses and in turn, allow the researcher to respond immediately for clarification (or provide clarification for the participant or for probing) or tailor subsequent questions accordingly.

Each participant was interviewed individually, lasting about 1 to 1.5 hours. It was essential that the interview was conducted at a location where the participant and the researcher could talk in private so that the participants could feel comfortable to answer the questions

honestly. Interviews were held at a private room booked at a public library, at an agreed upon date and time. The interviews were taped using a digital audio-recorder, with the consent of the participant, in addition to taking down written notes. The questions in the interview pertained only to the interest of the research questions that were to be addressed in the study. Questions were open-ended and related to participants' background, such as place of birth, as well as questions regarding their involvement in the political demonstrations of 2009 and subsequent acts of transnationalism. In addition, questions were asked to probe matters of identity construction and processes of negotiating feelings of "Canadianness" and/or "Tamilness". There were no questions asked that inquired into participants' personal information including political opinions or affiliations. In addition, participants were ensured that their identification will be kept confidential in the write-up of this research paper. As such, this paper will use pseudonyms instead of using participants' actual names.

### **Researcher's Role and Positionality**

Positionality is an important component to the process of qualitative data collection. Positioning is a method that allows one to understand how people locate themselves within society or in conversations or interviews (Sriskandarajah, 2010). Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to the 'other' and these positions can change when they are influenced by factors such as education, gender, class, race and sexual orientation (Merriam et al., 2001).

My social identity presented opportunities and limitations. As an insider, when interviewing participants within my own ethnic community, it becomes important that I situate my own social position in relation to my study, as I have a certain degree of social proximity to

the participants. As a second generation Tamil Canadian, I had to position myself within a particular dynamic while conducting the interviews. One benefit of holding insider status is that it aided in data collection, analyzing interviews in the context of shared ethnic experiences and a sense of trust from the participants. As an insider, I may have allowed participants to speak up-front about how they felt, as they may have seen my study as contributing to the literature on Tamil Canadians or they may have assumed that I must have gone through similar experiences given my close social proximity to them as a fellow Tamil Canadian.

Earlier assumptions of interviewer status as insider or outsider rested on the notion that the insider had a better understanding of experiences within a group, whereas the outsider provided an objective portrayal of the experiences (Merriam et al., 2001). However, both of what the insider and outsider understand is valid, so long as the researcher acknowledges their social location and the limitations it may have on their scope (Narayan, 1993; Merriam et al., 2001). Keeping this in mind, I safeguarded against biases by being reflective throughout the process of data collection and interpretation, by taking into consideration my positionality and assumptions so that I am able to fairly represent the participants' perspectives.

### **Data analysis**

Studies that utilize a qualitative methodology usually produce data that has no direct formula for translation (Patton, 2002). The interview data is textual in nature, consisting of digital recordings, typed transcripts of digital recordings and interview notes. The data analysis phase of the research after data was collected included coding of themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Individual case analysis was conducted first in order to identify themes. Then, data analysis began to look for key phrases or themes that appear from reviewing and re-

reviewing the data from the interviews for a cross case analysis. A cross case analysis was used to examine the similarities and differences that emerged from the various interviews, and allowed for deeper interpretation of the findings.

## **Limitations**

The limitations to my methodology need to be discussed. Despite the many positive aspects of qualitative research methods, such as the detailed descriptions, the variations in perspectives and opinions it provides, there are a few shortcomings. In taking on the subject of transnationalism among the second generation, I accepted the task of conducting primary research through a qualitative approach. However, I do not claim generalizability of the results I present. The qualitative method allows me to explore the selected issue in depth and with detail; however, by doing so, the sample size was affected. The findings cannot always be representative or generalizable to all second generation Tamil Canadians. Perhaps including more diversity in terms of sample size, gender and age may have yielded varied results.

This chapter discussed methodology undertaken for this study and provided a rationale for the use of a qualitative approach to conducting this study. The explorative nature of this study helps explain the thoughts and reasoning behind attitudes and beliefs of second generation Tamil Canadians in engaging or disengaging in transnational behaviour post-2009. This section also discussed the sampling and recruitment strategies employed in this study, the role of the researcher, data collection and analysis, and finally limitations of the study. The rest of this paper will discuss the results of the study.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Findings**

The second generation is undoubtedly transnational; they are able to remain connected to both Sri Lanka and Canada by immersing themselves in transnational social spaces. However, the findings suggest that second generation Tamil youths' transnational practices are not static; they represent both expanded and selective forms of transnationalism which fluctuates with lifestyle demands and as a matter of personal choices. The same is true in terms of identity construction, as the findings suggest; identity is flexible, while the role of transnational social spaces in forming and informing identities seems to play a significant role.

In this chapter, the extrapolated findings and emerging themes will be discussed in detail. This chapter will be divided into a few sections and subsections by theme. First, it will discuss findings related to the reasons for engaging in political demonstrations in 2009. In this section, their very transnational behaviour of engaging in activities related to a cause for their homeland is inevitably linked to notions of identity and belonging to both nations, and both concepts will be addressed through the findings. The second section delves into subsequent and current participation in transnational activities since 2009 and the impact of it on their identity.

#### **Transnational Political Activism: 2009 Demonstrations**

##### *Reasons for Engaging In Transnational Political Activism*

The second generation Tamil youth who marched on the streets and chanted slogans articulating Tamil grievances are in a unique position, different from that of the previous generation. Protests and events held before 2009 associated with the recognition for self-determination and freedom for Tamil Eelam, generally involved many recent migrant youths'

participation, during the late 90's and early 2000's. However, the political mobilizations that took place starting in January of 2009 saw a different generation join the transnational political scene. This 'new' generation of young Tamils were either born in Canada or had left Sri Lanka at a very young age, with little to no experience or memories of discrimination or oppression in Sri Lanka (Nandakumar, 2011). These were the children of first generation Tamils who had experienced the discrimination and civil violence in Sri Lanka. This unique position of the second generation played a pivotal role in influencing the participation of many young Tamils in the demonstrations of 2009.

When asked about why participants engaged in demonstrations, varied responses came up; however, there was a shared theme that emerged among most of the responses, and that was the strong sense of attachment participants expressed towards Tamil people back home. For example, one participant stated that he participated in the demonstrations because:

I felt like it was a way in which I could support my fellow people that were back home and suffering. I wanted to get word out about what was happening in my homeland and educate others so that something could be done to bring things to a stop (Kajan, male, 24).

As indicated from the above response and from other participants, there was a strong sense of attachment to the Tamil people back home, with participants often using words such as; *my people, my country, my homeland*, etc., denoting a sense of connection to those back home.

Some participants also felt it was like an obligation that they attend the protests to express not only Tamil sentiments to the homeland and the war, but also to raise awareness against humanitarian injustices occurring in their homeland:

I felt like it was my duty and the least I can do for my country and the thousands of people who lost their lives. So I wanted the rest of the world to open its eyes to see the tragedy taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century right before our eyes (Prasad, male, 24).

I felt that was the most efficient way for me to act and try to bring some sort of solution in stopping the war, even though I was a citizen of Canada, I wanted to voice my opinion and I didn't want to sit at home and expect things to happen on its own you know. I was very involved in the demonstrations, I went to Ottawa, I was on the Gardiner, and I felt like I had no choice but to do so because I felt, if the world is going to hold a blind eye to the issue, I wasn't going to – whether it be Tamil, white, Muslims, Sinhalese who were being attacked (Siva, male, 25).

I ignored the events at first because of my belief that the war was in another country and there was no point bringing it to Canada. Later, after attending the events and the coverage grew worse, I began to identify with my heritage and acknowledge that as an individual, human rights had no borders and that as human being it was part of my responsibility to act regardless of the fact that I was supposedly Canadian (Nisha, female, 23).

It should also be noted that within the Tamil community and the diaspora at large, there are differences in allegiance to the LTTE. However, during the 2009 demonstrations, many opponents of the LTTE came together to stand in solidarity with Tamils from the community, as well as with Tamils in England to Tamils in Australia:

I never really supported the LTTE; I mean they have their own faults as well we can't deny that but I think the protests brought everyone together in one space, including people like me who didn't support the LTTE. People within our community have differences in their opinion and it was like they couldn't get along before. But the protest really brought everyone in unity. I felt like I belonged to something bigger. I don't know, I was happy to be around other Tamils struggling to bring light to a situation and we were all in solidarity, like we had each other's backs. I felt closer to my people. It was a good feeling (Rathika, female, 21).

Another strong reason, aside from a strong sense of responsibility and attachment to the homeland, was the influence of growing up in transnational social fields in which these second generation children grew up with cross-border flows of information about the civil conflict.

Growing up, my family here always talked about the conflict. My parents would call my family members back home to enquire about their safety and although my aunts and uncles back home didn't talk about the war, like when they spoke to me on the phone, I could still sense, like something wasn't right. My parents were very involved in that sense, they influenced me a lot. They shared a lot of their experiences and it's very sad. I

learned about the conflict from a very young age, so like I felt like I had to stand up to injustices happening back home to my people (Roja, female, 23).

Some of these young adults, like Roja, had grown up hearing parents' stories of dangerous voyages in order to escape persecution and the hardships of warfare. The transmission of first hand experiences of civil conflict and oppression from the first generation and other actors within transnational social fields, thus, had a substantial effect on the decision of many second generation Tamil youth to participate in transnational political activism.

In some instances, those who were not exposed overtly about parents' experiences were in fact directly influenced by their parents to attend the protests:

I became involved through my parents who had actually guilt tripped me into finally attending a demonstration and I later continued to attend after I became aware of the atrocities that were ongoing in the country. My parents encouraged me to attend an event and from there on after I went of my own volition (Nisha, female, 23).

The first few protests, I went along because my parents did. I wasn't involved nor was I interested at that time. There were no particular people or person that influenced my participation aside from my parents. I felt I was doing my part (Meena, female, 22).

As seen from the responses, there is a variation in reasons as to why the second generation got involved in the demonstrations. However, as mentioned before, there was an underlying theme of Tamil nationalism that emerged among the responses. The participation of many second generation Tamil youth in the political mobilizations can also be understood as a form of long distance nationalism. Long distance nationalism is a form of nationalism that is entrenched in transnational networks, in which an ideology of belonging and longing links people from various geographic places to an ancestral territory and its politics (Fouon & Glick-Schiller, 2002). Long distance nationalism exists beyond imagination or sentiments and can lead to action, such as political mobilizations. Fouon and Glick-Schiller (2002) argue that long

distance nationalists may fight, kill and die for an ancestral homeland in which they have never stepped foot in or lived in. Many of the second generation that protested are able to take action on behalf of a cause or on behalf of Tamils in Sri Lanka, while simultaneously conducting their daily lives in Toronto.

Respondents also stressed a cosmopolitan view of human rights and the need to stand in solidarity with Tamils all over the world, and in Sri Lanka. The influence of a transnational social space while growing up has a significant impact on some participants' decision to demonstrate. The transmission of information on homeland politics, experiences and communications spanning nation borders contributed to the choice to partake in political transnationalism. In addition, a few participants stated that the dynamics of the demonstrations at the time provoked them to initiate renewed contact with their relatives back home through the help of their parents. The social and political affairs of their ancestral homes and the amount of ideas and practices operating within transnational social fields thus influence their social and political engagements related to Sri Lanka and the civil war.

### *Identity Construction during Protests*

In this section, I discuss the findings on identity construction among the participants while demonstrating. Literature on identity and transnationalism reveals that, during times of crises or change in the homeland, groups and individuals in the host country can recover a sense of identity with the homeland (Sheffer, 2003). Crises in the homeland, such as what happened in the final stages of war in Sri Lanka, provides an opportunity for those belonging to a transnational social field (including those who previously never identified or participated in transnational activities), to mobilize for a cause related to an ancestral homeland (Jones-Correa,

2002; Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). This was exhibited by second generation Tamil youth who mobilized towards a solution for the war at 'home'. As one youth puts it:

I wasn't very involved in the politics of Sri Lanka before the protests and stuff. I had a certain level of understanding of what was happening back home, but the final stages of the war were really intense and I felt the need to do something because of all the media coverage and all that. It was very disturbing. It's weird; I almost felt this resurgence of being Tamil. People who know me, know that I don't really care for the politics of a faraway land like Sri Lanka, but when things back home were getting bad, I had to do my part. When I was protesting I felt like I was showing other Canadians who I was. I mean, who we are and why we're protesting. I felt proud to be Tamil and I wanted so badly for the war to stop and my people to be free (Gautham, male, 22).

Participants were asked whether they felt more Tamil or more Canadian while demonstrating and how they negotiated their identities during that time. Results revealed a sway towards feeling *more* Tamil while demonstrating, but nevertheless mentioned that they still are Canadian. Many did express feeling more Tamil, but at the same time they also mentioned that the demonstrations allowed them to assert both identities:

I felt more Tamil while demonstrating because I was supporting the Tamil community but I was not confused about my identity or how I felt because I consider being Tamil and Canadian both a part of my identity (Meena, female, 22).

I felt in between both Tamil and Canadian because since I was Tamil I wanted to make a change to my country and since I was Canadian I had the right to stand up for what I wanted and had the freedom of expression (Prasad, male, 24).

The difficulty in trying to answer the question as to whether they identify as Tamil or Canadian demonstrated that the participants are well aware of their bicultural identities and do not wish to prioritize one over the other. The process of defining themselves in a way that captures both their emotional connection and belonging to their ancestral homeland and their emotional connection to Canada is influenced by social factors (Somerville, 2008).

Roja stated that the chance to demonstrate was a chance for her to declare the other half of her identity:

I did feel more Tamil while protesting because I was surrounded by Tamil people and it felt like we all connected. I took to the streets my identity as part Tamil and part Canadian, but I felt more Tamil 'cause I was protesting for my people and with my people. It was like a chance to express the other half of my identity. I am still Canadian, but while on the streets I did feel a lot more Tamil, I chanted, I carried flags and I expressed who I was. I am still Canadian though. I mean if this was Sri Lanka, we wouldn't be able to march on the streets, so I am thankful to be in a country where I can stand up for a cause affecting my homeland (Roja, female, 23).

The participants seemed to perceive Canadian identity in terms of the freedoms and opportunities made available to them.

On the contrary, some respondents expressed feeling less Canadian while they demonstrated:

I definitely felt out of place, I definitely didn't feel like a Canadian citizen. The reason being, I was in Ottawa and as I was protesting and we were being taken pictures by the RCMP, and as a Canadian I know that I could have been like, 'hey why are you taking pictures of me, is there any legal legislations allowing you because I'm just exercising my rights to protest in this country'. I almost felt like they were labeling me as a Tamil Tiger and there was a disconnect right there... We had no acknowledgement from the Canadian government saying we should be doing a lot more. I pay taxes just like every other Canadian citizen and I felt like, yes, this may not be a Canadian issue but at the same time, I feel like it was a Canadian obligation to stand up against human rights abuses happening abroad. I know I am a recent immigrant, my parents are recent immigrants and we may be labeled as minorities, but now I feel more pressure to assimilate into society (Siva, male, 25).

Rathika felt that she was Canadian but the negative images portrayed by the media and non-Tamils made her feel distanced from her Canadian identity:

I felt less Canadian though 'cause the negative reactions we were getting from other Canadians made me feel like this wasn't really home. That made me definitely feel more Tamil. They can block the streets for sporting events and international summits or whatever, but it becomes a problem when minorities demonstrate for the lives of their loved ones back home. I definitely felt like an outsider (Rathika, female, 21).

Yon (1995) contends that identity construction is mediated through many patterns of power. Marginalized identities can thus be constructed as a response to racism or exclusion. The political demonstrations were often casted by a shadow of doubt by popular discourse as to whether or not Tamils protesting were there for humanitarian concerns or to support the so-called terrorist organization of the LTTE. The “othering” of Tamils by media and other Canadians can thus create feelings of alienation, as Rathika felt while protesting, contributing to feelings that the Tamil identity was a marginalized identity in Canada.

Although participants felt they did not have to choose between being either Tamil or Canadian, the responses still revealed a sense of feeling *more* Tamil while they demonstrated. This can be attributed to the influence of the transnational social field in which they were demonstrating. As mentioned before, the political demonstrations can be understood as constituting a transnational social field which contains organizations, social networks and experiences that also produce categories of identity that are attributed to or chosen by individuals or groups (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). When participants described that they felt more Tamil while demonstrating, it can be understood as reflecting ways of belonging, as describe by Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004), in which they enact an identity that exhibits a conscious connection to a particular group, in this case, the Tamil community.

For the second generation, these demonstrations were spaces in which they were able to express and consider feelings of belonging and identity, not just to one nation, but acting within a transnational social field that incorporated both Canada and their homeland. It allowed for the assertion of multiple identities - as Tamil, Canadian, Tamil-Canadian, female, male, etc., in addition to exercising agency in the host country in attempts for change in the home country. Transnational social fields influence identity constructions and allows for hybrid identities to

form. Hybridity and transnational social fields challenge conventional models of immigrant assimilation and integration (Vimalarajah & Cheran, 2010). It is difficult to identify as half Tamil and half Canadian all at once at any given point in time, as found from this study. Identity is formed and informed by situational contexts, social networks' and of course, transnational social fields. Transnational political activism of the second generation and their assertion of more than one identity is a reminder that the second generation need not adhere to a single identity.

### **Transnationalism Post-2009 Demonstrations**

In this section I discuss the findings on transnationalism three years since the demonstrations. The purpose of this was to explore whether or not transnational practices since the 2009 political demonstrations have been continuous and whether identity formations have shifted since then. I asked participants how involved they have been in Sri Lankan politics since 2009, whether they have been following news on post-war situations in Sri Lanka and the connection or disconnection they feel to Sri Lanka after the war ended. The purpose of these sets of questions was to probe further into the dynamics of second generation transnationalism and to identify selective and expanded forms of transnationalism.

#### *Expanded and Selective Transnationalism*

When asked about whether or not the participants had a different sense of being Canadian and Tamil after the demonstrations, the responses were varied. Some participants felt a stronger sense of being Tamil after the events, for example Nisha points out that engaging in the political demonstrations substantiated her feelings of "Tamilness":

I have a stronger belief in maintaining my heritage after the protests and continue my understanding of the language and remaining interested in Sri Lankan politics (Nisha, female, 23).

Others felt no different before and after the demonstrations:

No, I feel just as Tamil and Canadian than I was prior to the events since it doesn't change who I am or what I came from and I am still proud to be Tamil and Canadian (Prasad, male, 24).

I feel I've developed stronger ties with both the Canadian and Tamil aspects of my identity (Meena, female, 22).

One respondent reported feeling less Tamil and more Canadian now:

It definitely has changed, in the sense, different being a Tamil, now that I see the groups that were very involved during that time, I almost distanced myself, now I am a lot more away from the political scene. The reason being, they don't promote my views, so I don't want to be part of a group that has a different goal. So I feel left behind in a social situation where I think in a different view. I think the Tamil identity is very attached to the struggle, and I believe we need to move past that now. A lot of people are still on that mission to create a separate homeland.

I feel like right now I've become more Canadian just because I'm in a work field and my perspectives are changing and I am striving to become a productive Canadian citizen. I was more of a liberal, and I feel like I'm shifting towards Harper. Economic settings and my age, the situation and work setting that I am in now affects my lack of attachment to the social and community involvement.

(Siva, male, 25)

The response above draws attention to many different issues related to transnationalism. First, it is obvious that transnational practices among the second generation are not static. Second, it is a matter of choice that these second generation individuals decide whether or not to engage in transnational practices, in terms of following post-war political situations in Sri Lanka. In general, results were varied in how engaged participants were in Sri Lankan politics:

Yes I continue to follow the news in Sri Lanka when I can and I do so for my own benefit to remain knowledgeable of my own heritage (Nisha, female, 23).

Yes I keep up to date by internet or TV and do so because I am interested how everything is going to be rebuilt there and if things would change for the better (Prasad, male, 24).

Yes I am, and I read articles and follow the news. I also talk to family in Sri Lanka. I follow the news because I care about that people and the country (Meena, female, 22).

Some participants on the other hand were not very engaged and felt there was no point in following post-war situations:

I have followed a few things but not now as quite often as I used to. One thing that makes me not want to is, every time I check the news article there's always some sort of oppression taking form again, there's no progression, there have been a lot more international involvement, but there still seems to remain new forms of oppression (Siva, male, 25).

I haven't really been following the situation there. I think I did immediately after the war ended, but in recent times no. simply because I don't have the time to really follow what's happening and I haven't really heard anything drastic happening there so, like it's just a relief that the war is over (Gautham, male, 22).

Some participants have engaged in transnationalism through physical mobility, visiting Sri Lanka after the war ended. They describe their experience:

I visited Sri Lanka in 2010 after the end of the war and I felt more closer to the country after my most recent visit because I was able to understand my position and relation to the country. I felt connected because I had visited the land on more than one occasion and the war nor the protests really did not influence me as much as my most recent visit to the country did (Nisha, female, 23).

After visiting the country after the war I felt sad about the destruction that has occurred on such a beautiful island. I went to see the base of the Tamil leaders and different ships and guns used. I felt weird seeing the Sri Lankan army all over the place. It felt as if they were showing that they were in charge of the country and had to demonstrate their power. I still feel connected to Sri Lanka as it is still my homeland and I want to visit it again (Kajan, male, 24).

As discussed in the literature review, physical mobility is not a requirement for transnationalism, especially among the second generation. However, those who have visited their homeland may continue maintaining ties with relatives after visiting. For example, a few participants also stated emailing and Skyping with relatives back home from occasional instances to once every two weeks, especially after most recent trips to Sri Lanka where familial ties were re-established and continues to be maintained across borders.

As mentioned in the literature review, the second generation engages and disengages in different forms and intensities of transnational practices at different stages (Levitt, 2002; Vertovec, 2009). The idea that transnational practices among the second generation fluctuates

according to demands of life was also evident in this study. When asked to describe how engaged they were in keeping touch with family back home, engaging in Tamil events related to the conflict (such as Maveerar Naal, which is an annually celebrated day devoted to commemorating fallen heroes, and other demonstrations expressing Tamil grievances), and overall participation in the Tamil culture, most of the respondents reported having little to no time for such transnational activities to occur, revealing a selective nature in their transnational behaviour:

I do wish I had more opportunities – well no, I do have opportunities to engage in Tamil events and stuff, but I'm so busy in trying to advance my career goals that I mingle far less within my Tamil community. I mean, I wouldn't say I'm totally out of touch with what's happening back home and talking to relatives, but at this point in time, it's far less (Ravi, male, 25).

I would say, I am much less involved in what's happening back home and in general with things related to the Tamil struggle. My participation in such political and cultural events has been minimal due to my own personal circumstances, like being busy with post-grad studies, which require me to travel to the States and Canada so I'm not really in the situation right now to focus on keeping in touch with my Tamil side (Prasad, male, 24).

I have participated less, mostly because I believe there are very few worthwhile, meaningful events that reinforce Tamil culture, and am therefore more selective about what events I participate in (Meena, female, 22).

I have gone to Maveerar Naal nearly every year and I go to show respect to those who have passed away from the war and have been gravely effected. I have participated in Kalaikal (Tamil inter-university dance competition) but have since reduced my participation due to school and work (Kajan, male, 24).

Of course there were some variations in the answers. Others reported continued engagement in cultural events and expressing their Tamil identity, through dance, religion and cultural functions. The varied responses on the level and intensity of subsequent forms of transnationalism after the demonstrations parallel many findings in the literature which support the notion of selective and expanded forms of transnationalism. The fact that these participants

engaged in the demonstrations of 2009 is reflective of transnationalism from *below*, operating within transnational social fields, appealing for socio-political change in Sri Lanka. Three years after the demonstrations, this study has revealed mixed findings, in that, some engaged in transnational practices while others did not, and the intensity and frequency varied over the three years. This process is indicative that transnationalism is very much present in the lives of the second generation, but is also a matter of choice and life style demands. The second generation is very dynamic and is selective in the activities they engage in. Those who engaged in the political demonstrations of 2009, and only somewhat participated thereafter, in any transnational activity, can be said to have taken part in an expanded form of transnationalism. In that sense then, Tamil transnational political practices, such as the 2009 demonstrations, fall under the grouping of expanded transnationalism, especially when examining transnationalism in the current post-war situation.

#### *Identity Construction Post-Demonstrations*

As is evident from the findings above, it is difficult to separate notions of identity from transnational practices. The second generation takes part in transnational activities within transnational social fields, which influence identity construction and expression. At the same time, they also take part in the mainstream Canadian society which shapes another part of their identity.

These second generation Tamil youth experience fluid identities that are realized through transnational relations with friends and family members in two different countries. Participants specified how they felt in terms of their identities “right now”, indicating that identities in fact do shift over time. Two factors which influence these changes in identity are; shifting social contexts and social networks (Somerville, 2008). This in turn can affect their level of

engagement in transnational practices. For example, as noted from the above results, some participants are at a stage in their lives where career and academic demands impede their opportunities to engage in transnational activities. As such, it also has an impact on their identity.

When I was young, I would say I was very concerned about you know trying to keep my identity. And during university times, I was part of the TSA, so there I wanted to represent our culture and try to you know bring more awareness to the Canadian society. But as of right now, ever since I got a job, I feel like I need to be more Canadian and try to adapt to the western culture to enhance myself and excel in the corporate world. I feel like I am trying to distance myself from my culture. I would say it is almost purposeful just to fit into the environment of a corporate structure and feel that my cultural conversations with others, it doesn't really hit the right attraction, so I feel like I need to be more of a westernized citizen and talk about golfing and social lifestyles in order to fit in and excel myself career wise (Siva, male, 25).

Interestingly, he points out that, before he identified much more with his Tamil identity, but as of “right now” he identifies more with his Canadian identity, which he seems to understand as conforming to a neo-liberal framework. This is an example of shifting social contexts and how it can impact identity at different stages of life, as he prefers to take on a more “Canadian” identity in the context of work.

Another participant describes his experience of having his social network and context influence his identity:

Things that make me feel Canadian, is like watching or playing hockey with other Canadians, not necessarily Tamils. Sometimes I feel more Canadian during times of the Olympics like when Canada won the gold medal in men's and women's hockey. I felt very proud to be Canadian. I have a diverse group of friends, in fact I'd say I have more non-Tamil friends and when I'm with them, I feel more Canadian (Gautham, male, 22).

However, there still remained a notable reluctance among participants to choose a single ethnic identity over the other:

I express my Tamil identity at home mainly and sometimes with the Tamil friends and family by speaking Tamil, watching Tamil movies, going to Tamil gatherings and engaging in conversations of recent event in Sri Lanka. I express my Canadian identity by speaking English the main language spoken here in Canada. During winter time I go

skating and watch hockey which is one of the sports that Canadian excel in and are known for (Prasad, male, 24).

I continue to speak the language and force myself to speak the language at home so that I continue to be in touch with it and I do keep abreast of the news and watch Tamil cinema along with partaking in the necessary religious and cultural events as appropriate (Nisha, female, 23).

I don't really know how to identify myself. I feel both Tamil and Canadian right now. Um, I think it really depends on where I am and who I'm with, to be honest. Sometimes I can be with my family or be at the temple or cultural events, even while I'm dancing, I feel very Tamil. Other times, I mean like majority of the time I feel Canadian 'cause I'm interacting in the mainstream, like when I'm at work. It depends. Like I can't always express my Tamil identity at work and I have certain cultural expectations and traditions that I follow when I'm at home, where I can't always behave so westernized you know. I guess I use each of it to my advantage whenever I need to (Roja, female, 23).

Roja's response reflects the intricacies of gender roles and expectations that are reproduced within transnational social fields. Women and men participate in transnational networks which connect them within social fields that include hierarchical practices and ideologies of gender which can be further reinforced through cross-border flows of ideas of cultural norms and traditions (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

The above responses also bring up an interesting notion about identity and the fact that the second generation does not have to choose one identity over the other. These second generation youth continue to maintain several identities that connect them to different nations, while being exposed to transnational social fields in which cross border flows induce feelings of connection to the homeland even though they engage in mainstream activities in Canada. Being exposed to various cultural experiences has encouraged individuals in the second generation to develop situational bicultural identities during different stages in their lives (Ho, 1995).

Situational ethnicity allows individuals to select and discard certain attributes of both cultural values and traditions and that was very evident in this study, especially when it comes to work place settings and interacting within social networks. Hybrid identities are mixed identities

derived from different cultural backgrounds and as Plaza (2006) argues, hybrid identities are contingent, fluid, volitional and dynamic, and the second generation is in a position to engage and express these identities in different ways at different times.

In addition, when participants were asked who they believed influences their transnational practices the most, participants stated the role of their parents in emphasizing the importance of preserving a Tamil identity and engaging in practices that connect them to their homeland:

My parents greatly influence my transnational practices because it remains an important part of their heritage and their identity (Nisha, female, 23).

My biggest influence on my transnational practice are my parents and family since we taught me majority of the things I know about my culture and tradition and what it means to be Tamil through conversations and lectures and readings. Also religious events at temples and even weddings teach me a lot about our Tamil tradition/culture by again lecture or observing what people do at such occasions. My parents constantly remind me that I shouldn't forget about my roots. I think it's important to learn and keep in touch with your culture, well for me, 'cause I want to pass the values and traditions on to my kids too (Prasad, male, 24).

I'd say my parents and also my grandparents too influence my participation in Tamil culture and teach me the things they want me to learn. Growing up too, my grandparents were a big influence, they took care of me. I think I've learned a lot from both my parents and grandparents and it's good because I'd like to teach my children and hope that my parents would too (Roja, female, 24).

Roja brings up a unique perspective on the role of transnational social fields and generational transmission of cultural identity. As argued by Levitt (2009), many households function transnationally across generations and whether or not the second generation continues or severs some kind of cross-border connection depends heavily on the degree to which they are brought up in transnational spaces (Levitt, 2009; Abelman, 2002). Participants were all on the same page when it came to preserving the Tamil culture and identity, as they felt it was important to keep a Tamil identity for not only the sake of parents, but also to pass on Tamil

culture and identity to future generations. According to Pries (2004), the second generation adopts transnational strategies wherein they engage or disengage according to individuals' needs and wants at different ages. For example, at the point of marriage or raising children, those who showed little interest for an ancestral homeland before can activate cultural connections within a transnational social field, whether in search of a spouse or to transmit traditions and values to their children (Espiritu and Tran 2002). This point seems to be resonating among the participants, who are determined to pass on values and traditions from their Tamil culture.

The next section will discuss the findings together with findings from the literature and will conclude with future directions and concluding remarks.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Discussion**

Second generation Tamil youth are positioned in spaces where they encounter a range of different and competing influences, in addition to their own real and imagined perceptions about those influences. They are able to identify with cultural influences within different social fields and can act upon them at any given time or place, if they wish to do so.

This study emphasized the perspective of transnational social spaces in influencing identity and transnational practices among the second generation. As such, by using the transnational social spaces perspective, it helps to understand the reasons as to why the second generation cares to participate in political activism related to an ancestral homeland (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004). In addition, the political demonstrations can also be understood as constituting a transnational social space in which many actors within the Tamil community, including; family members and friends, media, symbols, images, organizations, institutions, and other social networks, function and circulate information that crosses national borders and floats within this transnational social space. These various agents and actors within this space are engaging in transnationalism; as such opportunities and actions taken within the space connect individuals through direct and indirect relations across borders, while they simultaneously engage in actions of the host country, such as carrying on their daily routines, as well as demonstrating on Canadian soil for a cause related to their homeland. For example, by engaging in the political demonstrations, the second generation entered this transnational social space in which they are able to learn and share experiences and stories of other members of the same space who have direct contact with and receive information from relations back in Sri Lanka. They are exposed to cultural, social and political ties within these spaces that cut across

geographic and national boundaries, linking them to their homeland. At the same time, these second generation children are able to exercise their rights as Canadian citizens and engage in demonstrations, as well as other activities that pertain to the host country, such as contributing to the economy through work or participating in the Canadian education system.

Both migrants and refugees, and their children continue to participate in cross-border political practices related to their home country. In the same way, second generation Tamil youth engaged in the political demonstrations of 2009 for several different reasons.

This study revealed three central factors that emerged across the sample as to why they engaged in political activism directed towards Sri Lanka. All three themes underscored the importance of transnational social spaces. The first reason that emerged was a strong sense of attachment and belonging to a Tamil homeland and its people, referred to as Tamil Eelam in the Tamil struggle for autonomy. Although many of the participants have not visited Sri Lanka ever, or since immigrating, they still felt a strong sense of belonging. This, as discussed in the findings represents a sense of long distance nationalism that is developed through the circulation of information and resources within transnational social fields, in respects to the struggle for autonomy for Tamils in Sri Lanka and abroad. These cross-border flows of information allow individuals to connect to a way of belonging to their Tamil homeland through either memory or imagination, even if they have never physically been back home (Levitt & Glick-Schiller, 2004).

Secondly, there was a sense of obligation to fight against humanitarian injustices occurring in the homeland. Participants again expressed feelings of attachment and belonging to not only their homeland and to the Tamil people, but also their outlook on humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism reflected an attachment to Canadian values of freedom, equality and opportunity.

Finally, the influence of transnational social fields is most apparent when participants mentioned the impact their parents and other actors had on their decision to participate in the demonstrations. Growing up within transnational social fields where the first generation shared stories of oppression and civil turmoil in Sri Lanka, the second generation is able to vicariously experience and develop a sense of cosmopolitanism and longing to redeem a homeland to their people. Furthermore, even if the participant did not heed interest to homeland politics, the fact that their parents or other members of the family still maintained high levels of transnationalism, via remittances, contacts, travel, etc., they are nevertheless interacting within a transnational social field through which they are exposed to information, resources and identity flows (Levitt, 2009). While the participant may not have identified with or acted on situations based on those previous ties initiated by the first generation, the fact that they belong to the same transnational social field keeps them cognizant and connected so that they can take action, if events, such as the final stages of the civil conflict, prompt them to do so (Levitt, 2009).

Another goal of this paper was to examine identity construction among the second generation who encounter two different cultures and interact in various social spaces. The results revealed that, participants felt *more* Tamil while demonstrating because they were surrounded by other Tamil members from the community. Nevertheless, some still did not deny that they still held onto a Canadian identity simultaneously. The reason being was that they felt they were exercising their right as Canadian citizens to protest on Canadian soil, for a cause that was affecting their homeland. Some second generation youth who belong to transnational social fields do not choose between the home and host country. Rather, they attempt to find a middle ground, although a weak middle ground, between the competing ideologies, resources and limitations flowing within both social fields, and position themselves effectively when need be

(Levitt, 2009). However, some participants did admit to feeling *less* Canadian while protesting, due to negative experiences with how they were perceived by other Canadians and the media, as well as by the failed expectations they held about Canada's support in their protesting.

### **Expanded and Selective Transnationalism**

At the outset, this paper explained that the political demonstrations of 2009 are to be understood as an example of transnationalism among the second generation. Another aim of this paper was to identify subsequent forms and kinds of transnationalism since 2009. Although there were minor individual differences, for the most part, the bigger picture emerged to reveal that participants were less engaged in transnational practices since 2009. In retrospect, the 2009 political activism of second generation Tamil youth can be understood then, as a form of expanded transnationalism. Expanded transnationalism involves occasional transnational practices among migrants, such as in response to crises or natural disasters affecting the homeland (Levitt, 2009). The intensifying situation in the last stages of the war commencing from January 2009 prompted many second generation Tamils to engage in the political demonstrations, yet, three years later, this study revealed that there was very little engagement in post-war news or events. Itzigsohn et al. (1999) would also categorize this form of transnationalism as *broad*, signifying that the transnational practice can involve occasional and sporadic participation.

Another theme that emerged from analyzing data collected on post-2009 transnationalism among the sample was the life course perspective found in the literature on second generation transnationalism. This perspective holds that transnational practices among the second generation are not static throughout the life cycle and the level and intensity of individual engagement fluctuates according to different stages of life (Levitt, 2002). This was confirmed

when participants admitted to reduced levels of participation in transnational activities due to demands of career and academics. Thus, the second generation is selective in their transnational practices, where they can pick and choose when and how often they want to engage in transnationalism.

### **Fluidity of Identity**

A transnational social field perspective also allows for the second generation to interact with multiple identities. In terms of identity construction after the 2009 demonstrations, the results revealed that participants preferred a hyphenated identity as Tamil-Canadian. Although they were more selective in their transnational practices and more involved in the mainstream Canadian society, they still belonged to a transnational social field, whether at home or in other contexts, in which information on Tamil culture and identity continuously circulates. As such, participants were reluctant to leave out a Tamil identity and did not wish to prioritize one over the other. As the literature on identity among the second generation demonstrates, these young adults are able to navigate through different cultural realms and as such, their social contexts and networks greatly determine their identity, indicating that, similar to the dynamic nature of transnationalism, identity too is not static and can ebb and flow at different stages of life.

Although the second generation is selective in its transnational practices, a social field perspective also differentiates between *ways of being transnational* and *ways of belonging transnationally*. For example, some may engage in certain social relations and practices but not with the associated identities, which allows them to experience such practices within social fields without having to actually identify to a particular cultural or identity label. On the other hand, ways of belonging denotes practices that enact identities which illustrates a conscious connection to a particular group, such as when engaging in the protests (Fouron & Glick-Schiller, 2002).

Ways of belonging are concrete and not symbolic and can include flying a flag or choosing a particular kind of cuisine. Members within transnational social fields combine ways of being and ways of belonging differently in different contexts which were evident in this study as well. Some participants are exposed to households which are saturated with particular flows of content related to the Tamil identity or the homeland, or may eat certain foods or follow certain traditions because that is what their family has always done. In that sense, they are expressing a transnational way of being.

It was apparent that the participants understood that in order to be transnational they had to take on activities in Canadian society, as well as activities that connect them to their homeland. Such activities are reflective of different forms and intensities of transnationalism at different stages in their lives. This is the context in which the second generation experience transnationalism. How and when the second generation participates in certain elements of their cultural stock ranges greatly by group. For example, Kasinitz et al. (2008) found more transnational activism among their Dominican, West Indian and South American participants and further variations between gender, social relations and language preference arose. There are many factors that influence the transnational practices of the second generation, and this study provided one such perspective – that of transnational political activism.

### **Future Directions**

This research paper provided an understanding of transnationalism among second generation Tamil youth and how identity is constructed and re-constructed within social fields. Although this paper contributes to Canadian literature on second generation transnationalism and identity construction, there is still room for advancement. A larger sample that incorporates more

diversity in terms of age, gender, region, religion, and language proficiency can yield different results in levels of transnational attachment.

This study looked at a particular population of immigrants in which the first generation fled persecution and oppression in the homeland. This study has found the influence of first generation stories and flows of information about the homeland which greatly impacted the second generation's decision to engage in political activism. However, the dynamics of this group's transnational politics has started to change since the end of the war which deserves a lot more attention in the literature. Future studies could examine in detail any residual effects of Tamil Eelam sentiment among the first generation that further influences transnationalism among the second generation.

This paper also touched on a life course perspective of transnationalism, future studies can ambitiously track such life course transnational activations among the second generation and document the fluidity of transnationalism, generational influences and identity construction throughout the life course of a group. In that sense, a study that incorporates the role of multiple generations within the household can further our understanding of transnational social spaces and transnational practices across generations.

Future research can build from this study to combine factors that can affect political activism or other forms of transnationalism among the second generation, such as the influence of Canadian national policies such as multiculturalism or national security ideologies. Future studies can also examine the impact of popular discourse on identity construction and expanded transnationalism among the second generation and how negative portrayals of certain marginalized groups affect their identity construction and subsequent transnational practices. In

addition to looking at Canadian popular discourse, studies can also examine ethnic media productions within the Tamil community and how that has impacted identity constructions related to the Tamil struggle and how the second generation negotiates between both discourses within the social fields they are exposed to.

The impact of social media on youth activism is also another area of research future studies can focus on. Popularity of recent advances in online social networking sites has become a primary source for the circulation of information and communication, making the spread of information across borders almost instantaneous. Future studies can examine how youth activists utilize social media to attain objectives of a cause that is directed towards their homeland and the ways in which it connects others across borders.

Finally, another interesting, yet complicated suggestion for future research, can focus on second generation transnationalism among children of mixed or interracial marriages and how multiple and different transnational linkages are sustained with the possibly of more than three nations.

As more research accumulates in the field of transnationalism among Canadian second generation immigrants, it may perhaps unearth the many manifestations of transnational practices in diverse countries such as Canada and strengthen our understanding of transnationalism in a globalizing world.

## **Appendix Interview Guide**

### Background

1. Were you born in Canada?
  - a) If not, where were you born?
    - a. At what age did you come to Canada?
2. Do you have family/friends living in Sri Lanka?
  - a) If yes, do you keep in touch with them? Describe by what means and how often? (Skype, e-mail, chat, telephone, visits, remittances).
    - a. If you don't keep in touch, please describe why.
  - b) Do you feel it's important to keep in touch with them? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever visited Sri Lanka?
  - a) If yes, how many times? When?
    - a. Please describe that experience, how you felt; did you feel connected or disconnected? In other words, did you feel like you fit in or belonged?
    - b. Were you able to relate to the people there? If so, how?
    - c. What were your perceptions before and after visiting Sri Lanka?
  - b) If not, would you like to visit? Why or why not? Do you feel connected to your/parents' homeland? How so? What steps do you take to feel connected?
4. Please describe how important is it for you to keep in touch with your heritage and/or culture?
5. What steps do you take to feel connected to your homeland?
6. In your opinion, what does it mean to be Tamil and what does it mean to be Canadian?
  - a) How do you currently identify yourself (As a Tamil-Canadian, Canadian, Tamil, or Sri Lankan Tamil)? Describe.

### Political Demonstrations

1. How and at what age did you become aware of the civil issues in Sri Lanka?
  - a) Were you able to relate to the conflict in Sri Lanka? How so?
  - b) Were you involved in activities or events prior to 2009 that related to the civil conflict?
    - a. Did you feel it was important for you to engage in these events or activities? Why?
2. Why did you get involved in the 2009 demonstrations/events?
3. Please describe how you got involved in the demonstrations/events.
4. Describe what you did and observed at these demonstrations/events.
5. Describe a time, if any, you felt you didn't want to participate in the events or were influenced to attend by peers or family. Significant individuals who influenced your participation?
6. Describe how you felt while attending these demonstrations/events.
  - a) In terms of identity, did you feel more Canadian or more Tamil (in-between) while demonstrating? Please elaborate on how you negotiated your identity during that time. Did you feel confused about the way you felt?
7. Did the dynamics of the war or demonstration at this time provoke you to keep in touch with family/friends in Sri Lanka more or less or the same? Describe the feelings.

### Present/post-demonstrations

1. Do you have a different sense of being Canadian after the events? Do you have a different sense of being Tamil after the events?
2. Have you been or are you still following news on post-war situations in Sri Lanka? Why and How so?
3. Describe the connection (or disconnection) you feel to Sri Lanka after the war ended?
4. Have you visited Sri Lanka after the war ended? If so, describe that experience. Did you feel more connected or disconnected (this time)? If not, would you visit Sri Lanka?
5. Have you been engaged in Tamil events related to the conflict (i.e. Maveerar Naal, Channel 4 news, subsequent demonstrations, etc.)? Describe why you engaged or why you didn't.
6. Are there times when you feel more Canadian than Tamil or vice-versa? Describe those times.
7. Do you feel it's important to express Tamil identity? Why or why not?
8. Describe how you express your Tamil identity? On a regular basis. Your Canadian identity? What sort of activities do you engage in to express it? (movies, clothes, religious/cultural events, etc.)
9. After these events, would you say that you participated in the Sri Lankan Tamil culture more or less or the same or has fluctuated due to demands of life (work, school)? Describe. (Thalam, cultural shows, etc.)
10. How would you describe yourself at this moment, in terms of your identity?
11. Are there events or people in your life that influence your transnational practices? How so?

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