RESEARCHER, INFORMANT, “ASSASSIN,” ME*

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Nothing in my academic training prepared me for the methodological challenges I faced while conducting fieldwork in a setting of war. No graduate seminar had schooled me in "methods in the field of battle"; no workshop offered "techniques for researchers, terrorists, and native Others." In this essay I examine methodological challenges inherent in being assigned a criminalized identity and labeled a terrorist assassin.

Working from experiences in an environment of violence engendered by war, I argue for methodologies that recognize the researcher as an informant. Fieldwork can no longer be constrained to discovery and the study of an exotic Other. Trained as an anthropologist, I am acutely aware of that discipline's historical and continued efforts to reconcile its colonizing past (Asad 1973; James 1973). Social science researchers are participants in every ethnographic moment that constitutes fieldwork, and no longer can anyone claim the status of objective observer. Our experiences, subject positions, and complicated identities are integral not only to research but also to the interpretive process of analysis and representation. In viewing the researcher as an informant, we make visible the motivations, experiences, and perceptions that inform ethnographic data. I am not suggesting that our voices as researchers be trusted above the words of those whom we interview in the field. I do, however, believe that revealing the pathways of our analyses as we represent others is an important step toward integrity in research. Critically examining our motivations and experiences in researching particular peoples and communities is part of respectful scholarship based on equity and integrity.

A Tamil woman. I was born in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, and raised in North Borneo and Minnesota. Identity is central to my research and writing on the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a social and political movement that works to advance the Tamil nationalistic struggle in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. As an expatriate/transnational field-worker and academic, I became a subject of interest and suspicion. As a researcher, I look physically authentic, with dark skin, curly black hair, and wearing—by choice—the symbolic markers of a Hindu-Tamil woman: a thilakam or pottu and a nose ornament that map Tamil identity onto my body. This authenticity is reduced if a suspicious interlocutor questions my objectivity as a native, my distance as an expatriate and immigrant to the United States, and my Otherness as a Tamil academic working from within the politicized spaces of nationalism and violence in Sri Lanka.

* At Syracuse University I studied with Naem Inayatullah, a professor of political science who insisted that every student question her/his motivations for any argument presented in analysis and writing. I am indebted to him for this lesson, which I apply here to the process of ethnographic fieldwork and writing.

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THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

After decades of nonviolent protest and participation in diplomatic negotiations with successive Sri Lankan governments to secure the fundamental rights of citizenship, language, education, and employment, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), a political party, received the mandate of Tamil communities throughout the north and east in the 1977 general elections to create a separate state. Emerging from a history of state-sponsored violence and discrimination, the LTTE currently leads the Tamil nationalist movement, pressing for the creation of a separate state called Tamil Eelam.

In the United States we may be aware of the ongoing “ethnic conflicts” in faraway places like Sri Lanka, but we cannot imagine the material realities of people who live with war. The New York Times, National Public Radio, and the National Geographic Magazine have on occasion reported an eruption of violence as the Sri Lankan government “launched its campaign against Jaffna” while “the Tigers kept up their campaign of terror” (Vesilind 1997, 121). Little mention is made of the military checkpoints at every major intersection throughout Colombo, the capital city. All Tamils must, in fact, register their presence and identity with local police stations; national identification cards differentiate Tamils from Sinhalese, in a distinction exploited by military police who randomly detain people on the streets and conduct periodic “clearing operations.” Searches of Tamil homes and neighborhoods are used to weed out supposed Tamil terrorists. Also unreported in popular press accounts is state-sponsored violence delivered as organized anti-Tamil “riots.” Since independence from Great Britain in 1948, “riots” followed the efforts of Tamil political parties to negotiate a parity of status for the Tamil people. The 1983 “riots” have been documented as an expression of the Sri Lankan state’s human-rights abuses with the genocidal killings of more than 3,000 Tamils in Colombo and the destruction of 18,000 Tamil homes and business (Sivanandan and Waters 1984b).

Pushed to the margins of Sri Lankan society, Tamils turned to armed resistance in defense of their communities. Committed to armed struggle, Tamils participating in the LTTE movement have been stamped “terrorists” by the Sri Lankan government and are subject to indiscriminate arrests that result in disappearance and death. Proscribed by the Sri Lanka government and the U.S. Department of State, the LTTE is not recognized as a social and political movement and has been denied participation in political processes. The conflict has now escalated to civil war. As such, Tamils participating in the nationalist movement are marginalized as a “violent Other.”

As a graduate student doing fieldwork in Sri Lanka, I had no tool belt of methods to help me when I was confronted by the Sri Lankan military police at checkpoints or to prepare me to deal with Sinhalese soldiers who viewed me as the enemy, as a Tamil Tiger camouflaged in the flow of “civil society.” Nor did I have any methodological strategy for responding to academics who assumed that I was a representative of the LTTE and demanded from me justifications for the latest bout of reported violence. What I thought I had been trained to do as a student of anthropology seemed to
have little relevance in this militarized landscape. Like other Tamils, I learned to survive everyday fears of interrogation, arrest, detention, torture, disappearance, and death whenever I ventured into the streets.

Thanks to economic embargoes, censorship, and circumscription of the north as the "war zone," the Sri Lankan government prohibited the bringing of cameras and tape recorders into Jaffna. Equipment was confiscated at Sri Lankan army checkpoints. The LTTE, however, provided a tape recorder for my interviews with cadres in the northern city. I transcribed and translated the tape-recorded interviews. But interviews with people who were not LTTE cadres were written in field journals.

This methodology recognized distinctions between people who identified themselves as iyakkum (movement) or LTTE cadres from pathu makkal (the general public). Respecting vulnerability, I chose not to tape record the voices of pathu makkal who feared identification and arrest. The recording of people's words gives new meaning to the term informant. The visible presence of a tape recorder or a notebook and pen in the contexts of everyday conversation is highly problematic: People are cautious about how and where their voices are heard. Had the Sri Lankan military confiscated my recorded interviews, not only I but the people I spoke with would have been in danger of arrest—and worse. Also, Tamils in Jaffna did not want to risk being suspected of having given information about the LTTE to the Sri Lankan military. The movement exercises its own severe discipline by expelling people from the north or executing those whom it identifies as Sri Lankan military informants.

**CONFRONTING THE VIOLENCE OF WAR**

Since the formal emergence of Tamil nationalism in 1976, Tamils have been perceived by Sinhalese majority governments as a threat to the unitary nation-state of Sri Lanka. Under the provision of the 1979 Anti-Terrorism Act and the Rule of Emergency, all Tamils must register with the police in Sri Lanka. When I travel there I am required to register at the local police station of the city or village where I choose to reside for any period of time (whether two weeks, two months, or two years). During a six-month stay in Colombo, I was detained and interrogated by the Sri Lankan military police in some twenty-five incidents. I was subjected to body searches, and my belongings and residence were ransacked. I was questioned, as a Tamil, by Sinhalese soldiers who addressed me not only with the authority of their voice and their language (Sinhala) but also with the brandished authority of their weapons: AK47s, M16s, grenades, pistols, and batons. This was my ethnographic reality. It was the reality of war, and I, a Tamil, was marked as an enemy. In this everyday ethnographic moment I conducted my research.

Such an experience in the field is ethnographic data. The suspicion and violence mapped onto me as a Tamil woman were material realities of my fieldwork; through them I analyze my "ethnographic data." These experiences guided data collection, including how I conducted interviews and observations, wrote field notes, collected cultural productions, participated in a variety of social events, including temple ceremonies, activist rallies, and university lectures, and undertook local projects
with nongovernmental organizations such as the International Center for Ethnic Studies (ICES) in Colombo and Ootru, a Jaffna-based group.

By presenting my perspective, and insisting on a high degree of personal participation in the analysis of ethnographic accounts, I hope to make visible the power inherent in the project of representing others. This is a choice that Kirin Narayan makes clear: "To acknowledge particular and personal locations is to admit the limits of one's purview from these positions. It is also to undermine the notion of objectivity, because from particular locations all understanding becomes subjectively based and forged through interactions within fields of power relations" (1993, 679).

The Researcher as Informant

Recognizing Paulo Freire's enjoiner for "consciousness as consciousness of consciousness," we can examine motivations that underlie the study of particular aspects of peoples and communities (1992, 66–67). Such a consciousness of intent and motivation is possible when the researcher is understood to be an informant.

As cultural anthropologists and geographers, we represent others. In explicitly recognizing the researcher as an informant the researcher's voice is made as central as those of others, without attributing it undue value or trustworthiness or special status. We can then examine how our analyses represent others. Ethnographic accounts of "native informants" do not simply speak for themselves; informants' words are shaped by the questions posed to them. The motivation is usually suppressed by the researcher as he/she voices his/her questions.

We interview native informants largely without a conscious examination of why we want knowledge. An inherent power is assumed by a researcher, absolved of responsibility for questioning motivations and intent in approaching (let alone interviewing) a community. The researcher's power issues from a social and geographical space that affords a presumptive right of inquiry. The space of analysis is privileged, ostensibly reserved for the researcher; the space for informing is then relegated to the local native.

Researchers are not innocent subjects who are in the field only to listen and learn from local people. We bring research agendas. But in acknowledging the researcher as informant, we destabilize the hierarchy. Understanding the researcher as an informant, I am conscious of my subject position, my motivation, my agendas. I can reveal my bias and fallibility as a human subject, one relied upon to report on my experiences and observations of the realities of nationalism, resistance, violence, and war.

A central motivation for studying the conflict in Sri Lanka was my interest in finding a place for myself in the Tamil activist community, which supports a peace process that recognizes the legitimacy of the Tamil nationalist struggle. I traveled with my mother to Sri Lanka, and to Jaffna in particular, going there as many other Tamil families have throughout the period of war (that is, since 1983). My initial plan had been to visit Jaffna for three weeks, but I felt compelled to stay longer, reconnecting with my natal community, speaking with LTTE cadres, and experiencing their
civil administration. I witnessed the ways in which Jaffna people cope under the LTTE government and under the economic sanctions placed by the Sri Lankan state.9

The Researcher as Terrorist-Assassin

I was introduced to Dr. Neelan Thiruchelvam during the early part of my Colombo fieldwork, before I traveled to Jaffna. He was a respected academic, with expertise in constitutional law, and a director of the prestigious ICES. He encouraged me to join ICES as a research fellow and take part in a project that studied the 1992–1993 peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. At ICES, one of Colombo’s leading think tanks, my job was to prepare a proposal for funding to conduct a symposium on conflict resolution, which would focus on the Oslo-brokered peace process. The project brought people from Norway who had taken part in the back-channel negotiations that led to the historic peace agreement between the Palestinian Liberation Organization and the government of Israel.

I began my work at ICES in the second week of April 1994 and continued as an affiliated research fellow for my remaining eleven and one-half months in Sri Lanka. The proposal received funding, the participants from Norway agreed to come, and the symposium in September 1994 was a success. In October the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE conducted a first set of public peace talks in Jaffna. Six participants in the ICES symposium were members of the delegation from Colombo. Representing the Sri Lankan government, they visited LTTE representatives.

At ICES I came to know the research fellows and research associates. They were, by and large, Sri Lankan academics who either had finished their graduate studies in the United Kingdom or the United States and returned to live and work in Colombo or, like me, were graduate students pursuing an education in a foreign institution and conducting fieldwork in Sri Lanka. For most, research focused on issues of the national conflict. Academics at ICES were proud that their work contributed to intellectual nonpartisanship and objectivity in research and publications. With recognition and support from the Ford and the Guggenheim Foundations in the United States, ICES maintains a respected publishing record through an in-house journal, the Thatched Patio, and through monographs and edited volumes. My own research interests matched those of this institution, and the opportunity to take part in a conflict resolution symposium was deeply rewarding.

Even with these sentiments, I was conscious that my identity was not fully coincident with the majority of researchers at ICES. Except for two Tamil men, these were Colombo-born Sinhalese academics or came from a mixed background (Tamil and Sinhalese). My relationship with many of the research fellows was tenuous, fraught with their underlying fear and suspicion of how I might stand personally and politically on the Sri Lankan conflict. Given my remove from the visible political position of ICES, a position that by unspoken consensus dismissed the LTTE as a “fascist” or “authoritarian” regime committed to violence, I was at odds with the expected point of view within ICES, and no less so within Colombo’s larger intellectual community. Exchanges like this were routine:
"So, you were born in America?" I would be asked.

"Actually, no," I would explain. "I was born in Jaffna, and my family moved all
over and finally ended up in the States, which is where I mostly grew up."

"So you’ve never really lived in Sri Lanka then."

"Well, actually, I did live here for two consecutive years between 1971 and 1973
and then returned home for summer holidays often."

"Ah, in Colombo?"

"Well, no, in Jaffna."

The questioning would continue until the interviewer was satisfied with my re-
sponses, or until I was sufficiently disgruntled at yet another interrogation con-
cerning my authenticity as a Tamil and a Sri Lankan. At ICES I was regarded either as
a clueless American coming back to the homeland to do fieldwork or as some kind
of hillbilly from the remote corners of provincial Jaffna fumbling about trying to
get in on what people at the center prided as the fast-paced action of an Anglo-
Americanized circle of Colombo intellectuals. My questioners’ assertion, "So you’ve
never really lived in Sri Lanka then," signaled my dismissal as a non-native Other.
To the Colombo intellectual, I bore the marks of a non-native: I spoke not Sinhala,
the official national language, but Tamil; I had never lived in Colombo. Most im-
portant, rather than dismiss the "Tigers" as a "fascist," "terrorist" organization, I was
giving legitimacy to the LTTE as a social movement advancing the objectives of Tamil
nationalism.

Categorically, the associates and fellows at ICES regarded the LTTE with disdain,
considering the Tigers a terrorist organization whose members should be sepa-
rated from the wider Tamil communities and eliminated. At ICES, humor was a great
vehicle for forwarding sentiments about the movement: "The LTTE are a bunch of
fascists, ruling the people of Jaffna with the point of a gun, but the problem is that
they’re hard working fascists, you see." Comments like these were constant, coupled
with one-liners about Yamuna, the in-house LTTE sympathizer. For the most part I
took these jokes in stride and found them passingly funny because the images were
so far away from people in my extended family and community who were indeed
members of the LTTE. The people I knew were not the scary terrorists being described
in the context of ICES. I had to suppress anger, though, at the intolerance of these
self-proclaimed intellectuals and my fear at what this could possibly lead to in a city
where LTTE sympathizers are systematically arrested and interrogated at the local
police stations or, worse, at the headquarters of the military police.

My fears were almost realized toward the end of my stay in Sri Lanka. In Jaffna I
had the opportunity to speak with members of the LTTE and to work closely with
Ootru. When I returned to Colombo after almost six months, in March 1995, people
at ICES seemed genuinely pleased to see me. Their pleasure was coupled with an
intense curiosity about life in the "war zone":

"Yamuna! You’re back! We were so worried. What happened? You were supposed
to have returned months ago. You were only supposed to visit Jaffna for a few weeks
and then you just disappeared for months. Were you safe? Did anything happen? Did your mother arrange a good marriage for you? So what was it like? Did you meet any Tigers? Were you harassed by them? Where did you live? How did you manage up there? Are they really supporting the LTTE?

I answered each question intending to demystify life in what has been exotically popularized in Colombo as the war zone. In my reports to fellow ICES researchers, I could not add much to what they already knew and had heard about life in Jaffna. But even in hallway conversations I was serving as a key informant for them; I was providing first-hand information. Little of it was "news"; they too could read the censored news accounts of the Colombo press and had personal accounts of other Tamils who journeyed back and forth between Colombo and Jaffna. In fact, a few of the ICES administrative staff were Tamils from Jaffna and were among those who periodically traveled north to visit their families. I assured my colleagues that nothing terrible had happened to me or my mom, that we had decided to stay there voluntarily, and that my research was deeply enriched by the experience. I also assured them that I had not been detained and interrogated by the LTTE; nor had the movement forced me to remain in Jaffna against my will. I confirmed reports of the daily hardships the people there are facing as a result of the five-year economic embargo that denies them such fundamental provisions as rice, flour, sugar, soap, batteries, gasoline, and electricity. I told them that my mom and I had returned to our house in Jaffna and confirmed that, indeed, one cannot live in the north without meeting or seeing any Tigers, since the movement had maintained a civil administration in the north for the previous five years (1990–1995). I reported what I had observed as critical support of the LTTE—support contested and complicated in terms of people's everyday sentiments and analyses of what the LTTE had achieved and what comprised its objectives of statehood.

A week before my departure for the United States a senior ICES associate encountered me for the first time since my return from Jaffna. An elderly, respected Sinhalese scholar in Sri Lanka committed to publishing academic works in the Sinhala language for greater accessibility to people beyond the academic community, he is greatly esteemed within the Sri Lankan academic community for his literary and analytical contributions to ICES work on "ethnic conflict." He saw me inside the ICES office, where most of the researchers had their desks and workstations. I knew that he, like the others, would be interested in news about the war zone, but I didn't expect the association he subsequently made: "We thought that you'd been kidnapped by the LTTE, and many of us here also thought that you'd return as a Patricia Hearst to assassinate Neelan Thiruchelvam."10

This radically affected how I understood and analyzed my observations in the form of field notes, interviews, and data in general. The notion of being envisioned as a potential assassin led me to reexamine my position as an anthropological researcher. Before I left for Jaffna, Neelan Thiruchelvam was a highly visible member of Colombo civil society. While I was in Jaffna, he became a TULF member of Parliament in the Sri Lankan government. Surrounding him at all times were between six
and ten bodyguards, armed with automatic machine guns, always poised with a 
finger on the trigger guard. They surrounded Thiruchelvam as he walked from office 
to office and from building to building within the ICES compound. They stood out-
side the door to his office when he was in meetings. The bodyguards were dressed 
in civilian clothes—white or colored button-down shirts, dark trousers, shoes, san-
dals, or Bata (rubber) slippers—not in military uniforms and boots.

The image of these militarized bodies stuck in my mind as I endured this “jok-
ing” accusation that I was an LTTE assassin who had returned from Jaffna to kill 
Thiruchelvam. My confidence was challenged by this passing assault from a Sin-
halese academic. Scared and humiliated by his intimidation, his dismissal of my 
person, my voice, the experiences that I brought from Jaffna, my work as an ICES 
colleague, I could think of no response. I came to realize months later that this was 
an important ethnographic moment that shaped my understanding, my analyses 
of violence and war. Four years later the fears of the Sinhalese academic—and my 
own fears—were realized: On 29 July 1999 Neelan Thiruchelvam was “killed by a 
suicide bomber” at the entrance of ICES. In the days that followed, numerous Tamil 
youth were arrested and interrogated by the Sri Lankan military police throughout 
Colombo.

Cindy Katz calls for “a direction of field research that offers the possibility of 
more direct political engagement” (1996, 171). I write here as a researcher and an 
informant, making visible the experience of Tamils who continue to survive under 
oppressive conditions of state-sponsored discrimination and violence. Inherent in 
using oneself as an informant is the danger of compromising academic legitimacy 
by making visible the direction of one’s political engagement. Yet these are the ne-
necessary risks that researchers who work for social justice and social change face. Critical 
ethnographic research that is politically engaged is likely to demand emotional en-
gagement. As politically and emotionally engaged researchers presenting observa-
tions and analyses as informants, we are poised to challenge “the academic protocol 
that delegitimizes anger in the academic text [as] epistemologically strategic but fraudu-
 lent” (Keith 1992, 562). I find that my anger, frustration, fear, confusion— 
myriad emotions that arise in fieldwork and writing—are also a source of insight 
and understanding.

Notes

1. The thilakam or pottu (a vernacular term) is the dot that a woman places on her forehead. 
Traditionally symbolizing the state of auspiciousness, the red pottu indicates that a woman is 
marrried, and the black pottu signifies the liminal state of children and unmarried women in Hindu prac-
tice. In the context of Sri Lanka, Hindu-Tamil women have strategically chosen to remove the pottu in 
times of crisis (at police checkpoints and during military searches, state-sponsored “riots,” and sys-
tematic killings of Tamils) and even in the public workplace in an effort to mask one layer of Tamil 
identity in an environment in which Tamils are regarded as potential LTTE insurgents.

2. At the first National Convention of the TULF, on 14 May 1976, Tamil political leaders clearly 
articulated their decision to create a separate sovereign state of Tamil Eelam “by bringing that constitu-
tion [for the state of Tamil Eelam] into operation either by peaceful means or by direct action or 
struggle” (quoted in Wilson 2000, 114). Throughout this essay I use the term state to refer to an inde-
pendent, sovereign nation-state, with its constituted government and distinct geographical location.
3. The military tactic of "clearing operations" as a means of eliminating insurgencies against the state's governing power includes the use of chemical, conventional, and nuclear weapons. Bernard Nietschmann's discussion of the ecology of war sheds light on the examination of state-sponsored violence (1990). For example, Nietschmann points to the use of scorched-earth tactics "by the North against the Confederacy in the American Civil War, by Britain against the Mau Mau insurgency in Kenya (1951-1956), by France against Algerian independence forces (1949-1962), and by the Soviet Union against mujaheddin communities, their crops and sanctuaries in Afghanistan (1979-1989)" (p. 35). Scorched-earth tactics include napalm bombing, incendiary cluster bombng, artillery-shelling, the burning of forests, and the spraying of herbicides and poison gas. Nietschmann reports that the "United States forces bombed and shelled 30 percent of South Vietnam's territory ... and sprayed herbicides on 10 percent of the country, destroying 8 percent of the croplands, 14 percent of the forests, and 50 percent of the mangroves" with the intent of removing the "enemy's cover" (p. 35).

4. Evidence of state-sponsored genocide emerged with eyewitness accounts of Sinhalese rioters, under the protection of the Sinhalese police, "carrying voter lists and addresses of Tamil owners and occupants of houses, shops, industries, and other property" (Tambiah 1992, 73). Both Tambiah and Sivanandan and Waters (Sivanandan and Waters 1984a, 127) elaborate on the Sri Lankan government's prior intent and on how it planned the 1983 riots by distributing anti-Tamil propaganda and by organizing government vehicles and trains to transport Sinhalese rioters to strategic locations in order to expedite the violence.

5. The Palestinian Liberation Organization and the Irish Republican Army were also included in the U.S. State Department's list of terrorist organizations until they were formally invited by the U.S. government to take part in multilateral negotiations that received international recognition and provided an unprecedented degree of political status for them.

6. Other anthropologists have chosen to refrain from tape recording interviews in order to maintain the integrity of the research context. Edith Turner, for example, in her conversations with the Inupiat people of northern Alaska, explains that "continual tape recording, or writing field notes in front of my Inupiat friends—except for more formal sessions—would not have fit their style. My conversations with the Inupiat people were all unofficial, all human and merely friendly" (1996, xxii).

7. Diane Wolf examines the issues of power that are inherent in conducting fieldwork. In the context of First World feminist researchers conducting fieldwork among Third World women, she identifies "the unequal hierarchies or levels of control that are often maintained, perpetuated and created, and re-created after field research" (1996, 2). However, the categories "First World" and "Third World" are fraught with contradictions.

8. I should make it clear that I did not join the LTTE. Other anthropologists returning to their natal communities have joined nationalist organizations. For example, Joseba Zulaika joined the armed Basque separatist group Euskadi for Freedom in Spain (1995). Describing himself as "the anthropologist as terrorist," he asserts that he "was not interested in any nationalist agenda but only in writing a good ethnography" (p. 208).

9. The LTTE leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, has been characterized as an "authoritarian fascist" and the Pol Pot of South Asia (Burns 1995). Similar accusations have represented the LTTE as a "fascist" organization (Taraki 1991, 64; Shaminagarathnam 1993, 18).

10. Patricia Campbell Hearst, granddaughter of the newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst, was kidnapped on 4 February 1974 in Berkeley, California, at the age of twenty-three. Taken captive by the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA), a group that comprised a male black ex-convict and eight white followers, both men and women, Hearst was held captive for two months. Deciding to join the SLA in April 1974, she participated in an armed bank robbery by its members. Following another armed bank robbery a month later, American police and FBI agents firebombed the SLA safe house; only Hearst and two others survived. The three were arrested on 15 September 1975, and Hearst was convicted for her participation in the armed robberies. President Jimmy Carter commuted her prison sentence in 1979, and President Ronald Reagan pardoned her. These events received extensive global media attention, and Hearst's autobiography, Every Secret Thing, was published in 1992 (Castiglia 1996).

11. By calling me "a Patricia Hearst coming back to assassinate Neelan," the ICAES academic was referring to the phenomenon of Karum Pul (Black Tigers), an elite division of LTTE cadres who choose to deploy their bodies as missiles in the theater of war. Popular and academic discourse relies on the
construct of "suicide bomber" to describe this phenomenon in the Tamil nationalist movement. In
my work, I present an alternative perspective on this choice by examining the body as a site of resis-
tance and by analyzing violence as a means of dialogue.

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