

Debates over Genocide as a Definition: How the State manipulates terms and histories to perpetrate Genocide

Richard Mann, Ph.D.

*Professor, Associate Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Carleton University, Ottawa, ON
Canada*

Abstract

This essay argues that the Sri Lankan government constructed definitions of Tamils as ‘terrorists’, ‘separatists’, and ‘anti-national’ in an attempt to disguise state violence against the Tamil minority community in Sri Lanka as anti-terrorist as opposed to state generated violence. This state-generated label, I argue, is designed to enforce majority Sinhalese control over the government in Sri Lanka and to allow the ruling elite to maintain power. This state-based violence is more, I argue, than a human rights violation, but better viewed as a Genocide. Such an argument raises the vexed question of how to define Genocide, and how do states manipulate definitions of terrorism to disguise their attempts to destroy minority groups. Hence, the essay also examines definitions of genocide and how better to understand the need to expand the definition of this term so that states cannot manipulate how they frame the destruction of minority groups within their nation-states as somehow justifiable acts.

Citation

Mann, R. 2018. Debates over Genocide as a Definition: How the State manipulates terms and histories to perpetrate Genocide. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Tamil Nationhood and Genocide. May 5-6, Ottawa, ON. 2:111-119.

Introduction

In this essay, I argue that much of the west’s misunderstanding of the atrocious violence committed by the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil people from the 1950s and on into the current era is largely a product of the manner in which the Sri Lankan government framed media reports of its violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka as violence against “terrorists.” The control the Sri Lankan government had over media and the post September 11 “war on terror” by western governments reinforced the Sri Lanka government’s ability to frame Tamils as terrorists and to justify its atrocious killings in western media sources.

Unlike most media frames, which are constructed by the media itself often based on common cultural values, the framing of the ethnic violence and genocide in Sri Lanka was produced by the Sri Lankan government, which had complete control over the Sri Lankan press and a government that blocked western media outlets from covering stories in Sri Lanka. Hence, media reports of Tamil terrorists bent on destroying a democratic state are based on how the Sri Lankan government used its control of the media and its ability to block foreign journalists from covering events in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan government used this approach to justify its killing of Tamils and its use of media framing both in Sri Lanka and overseas to attempt to justify its killing of Tamils for its own political ends. The result, however, is a framing of Sri Lankan Tamils in western media as terrorists and as acting against a democratic state, when the actual situation in Sri Lanka was the government engaging in terrorist acts against a minority group in Sri Lanka largely for its own desire to control and manipulate power.

Frame Theory

Here I will briefly discuss frame theory, the mode of media analysis I will employ in this article. Media

framing can be the conscious or unconscious choice of newspaper editors and journalists to highlight certain aspects of a narrative so that certain preferred conclusions stay with the readership. Framing works through selection and salience (Entman 1993). The choices made by editors and journalists as to what will make the news, how it is presented and the repetition of such frames, have a significant impact on how the media audience understand and react to reports. More simply put, the constant use of the term terrorist sets a certain frame in the minds of readers that becomes difficult to eliminate once it has been repeated to the point where the readers of the news reject counter claims when they occur. Certain groups, ideas and language are repeated to the point where alternative views rarely appear, or they are immediately viewed as false because a certain frame has already been established by the media. Key to this article is Robert Entman's analysis of media framing which stresses that frames often identify what "a causal agent" has done, and the benefit or damage of those actions. The evaluation of the benefit or damage of the causal agent typically measured by "common cultural values" (Entman 1993). Central to such common cultural values in the context of Sri Lanka and how the events in Sri Lanka were used in western media outlets, I will argue, is the control the Sri Lankan government had over the media in Sri Lanka which gave them the opportunity to frame Tamils as "terrorists" attacking a democratic government. A frame the western media appears to accept, in part because the Sri Lankan government blocked foreign journalists from covering news stories in Sri Lanka and after 9/11 the western media's fixation on terrorists makes this frame particularly appealing to western media sources. The constant repetition of the term terrorist and violence as connected to religious extremism that dominated western media outlets after 9/11 allows the Sri Lankan government's claim that Tamil Hindus were terrorists and religious extremists to go unquestioned by western media outlets. Though, a more accurate statement would have been to refer to the terrorism and genocide of the Sri Lankan government against Tamils in Sri Lanka.

A significant part of media framing in the west, however, is that democratic governments are righteous and employ justice. Such a view of the Sri Lankan government is false, but the media frame of democratic societies is difficult to shift if the media's only source of information about events and

perspectives in Sri Lanka is in fact the Sri Lankan government, a government that used the media to justify their violence against a religious and linguistic minority and to help secure their own power and dominance at the expense of the lives of a minority group.

The sources of media information generated for this essay were developed through a data base search through Carleton University's library collection of digital records of Newspapers. A search for Sri Lanka, Tamil and terrorist generated 999 newspaper articles which form the basis of the argument I will make in this essay. The newspaper articles come from a variety of international sources: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Independent* (London UK), *The Age* (Melbourne, Australia), *The Daily Yomiuri* (Tokyo, Japan), *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), *The Globe and Mail* (Canada), *The Toronto Star* (Toronto, Canada), *The Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa, Canada), *Edmonton Journal* (Edmonton, Canada), *The Irish Times* (Dublin, Ireland), *The Straits Times* (Singapore), *Sunday Age* (Melbourne, Australia), *The Australian*, *The Australian Financial Review*, *The Hamilton Spectator* (Hamilton, Canada), *The Weekend Australian*, *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (St. Louis, USA), *The Gazette* (Montreal, Canada), *Courier Mail* (Queensland, Australia), *The Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver, Canada), *National Post* (Canada), *Daily News* (Sri Lanka), *The Guardian* (London).

Framing Chandrika Kumaratunga and Tamil Sri Lankans before 9/11

The framing of Tamils and the Sri Lankan government begins well before September 11, 2001. Part of the framing the Sri Lankan government and President Chandrika Kumaratunga was to present Kumaratunga as on a mission to negotiate peace on behalf of a democratic government. Much of this framing attempts to present the President as a peace negotiator and Tamils as opposing such efforts to bring about peace. In a November 11, 1994, article which appeared in *The Times* with the headline: "Sri Lanka picks President who promises peace" we are told the following:

....campaigning with a dove on her election posters, she began trying to find a peaceful solution to the island's 11-year war with Tamils in the North by sending a delegation to talk to the separatists. The size of her victory has vindicated her drive for peace (The Times, Nov., 11, 1994).

A similar frame of Kumaratunga as on a peace mission is reflected in an article that appeared in *The Washington Post* with the title: “Sri Lanka’s Landslide Winner Campaigned against Violence”:

And in the end, it was the widow campaigning hardest against what she labeled as Sri Lanka’s “culture of assassination” who emerged the overwhelming victor in a nation exhausted by nearly two decades of some of the world’s most vicious and unrelenting political violence (Moare, Nov. 11, 1994).

There are other articles that could be cited, but the same theme appears repeatedly. Kumaratunga is presented as attempting to generate peace in a troubled country and as a champion to end violence. There are occasional references to state-based violence, but a recurring theme in these articles is the absence of a Tamil voice. We often hear about what Kumaratunga proposes to do, but rarely do we learn of what happened in Sri Lanka during the 1980s when Tamils were killed in tremendous numbers, often with international recognition of the atrocities. The initial framing of Kumaratunga presents her as a champion for peace, but the actual events in Sri Lanka make it clear that her drive for peace was more an attempt to win power than to actually develop a legitimate peace plan. While it is difficult to determine how western readers would have interpreted these newspaper reports without running focus groups, but the reports attempt to present a democratically elected leader who is trying to bring peace to a nation. That this was not to be the case will become clearer as we progress, but the initial framing presents a leader trying to bring about peace, hence, when that attempt fails the frame shifts to one that puts the blame for this failure on Tamils, who are framed as terrorists.

Indeed, the shift in the framing is already suggested in one report from the *New York Times* in the following year when we are told the following:

While the peace initiatives with the Tamil Tigers were perhaps her greatest coup, Kumaratunga said that forging a peace agreement would be her most difficult challenge. The negotiations were postponed indefinitely when her election rival was assassinated in a bomb blast that many believe was carried out by the Tigers (Burns, April 16, 1995).

What we see here in the media framing is that the failure of Kumaratunga is presented not as her fault, but as generated by violence from the Tigers. The

frame of a peaceful negotiator who is derailed by a militant group helps to generate the post 9/11 frame of the Tamil Tigers as “terrorists” which we will see later in this essay.

A significant framing of Kumaratunga by western media sources occurs after an attempt is made on her life by a bombing that resulted in her losing sight in one eye. The account of this attempted assassination is repeated in a wide variety of western media sources. In an account from January 4, 2000 from the *New York Times* we read the following:

“Insurgents Blamed in Sri Lanka”: President Chandrika Kumaratunga of Sri Lanka, her right eye closed from an assassination attempt last month, appeared on television today to accuse the Tamil Tiger rebels for the first time of trying to kill her, then discredit her. “The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam wanted to kill me, but, it was God who saved me,” she said (Jan.4 2000 *New York Times*).

The earlier frame was Kumaratunga the peacemaker. After the attempt on her life, which was never accurately demonstrated to have been performed by the Tamil Tigers, she is presented as a figure worthy of support by foreign governments because of her earlier framing as a democratically elected figure campaigning for peace. Hence, the frame that is produced by media sources is that Tamils are violent and Kumaratunga is a victim of that violence. Kumaratunga’s approach seems to be to generate sympathy for herself in the foreign media, a strategy that appears to work. We see signs of the impact this framing has not just on Western media, but also on Western leaders in the following December 20, 1999 article from *The New York Times*, with the title:

“*Injured Sri Lankan Leader Urges Tamils to Help End Terrorism*”: *Speaking from her hospital bed, President Chandrika Kumaratunga appealed to minority Tamils in Sri Lanka today to join her in fighting terrorism, just hours after surgeons operated on her right eye to remove shrapnel from a suicide bombing attack. “The Tamil people must clearly and without hesitation decide whether they are going to continue to strengthen the hand of terror and murder by their secret, silent or partial support of the L.T.T.E.” Mrs. Kumaratunga said in English during the five-minute radio and television address to the nation. President Clinton and Indian President K. R. Narayanan and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee sent messages of*

concern and sympathy to Mrs. Kumaratunga. "It is particularly distressing to me that these heinous acts have occurred during a democratic election campaign." Mr. Clinton said in his message, a copy of which was made available in Colombo (Dec. 20, 1999, *New York Times*).

What I wish to stress here is the impact the earlier Clinton's comments about democracy and elections and Kumaratunga use of the word terrorism and her call for people to move away from terrorism all have a particular frame that will endure over the next few years of media reports on Sri Lanka. Tamils are repeatedly framed as terrorists and the government as seeking democratic solutions. The response of Clinton also has a powerful impact because for the reading American public their leader has pronounced his opinion on the situation in Sri Lanka and for many Americans that generates the frame of terrorists against democracy that will only increase after 9/11, media framing of Kumaratunga as a democratically elected figure who was seeking peace. Kumaratunga is also presented in a very sympathetic manner by western media. In an article, which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on December 23, 1999, we are told the following after she had addressed state media about the attempt on her life:

Family and Cabinet ministers wept as they embraced their leader, who denounced the Tamil Tigers as cowards. The campaign for an independent Tamil homeland in north-east Sri Lanka has cost more than 55, 000 lives since 1972 (Kremmer, Dec. 23, 1999)

Hence, the framing of Kumaratunga is a democratically elected President who is to be sympathized with because of this attempt on her life. The impact of such a frame should not be underestimated. The emotional response of her colleagues and the responses of various western leaders frame much of this in the minds of western readers as a figure of sympathy. What I would stress, however, is that a similar sympathy and empathy and narrative of unjustified violence is never presented in the case of Tamils in Sri Lanka. In all fairness to the western media there are occasional references to state-based violence against Tamils in Sri Lanka. In a November 11, 1994 article that appeared in *The Washington Post* by Molly Moore, we are told just after Kumaratunga was elected that she made the following address to the nation on state television:

she called her crushing defeat of the opposition party "a clear and massive mandate" for new efforts to end the country's 11-year-old civil war and "nearly two decades of harassment, state terrorism and violence of all sorts" (Moore Nov. 11, 1994).

There are other references to state-based violence against Tamils in some western media outlets. In an article by John F. Burns which appeared in *The New York Times* on April 16, 1995, we are told that the Tamil Tigers, "grew out of widespread grievances against what was seen as routine discrimination against the mainly Hindu Tamils by the ethnic Sinhalese majority, who are mostly Buddhists" (Burns April 16, 1995). A small number of other newspapers also mention the word "pogrom" in relation to violence against Tamil in 1983 (McGirk, Nov. 11, 1994). While these accounts of discrimination and violence against Tamils are accurate, Neil DeVotta's book, *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka* (2004), provides useful research into how the Sri Lankan state used linguistic and religious biases to manipulate the state and generate violence against minorities. What I wish to emphasize in the context of media framing of violence in Sri Lanka is that the sympathetic narratives and framing are reserved for Sri Lankan leaders. Without context and examples from Tamil families who have lost loved-ones due to state-based violence, the framing of Tamils as "terrorists" and the Sri Lankan state leaders as figures to be empathetic towards these occasional references towards violence against Tamils have little impact on the western reading public; because without the lived examples of the impact of state-based violence on Tamils, the western political and public audience only hears of the emotional impact of violence from the Sri Lankan leaders. The framing of events in Sri Lanka and particularly whose voices are heard have a significant impact on how Sri Lankan Tamils are viewed by the western media and much of that impact is negative.

Even before September 11, 2001 the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam were labelled as a terrorist group by a number of countries. As early as 1995, the United States listed the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as a terrorist organization. Much of this view of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ignores the state-based violence against Tamils and only acknowledges Sri Lankan based reports of terrorism.

Such is the power of media framing. Even with the pre 9/11 listing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as terrorists, the events of 9/11 become powerful tools in the continued framing of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and international support for the Sri Lanka government's attempts to destroy Tamils.

Not long after September 11, the following report, which appeared in *The New York Times*, on December 5, 2001, demonstrates how Kumaratunga frames Tamils as terrorists in an age where such a framing appears to justify state-based violence against groups labeled as terrorist in a post 9/11 world:

In the early years of her presidency, Chandrika Kumaratunga embodied the hope for peace in Sri Lanka, a democracy that had then struggled through more than a decade of insurrection, ethnic strife and terrorism. Then Mrs Kumaratunga, who once pledged to restore civility and respect for human life, encouraged her followers to strike back. "Killing the killers is justified," she declared, as television cameras rolled (Dugger, Dec. 5, 2001).

Here, Celia W. Dugger, the author of this article appears to be critical of Kumaratunga, but in an earlier article Dugger notes the impact of 9/11 on how the framing of Tamils has progressed. In the article, we are told:

There will be no peace talks, he [Velupillai Prabhakaran] said, unless Sri Lanka lifts its ban on the Tigers as a terrorist organization. It is a tricky moment for such a demand from the Tigers, who have frequently dispatched suicide bombers as part of their rebellion. Since the attacks on America on Sept. 11, Canada, which is home to a large Tamil diaspora, has banned the Tigers, joining India, the United States, Britain and, of course, Sri Lanka itself (Dugger Nov. 28, 2001).

What Dugger recognizes here is that after 9/11 any group labelled a terrorist group cannot escape that framing.

An important shift in the framing of Sri Lankan news was the ability of Kumaratunga to take control of media and reporting in Sri Lanka. Much of this comes about in 2003, after 9/11 in 2001, when the President declares a state of emergency in the country. In an editorial that appeared in *The Age*, an Australian newspaper, we read the following:

Last week, while Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was in Washington on a state

visit, the country's President declared a state of emergency and suspended Parliament. Chandrika Kumaratunga also took the opportunity to sack top civil servants and the ministers for defence, the media and the interior. In a television address on Friday, Ms Kumaratunga said her actions were necessary because of the grave threat to national security facing Sri Lanka (Nov. 10, 2003).

Kumaratunga's actions are clearly attempts to take over control of the country and to control media in the country and internationally. The state of emergency allows her to block foreign journalists from entering the country and transforms her government and her voice as the figures that control how the country and her rule are reported in the international media. This is because Sri Lanka's state-run media, which Kumaratunga now controls, delivers the only source of information the international media can now have. What this ability to generate media frames does for Kumaratunga after 9/11 is to continue to present herself as a champion for peace and to frame Tamils as terrorists and to gain international support for her brutal attacks on the Tamil community because she presents herself as engaged in a war against terror. The terror perpetrated by the state is never presented, and if it is referred to, it is presented as justified because it is framed as violence against terrorists.

The impact of the state's control and abuse of media is well represented in Lasantha Wickrematunge's article "And Then They Came For Me", which can be found in Ramu Manivannan's important book, *Sri Lanka Hiding the Elephant: Documenting Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity* (2014: 211-214). What Wickrematunge illustrates in his article is that the independent media was under attack in Sri Lanka. He states: "Electronic and print-media institutions have been burnt, bombed, sealed and coerced. Countless journalists have been harassed, threatened and killed. It has been my honour to belong to all those categories and now especially the last.... Indeed, murder has become the primary tool whereby the state seeks to control the organs of liberty (Manivannan 2014:211). The absence of a free media in Sri Lanka and the ability of the state to control media reports that go out to the local and international communities makes how the Sri Lankan government generates a frame of Tamils and itself a form of state control and domination rather than an accurate reflection of what is actually happening in a state.

The framing of Kumaratunga as a champion for peace and someone to be sympathetic towards is the opposite of how Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, is framed. The media framing of Prabhakaran is important because he was the main figure with whom Kumaratunga would have negotiated peace with, as we shall see, he is framed as the opposite of Kumaratunga. Much of this framing is delivered by the main voice the western media pays attention to, Kumaratunga. In an article by John F. Burns on August 24, 1994, in *The New York Times*, just after Kumaratunga was elected we read the following:

Mrs Kumaratunga, 49, said she favoured a settlement to the war "as soon as possible" and would make new proposals to the rebels within three months. She said she did not believe the rebels' reclusive leader, Vellupillai Prabhakaran, who has a reputation for ruthlessness and intractability, was inflexibly committed to an independent Tamil state in Sri Lanka, as he has suggested in the few interviews he has given (Burns Aug. 24, 1994).

Of the 999 articles recovered from the database I used in this article, none of them include interviews with Prabhakaran, hence we never hear of his reasons for wanting a separate state or what led to the path the Tamils find themselves on. Rather, he is repeatedly framed as an irrational terrorist leader, and as the figure blocking peace efforts. In an account of Kumaratunga's address to the nation after the attack on her, we read the following article by Christopher Kremmer on December 23, 1999 which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

"Let all those who aid and abet terror be warned... let those who aid and abet terror be warned... let those who secretly or openly condone the path of violence pursued by the cowards of the LTTE be warned: the days of terror in this land are numbered, and that number is small. That enemy is hatred and he sits in front of me as I speak," she said, "I see him, I know him. I have felt his touch for the last time." Mrs Kumaratunga's words were construed by some observers as a reference to the Tamil Tigers' leader Velupillai Prabhakaran (Kremmer, Dec. 23, 1999).

Similar references to Prabhakaran are found in other western media sources. In an August 10, 1995 edition of *The Times* an article with the title "Tiger Terror" appears. In this article the Tigers are

described as "true to ruthless form" in ending the peace accord of 1995. We are then told:

The leader of the Tigers, Velupillai Prabhakaran, is a remorseless megalomaniac. On his orders, Tamil "hit squads" have murdered the late Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the late Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa and the opposition presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake. The Tigers are fearsome adversaries, whose messianic zeal in the cause of an independent Tamil state is fuelled Prabhakaran's careful cultivation of his own mythic status.... Mrs. Kumaratunga faces an adversary with whom little rational dialogue is possible.... The elimination of one man, Prabhakaran, could fashion a miraculous change in the island's politics of conflict (August 10, 1995, "Tiger Terror").

Again, the media frame of a terrorist leader who must be destroyed ignores the actions of the Sri Lankan state as does it affirm a frame that places all the blame for violence on Tamils and presents the Sri Lankan leaders like Kumaratunga as rational and dealing with people who will not respond to rational dialogue. Such a frame, sadly, makes the violence of the state against Tamils somehow acceptable, at least to the foreign media. Hence, we have two media frames in this context. One that presents Kumaratunga as a champion for peace and democracy fighting an irrational terrorist group and its leader. The result is that the Sri Lankan state finds a way to legitimate its violence against Tamils, seemingly with the approval of western governments and the media who have accepted the framing they have been given.

After 9/11 we start to see Kumaratunga reference 9/11 when she is trying to label the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as a terrorist group and to support her own interests. After the assassination of Lakshman Kadirgamar, a Tamil MP, we see Kumaratunga employ the framing power of the idea of terrorism after 9/11. On August 16, 2005 the following material appeared in an article, with the title "Rebels blamed for MP's assassination" published by *The Australian*:

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, in a rare broadside against Tamil Tiger rebels, says there is evidence linking the guerillas to the assassination of foreign minister Lakshman Kadirgamar. Mr. Kadirgamar was gunned down on Friday night at his home in the capital, Colombo. He was a vocal critic of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and played a key role in the group's proscription as a terrorist organization in several

countries including the US. "Initial indications of the investigations seem to reveal responsibility of the LTTE in the brutal murder," Ms Kumaratunga said in a nationwide TV broadcast on Sunday night. "Mr. Kadirgamar was an idealist. Long before September 11 and the London bombing; long before terrorism became anathema to the Western world, he spoke out against terrorism in Sri Lanka and abroad," Ms Kumaratunga said. "He was instrumental in having the LTTE recognized internationally for what they are – an armed terrorist group" ("Rebels blamed," Aug. 16, 2005).

Again, it is the framing that matters here and the ability of Kumaratunga to be the sole voice that gets heard and thus sets the frame. Likely knowing the power of any reference to 9/11 and the London bombings for audiences in America and England, she carefully presents the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam as now internationally recognized terrorists and again this framing of Tamils gives her international power to attack Tamils seemingly without the international community condemning such state violence against a minority group. Once this frame of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam has been established we find no western media or political sources questioning it. Indeed, as Ramu Manivannan convincingly argues, the support India, the USA and the European Union provided to the Sri Lankan government both militarily, financially and politically, "in the name of war against terrorism, have inadvertently contributed towards strengthening the anti-democratic ethos of majoritarian and state terrorism in South Asia" (Manivannan 2014: 6). Manivannan's exceptional book, *Sri Lanka Hiding The Elephant: Documenting Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity*, provides narratives from survivors of the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan government that has a remarkable impact. Part of the media framing we have seen in this essay, however, blocks the voices of Tamils impacted by state violence largely on the assumption based on the framing of the Tamil community as terrorists that they could not be trusted. That the media in Sri Lanka was controlled by the government and that they were able to block western media from accessing Sri Lanka so that they could actually document what was occurring in the country as opposed to simply accepting the Sri Lankan state's framing of what was happening.

To provide an example of how the framing can shift if a reporter is able to be on the ground in Sri

Lanka and report on what they saw; I was able to find only one article of the 999 examined for this essay where a western reporter was in Sri Lanka and able to see what was actually happening to the Tamils in the North and East of the country. The article appeared in the Canadian newspaper, *The Globe and Mail*, in November 5, 2003 and it was written by Paul Knox. The article reads as follows:

I travelled last year to Vanni, the primitive jungle region in northern Sri Lanka that's been a stronghold of the Tamil Tiger rebel movement for two decades. It was a powerful experience.... Most of the roads were little more than dirt paths. People got around on bicycles, or occasionally on motorbikes adapted for kerosene fuel. They depended largely on the Red Cross and aid agencies for medical supplies. Control by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam was evident everywhere.... So, if Tamil control is a fact of life, why is Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga making it the latest battleground in her long-running political war with her archrival, Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe? One of the things that struck me in Vanni was the poverty of opportunity for young Tamils, and the sense of a birthright betrayed. Their parents and grandparents grew up in a colony, and then a country, where higher education and advancement were relatively easy for talented Tamils who made the effort. Their prospects weakened under the Bandaranaiques. For better or worse, life under the dynasty convinced many Tamils that equal opportunity in a unitary state would always be vulnerable to the whims of the majority. They concluded that political autonomy within a well-defined territory would always be vulnerable to the whims of the majority. They concluded that political autonomy within a well-defined territory was the best way to assume their rights and their prospects (Knox Nov. 5, 2003).

The significance of Knox's article is that it is one of the only examples I was able to find of a reporter who actually went to Sri Lanka and observed what life was like for Tamils living in that country.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this essay, the Sri Lankan government is able to control media in the country and as a result are able to frame Tamils as terrorists. This frame is accepted by international governments before 9/11 and after 9/11. Such a framing allows the

Sri Lankan government go to war against Tamils seemingly with the approval and support of the international community. Much of this ability to frame Tamils and the objectives of the Sri Lankan government and figures such as Kumaratunga depend on the Sri Lankan government ensuring that the voices of Tamils are never heard unless they can be presented as radical and violent. Once journalists are able to be in Sri Lanka, however, and document what they have seen in Tamil areas of the country, the frame shifts from one of extremist terrorism to questioning the mandate of the government and its claims and sympathizing with the discrimination faced by Tamil youth. While I have not been able to interview Knox to find out why and how he conducted his research; I would like to suggest that part of what allows for such a shift in framing was the Sri Lankan Tamil expatriate community that left Sri Lanka and went to countries like Australia, Canada and Britain. Again, I cannot verify this, but once Tamils had left Sri Lanka and arrived in places like Canada their voices became heard and the terrors they and their families had faced in Sri Lanka may have become better known to journalists. This perhaps led to reporters like Knox travelling to Sri Lanka to investigate what life was like for Tamils in Sri Lanka. The impact that a different framing of what happened in Sri Lanka if the media had been able to report freely on what the Sri Lankan government did to Tamils would have been impactful. Indeed, what makes Ramu Manivannan's book so powerful is that it contains narratives of victims and witness accounts of what Tamils experienced (2014: 45-84, 111-148). Perhaps some of the most impactful elements of Manivannan's book are the collections of photographs often of murdered and bombed Tamil children who committed no crime but were killed by the Sri Lankan State simply for being Tamil (2014: "A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words"). The absence of such images in western media and the narratives of them are based in media framing constructed by the Sri Lankan government and accepted by western media and governments. The inability of the press and international governments to recognize what was actually happening in Sri Lanka is a reflection of how skillfully the Sri Lankan government was able to generate a frame of Tamils as terrorists and themselves as democratically elected peace brokers. In doing so, the Sri Lankan government frames their violence against Tamils as

justified by calling them terrorists; a frame that becomes particularly impactful after 9/11 in the western media and with western governments. In the end what we may learn from this study is that the freedom of the press and the ability of those who have been impacted by the genocidal violence of the Sri Lankan state to have their voices heard and respected as humans as opposed to the frame of terrorist becomes central to how we understand such state-based atrocities and the Sri Lankan Tamil communities that now live around the world and those still in Sri Lanka.

Bibliography

- Burns, John F., April 22, 1995, "A Mother-Daughter Rivalry Turns Political in Sri Lanka," *The New York Times*.
- Burns, John F., April 16, 1995, "In Sri Lanka, Glimmer of Peace After Years of War," *The New York Times*.
- DeVotta, Neil. (2004), *Blowback: Linguistic Nationalism, Institutional Decay, and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Dugger, Celia W., December 5, 2001. "In a Tinderbox, Sri Lanka President Turns Up the Heat." *The New York Times*.
- Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51-58.
- Knox, Paul, November 5, 2003, "Tamil homeland a fait accompli" *The Globe and Mail*, page A25.
- Kremmer, Christopher, December 23, 1999, "Emotional plea for peace from tearful President," *Sydney Morning Herald*, page 8.
- Manivannan, Ramu. (2014), *Sri Lanka: Hiding the elephant Documenting Genocide, War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity*
- McGirk, Tim, November 11, 1994, "Election stirs hope of peace in Sri Lanka" *The Independent*.
- Moore, Molly, November 11, 1994, "Sri Lanka's Landslide Winner Campaigned Against Violence," *The Washington Post*.
- The Times*, November 11, 1994, "Sri Lanka picks President who promises peace"
- The New York Times*, January 4, 2000, "Insurgents Blamed in Sri Lanka"
- The New York Times*, December 20, 1999, "Injured Sri Lankan Leader Urges Tamils to Help End Terrorism."

The New York Times, August 10, 1995, “Tiger
Terror”

The Age, November 10, 2003, “Dangerous Times in
Sri Lanka”

The Australian, August 16, 2005, “Rebels blamed for
MP’s assassination”