Disaster Nationalism

Tsunami and Civil War in Sri Lanka

Vivian Y. Choi

EXPERIMENTAL FUTURES: TECHNOLOGICAL LIVES, SCIENTIFIC ARTS, ANTHROPOLOGICAL VOICES

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DISASTER NATIONALISM

TSUNAMI AND CIVIL WAR IN SRI LANKA

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Note on Transliteration

Following conventions of other ethnographies of Sri Lanka, rather than use a standard system for transliteration, I have written Tamil and Sinhala words phonetically in English. However, the English usages I follow are those commonly used for those words (e.g., *prashanai*, the Tamil word for problems). Place names and proper nouns are rendered in the text in the form they commonly take in the Sri Lankan press.

Abbreviations

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
AMDP	Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBS	Bodu Bala Sena (Army of Buddhist Power or Buddhist Power Force)
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
DMC	Disaster Management Centre
DRM	disaster risk management
DRR	disaster risk reduction
GIS	geographic information systems
GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IPKF	Indian Peacekeeping Force
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NGO	nongovernmental organization
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
P-TOMS	Post-Tsunami Operation Management Structure
RADA	Reconstruction and Development Agency
SMS	Short Message Service
STF	Special Task Force
TAFREN	Task Force to Rebuild the Nation
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHIC	United Nations Humanitarian Information Centre
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UTHR-J	University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna)
VOC	Vereenigde Nederlandsche Geoctroyeerde Oostindische Compagnie (Dutch East India Company)

Preface
The Struggle Endures

As this book has taken shape during the last decade, the world has moved apace, frighteningly so. As the world recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic and a global racial reckoning fomented from my hometown, I felt a sense of both urgency and paralysis revising this book. Working through personal and global tumult, I did not anticipate that the vociferous collective movement and protests referred to as *Aragalaya* ("struggle" or "public uprising" in Sinhala) that took shape and power in the spring and summer of 2022 in Sri Lanka would literally bring political power—a power viewed critically in this book—to a standstill. While the book concludes with the concerning dynamics of pandemic nationalism, I begin with the Aragalaya as exemplary of political possibility. The Aragalaya incited new, organic collective political hopes and spaces, cutting across ethnic, class, gender, and racial lines while also reproducing familiar forms of militarized and violent state repression. Comprehensive outlines of events and on-the-ground observations and reports are available elsewhere; here, a brief synopsis will have to suffice.[1]

In 2022, Sri Lanka was facing its worst economic crisis since independence in 1948, leading to ballooning inflation, electricity cuts, and shortages of basic necessities. A critical intersection of "external shocks" such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine combined with then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa's fiscal mismanagement and poor policy decisions to catalyze a major economic downturn.[2] This crisis was felt by millions of Sri Lankans, who heard the promise of Rajapaksa's national vision, "Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour," but never saw it materialize. Running out

of foreign currency reserves, the government could no longer import essentials like fuel, medicine, and food, a situation that created massive shortages, seven-hour-long electricity cuts, and long fuel queues in which people actually died waiting. This came on top of the already steep rise in cost of living due to skyrocketing inflation. Despite the spike of infrastructural development and economic jumps after the end of the war in 2009, this economic turmoil was years in the making. The so-called peace dividend did not pay out. In postwar disaster nationalism and capitalism, undercurrents of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, the concentration of executive power, increased military spending, and corruption and patronage politics led to neither development nor security. Sri Lanka's economic downfall has deeper roots, too, in economic liberalization as well as in the concentration of power to the executive presidency in 1978.[3]

Protests against the Rajapaksa administration started gaining momentum and numbers in March 2022, leading to a nonviolent occupation of Galle Face Green, the *GotaGoGama* ("Got[abaya] go village" in Sinhala) in April. Across social media, the hashtag #gotagohome also became prominent during this time. Galle Face Green in Colombo was also the site of the war victory parade I discuss in chapter 1. Many people came together during the occupation, ringing in the Sinhala Tamil New Year in April and breaking fast during Ramadan. Through the Aragalaya, people found a shared space in which to voice their concerns beyond economic woes. Years of authoritarian and repressive state violence controlled the narratives and memories of war and national security, but the ghosts that continue to haunt postwar Sri Lanka also materialized (Fedricks et al. 2023, 31).[4] Protests continued regularly beyond Galle Face Green. In May 2022, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa resigned. Of course the government responded in the way most familiar to them: through securitization, police force, and violence, yet *GotaGoGama* remained steadfast. I watched breathlessly on social media as protesters eventually overtook President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's home in July 2022. The president fled the country, tendering his resignation from Singapore shortly after. Longtime politician Ranil Wickremesinghe was installed as Rajapaksa's replacement—not exactly the regime change the Aragalaya desired. Echoing his predecessors by calling the protesters a "fascist threat to democracy," Wickremesinghe resorted to the Prevention of Terrorism Act and declared a state of emergency to "do whatever it takes" to stop the protesters. Arrests of students and protesters abound. Sri Lanka has

taken on a loan from the International Monetary Fund and implemented various austerity measures. The status quo remains. Rice and fuel prices are only marginally lower. "What to do?" my friend in Sri Lanka responds to me with that familiar refrain over WhatsApp.

Still, it is possible to recognize the power of the Aragalaya—a collective force unimaginable and unprecedented, a new political space, demanding not just a new president or administration but a *system* change. The system in question is one that is critically examined in this book, a system of centralized power undergirded by Sinhala Buddhist nationalism and ennobled by the power of violence, which makes the Aragalaya's possibility for change, however fleeting, so extraordinary.

Acknowledgments

This book has been so long in the making. It is easy to begin this long list of gratitude, but it is difficult to know where to stop. I know there are names that I have unintentionally forgotten to add here.

First: the generosity of those who took the time to have conversations with me. Some of these conversations made it in this book, many did not, but all taught me about life and disaster in Sri Lanka. Most of these conversations could not have happened without Usha and Nitharshini, my amazing and fearless research assistants. They translated difficult conversations, hauled me around on the back of their scooters to wherever research whims took us, and always maintained good spirits, despite the gravity of our work. I had the most loving hosts with the Bartholmeusz family in Kalmunai. They treated me like their own sister, fed me delicious foods, while still giving me my own space and respecting my sometimes wonky research schedule. Muradh, a tireless and joyful leader of his community and coordinator of disaster mitigation and management, became a good friend. Many of our "work" meetings turned into long conversations and meals with his family and walks around his village. Fajru was one of the very first people I met out east, when I was struggling to put together a project early in graduate school. His generosity and critical concern for institutional forms of disaster management and development in the east were necessary and taught me about the ambivalences of doing disaster recovery work in Sri Lanka. His compassion was always for the people. As I was completing copyedits for the book, Fajru suddenly died. Fajru, I'm sorry I couldn't share the book with you in Sri

Lanka. May Allah grant you the highest level *Jannah*. Also gone too soon are brothers Lathan and Nalin, may they rest in power. Andrew Lucas and his treehouse were a home away from home. Omar Siddique was my Colombo refuge. He and Melissa Mandor were levity during a time of deep political turmoil and gravity in Sri Lanka. Sabrina Cader was welcome assistance in the National Archives. Nalayani Jayaram was a patient Tamil tutor (my own language shortcomings notwithstanding!) in Colombo who also generously shared with me her own family and life experiences.

I often joke that I have been sounding like a broken record for years, but this is a reflection of the many opportunities to give talks and presentations, all of which have helped me to think about the project in productive ways. Thanks to the following institutions: The Department of Anthropology at UC Irvine; the Department of Anthropology at Cornell University; the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; the Department of Anthropology at Oregon State University; the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute; the History and Philosophy of Science Workshop at the University of Chicago; the Center for South Asia at Brown University; Rutgers University's Symposium on Visual Culture in and out of Crisis; the Department of Anthropology and the Center for South Asia at the University of Washington; the South Asia Program at the University of Minnesota; the Department of Anthropology at Western Carolina State University; the Department of Science and Technology Policy at the Korea Advanced Institute for Science and Technology; the Department of Anthropology at Yonsei University; and the Khmer Studies and Social Work Program at the Royal University of Phnom Penh.

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Parts of this book have appeared in other places. Early thinking on disaster and insecurity appeared in "A Safer Sri Lanka? Technology, Security and Preparedness" in *Tsunami in a Time of War: Aid, Activism and Reconstruction in Sri Lanka and Aceh* (edited by Malathi de Alwis and Eva-Lotta Hedman) and "After Disasters: Emergences of Insecurity in Sri Lanka" in *Dynamics of Disaster: Lessons on Risk, Response and Recovery* (edited by Barbara Allen and Rachel Dowty). Much of chapter 2 was published as "Anticipatory States: Tsunami, War, and Insecurity in Sri Lanka" in *Cultural Anthropology*. Parts of the book appear in "Infrastructures of Feeling: The Sense and Governance of Disasters in Sri Lanka" in *Disastrous Times: Beyond Environmental Crisis in Urbanizing Asia* (edited by Eli Elinoff and Tyson Vaughan).

I first spent time in Sri Lanka on a Fulbright Fellowship, with not much experience and a lot to learn, prior to starting graduate school. I am grateful in particular to Malathi de Alwis, who generously gave a chance to my naive younger self. I regret that I was not able to share this book with her before her untimely death. I was fortunate to also have an amazing intellectual community at the University of California, Davis, guiding my research. My adviser, Smriti Srinivas, while always ready with readings, advice, and ideas, made it clear from day one that my project was mine. I treasure her wit, creativity, and willingness to think with me—she taught me very explicitly that the relationship between adviser and advisee was one of mutual intellectual exchange. My committee was a warm circle of generosity, insight, and care. Tim Choy first inspired me with his beautiful prose, and today he still provides gentle nudges, clever advice, and corny jokes (innovation!). Joe Dumit was the master of listening and repeating back to me what I had said in a way that made more sense while insisting that it was all my idea. A feat indeed! Alan Klima assured me during my first year of graduate school that I would "make it." He has been many academics' writing guru, including mine. Alan was instrumental in helping me organize the edits for the book while also reminding me that the book needed to be out in the world. They have all taught me what it means to be a generous scholar. I am also thankful for the opportunity to have learned from Marisol de la Cadena, Suad Joseph, Cristiana Giordano, and Suzana Sawyer.

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The sea pronounces something, over and over,
in a hoarse whisper; I cannot quite make it out.
But God knows I have tried.

Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

Tsunami-damaged home on the east coast of Sri Lanka. Photo by author.


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Introduction

WHEN DOES ONE DISASTER END AND ANOTHER BEGIN?

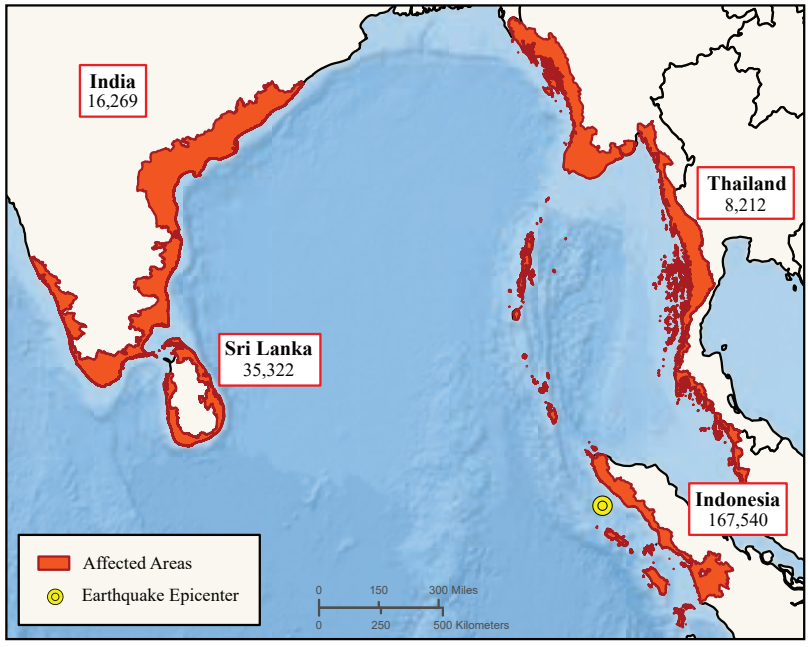
Mufeetha heard a deep and disturbingly quiet roar and looked up at the sky, which filled her with the fear of Allah. She thought at first she was looking at a sky blackened with crows. Later, she—along with many other Sri Lankans—would learn what to call that dark wall of water: tsunami. For a flickering moment, she thought of the valuables at home, her gold jewelry especially, but there was no time. With black waves lurching behind her, she managed to grab her two children and head inland. She was lucky to have escaped with her family (her husband was working abroad, as so many in Sri Lanka do), though her house was damaged. Many others in her community were not so fortunate: the eastern coast of Sri Lanka, the region of focus for this book and the location of Mufeetha's village, suffered more deaths and destruction than other tsunami-affected parts of the island.

On December 26, 2004, a massive megathrust earthquake with a magnitude of 9.1 rocked the Sunda Trench off the coast of Indonesia (Lay et al. 2005). The earthquake was registered as the third-strongest in recorded

seismological history, with the longest duration of faulting—between eight and ten minutes—ever observed (Park et al. 2005). It was so strong it caused the entire planet to wobble, vibrating as much as half an inch off its axis. It also tore open a gash in the earth between 720 and 780 miles (1,200–1,300 km) long (National Science Foundation 2005). The subduction of the India Plate beneath the Burma Plate also triggered a series of deadly tsunamis along the coastlines of many landmasses in the Indian Ocean. At the time, the "Boxing Day Tsunami" was a natural disaster of unprecedented magnitude. More than 230,000 people died in fourteen countries. Aceh, Indonesia, located nearest to the epicenter of the earthquake, was the most devastated region, with over 160,000 deaths. Sri Lanka was the second-most devastated country, with over 35,000 dead or missing and over 500,000 displaced (Government of Sri Lanka 2005), prompting global sympathy and unprecedented levels of international aid and response (Korf 2006a; Telford and Cosgrave 2007) (see map I.1).

The black waters of the tsunami struck an already war-torn shoreline in Sri Lanka. In 2004, Sri Lanka was engaged in what was then Asia's longest-running civil war, in which the Sri Lankan government had been battling the militant separatist group the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam ("LTTE" or "Tigers") for over two decades.

Disaster Nationalism traces the politics of tsunami reconstruction as they unfolded upon an already scarred social and political landscape in Sri Lanka. Given the island's decades of strife engendered by ardent, exclusionary, and oftentimes violent nationalisms, I argue that the tsunami's devastation and the techniques of disaster management and reconstruction that followed created opportunities for new modes of statecraft, national restructuring, and militarization. With the Sri Lankan government functioning as the obligatory passage point (Callon 1986) through which disaster management practices and reconstruction programs were conceived and executed, post-tsunami reconstruction efforts such as national disaster warning systems, coastal no-build buffer zones, and new housing schemes served as material, physical, and ideological nation-building projects. These efforts legitimated new forms of population and territorial management as well as—most significantly, as this book will detail—the government's aggressive approach to the war and terrorism (see Deleuze 1992; Foucault 2007; Lakoff and Collier 2015; Ong and Collier 2005). Based on eighteen months of fieldwork spanning from 2008 to 2017, *Disaster Nationalism* follows these national disaster management projects after the tsunami and through the end of the civil war in May 2009.



MAP I.1. 2004 Tsunami: Most affected countries. Total count of missing or dead as a result of the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia. Source: International Tsunami Information Center—UNESCO. Credit: Sara Dale.

As the organizing framework and heuristic of the book, I define disaster nationalism as both the process and mechanisms of state power that utilize disasters to produce, legitimize, and entrench national ideologies. As Naomi Klein's conception of "disaster capitalism" points to the way disasters open the door for corporate and free-market reorganization, disaster nationalism highlights a different but related phenomenon that took shape in Sri Lanka amid the ruins of both the civil war and the Indian Ocean tsunami. Where decades of war and competing virulent nationalisms had normalized militarization as a structuring force in social and political life, disaster management as a newly established institution after the tsunami also cohered with and empowered the Sri Lankan government's military goal to eliminate the LTTE.[1] The war was not merely the social context in which the tsunami played out; rather the tsunami reinforced an existing militarized logic em-

ployed to manage uncontrollable threats, including war and terrorism. Disaster management worked as a legitimate institutional framework categorizing both tsunamis and terrorism as imminent disaster risks, in turn sanctioning the state's goals to protect and uphold existing exclusionary majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideologies. By examining the militarization of disaster management, I show how the Sri Lankan state propagates the fantasy of an always-at-risk nation. And by tracing the mechanisms of disaster nationalism, I illustrate how disaster management also became a mechanism of national securitization, reproducing ongoing conditions of insecurity and precarity for minority Tamil and Muslim communities in disaster-affected areas of the island. This palpable lack of social and political change in the years *after* the tsunami and *after* the end of the war evinces the enduring disaster that is state-sponsored nationalism in Sri Lanka: "That there should be no difference between disaster and none at all: this is the disaster" (Smock in Blanchot 1995, xiv–xv).

Disaster serves as both empirical focus and analytic in this book. Empirically, disasters challenge and exhaust existing idioms, epistemologies, methods, and politics (Fortun 2001, 2012; Fortun et al. 2017). As totalizing and multifaceted events and processes of scale, disasters are not easily contained, materially, temporally, or categorically. They are also prisms, allowing us to see novel forms of social and political response (see Guggenheim 2014; Tironi 2014). They lay bare social and political instabilities while exacerbating and creating new ones. Each disaster shifts existing ontologies of disasters, the intersections of the material and social worlds, challenging the horizons of what is possible, what is imaginable (Morimoto 2012; Oliver-Smith 2002). While traditionally war has been absent from disaster categories outlined by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sendai Framework, as Kenneth Hewitt (2021) urges, the impacts of war demand the attention of critical disaster studies. The intertwined disasters of tsunami and civil war in Sri Lanka forced me to reckon with their varied, complex, and layered elements, dimensions, and articulations. In turn, disaster also became a productive analytic.[2]

In earlier stages of research, I was concerned that "disaster" should be a category used judiciously. Sri Lankan disaster governance, and disaster risk reduction and management more generally, by employing the term expansively, had created opportune conditions for power. I worried, too, that "disaster" might lose its significance or become banal through overuse. But I was challenged to

consider, on the contrary, what it might mean to consider more phenomena in the world as disasters.[3] Why shouldn't other forms of injury, destruction, and violence be given the same attention that spectacular disastrous events are? My approach to disaster as an analytic, then, is less invested in quibbling over what it is, what counts as a disaster, and the word's lexical origins or confusions and conflations with related terms such as crisis and catastrophe (see, for example, Barrios 2016; Quarantelli 1998; Tierney, Lindell, and Perry 2001), and more about following its contextual articulations and movements, considering disaster as both an object of concern (and care) and a process. Accordingly, in this book I follow disaster's articulations as an empirical force, materially, emotionally, discursively, and institutionally, as it is mobilized and militarized by the Sri Lankan government and, crucially, as it is experienced by Sri Lankans. It is precisely the power of conflating terrorism and natural disaster *as* disaster that this book problematizes. I build on anthropological work calling for systemic analyses of disaster as process (Button and Schuller 2016; Oliver-Smith 2002) by considering historical and political circumstances not just as prefigurations of risk and vulnerability but also *as disasters*. State-sponsored nationalism *as* enduring disaster in Sri Lanka reveals the temporal and political stakes, structures, and experiences of disaster nationalism.[4]

As an analytical lens, then, disasters and their unfoldings and management draw out how different kinds of political systems—racial, colonial, economic, technological—intersect. Since the tsunami and earthquake in 2004, disasters such as Japan's "Triple Disaster" of March 2011 (Dudden 2012; Pritchard 2010; see also Allison 2013), Hurricane Katrina (Adams 2013; Carter 2019), Hurricanes Maria and Ida (Bonilla 2020; Lloréns 2021) and earthquakes in Nepal (Shneiderman et al. 2023; Seale-Feldman 2020; Warner, Hindman, and Snellinger 2015) and Haiti (Beckett 2020; Farmer 2011; Schuller 2016) show how disasters have shaped and will continue to shape life and politics in the Anthropocene.[5] Moreover, as emergencies increasingly justify exceptional modes of militarized humanitarianism as a form of global governance (Benton 2017; Fassin and Pandolfi 2010) and as a counterinsurgency tactic (Bhan 2014; on militarized humanitarianism as "warfare," see Zia 2019), the need for examining these complex intersections and how they are experienced remains ever urgent. *Disaster Nationalism* offers both a method and a theory to examine the implications of new modes of risk and disaster infrastructures and technological fixes (see Fisch 2022; Reddy 2023) as preemptive approaches to disasters become more salient in contemporary

security-scapes (Gusterson 2004) of anti-terrorism (Anderson 2010; Masco 2014), climate security (Cons 2018), and, especially in this moment of writing, pandemics (Keck 2020; Porter 2019).[6]

NATIONALISM AND MILITARIZATION IN SRI LANKA: A BRIEF HISTORY

To historicize the intersection of nationalism and militarization in Sri Lanka, this section provides an abbreviated outline of the civil war (with chapter 1 providing a more tailored account of institutional precursors to the Sri Lankan government's Disaster Management Act). In short, the war, which spanned from 1983 to 2009, was waged between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, a militant rebel group fighting for what they believed to be their rightful homeland on the island. The war did not break out suddenly, but rather came to a head in 1983. As I detail below, following independence from Great Britain in 1948, Sinhala Buddhist majoritarian nationalist policies and social projects increasingly marginalized and alienated Tamil minorities, leading to a secessionist movement and ultimately the brutal emergence of the LTTE as the self-proclaimed representative of Tamils and Tamil Eelam in Sri Lanka—and decades of civil war.

First, to give a sense of Sri Lanka's heterogeneity, some demographics. The majority ethnic group at 75 percent is Sinhalese; Tamil populations central to the conflict and the notion of the imagined monoethnic Tamil Eelam (see map 1.2) make up approximately 11 percent of the population (a number that has fluctuated down due to migration and deaths from war), and Muslims (classified as both an ethnic and religious minority) make up approximately 9 percent. Malaiyaha or "Hill Country" Tamils, descendants of South Indian plantation laborers who migrated during British rule, are another Tamil-speaking minority and make up 4 percent of the population. Other minorities such as Portuguese and Dutch Burghers and the aboriginal Veddas make up the remainder of Sri Lanka's population. Tamil and Sinhala are also languages, though Muslims, mainly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, also speak Tamil. Many other minorities speak Sinhala, Tamil, and English. Sinhalese are predominantly Buddhist (approximately 70 percent), though some are Christian. While Tamils are mostly Hindu (approximately 13 percent), a small subset are also Christian.[7]

While in shorthand the civil war is often characterized as an "ethnic" one, ethnicity fails to capture the complexities of the conflict. The majoritarian nationalism of Sinhala Buddhism is not just about religious and ethnic claims but also about how these claims are at once political, cultural, and economic (Hewage 2014; Kadirgamar 2013; Venugopal 2011). Relatedly, I shift the frame to illuminate the consequences of state formation (see Bastian 1999) in which Sinhala Buddhist nationalism is central, yet not all-encompassing. The foundations of state-sponsored projects of exclusionary nationalism, decades of an almost continuous state of emergency, and legally sanctioned counterterrorism measures and violence all point to how disaster can be instrumentalized by the state. Disaster nationalism draws attention to the mechanisms of disaster management that merge with state, military, and Sinhala Buddhist nationalist ideologies.

Prior to the "disaster" (Manor 1984) of Black July in 1983 and the official "beginning" of the Sri Lankan civil war, tensions had long been mounting between the majoritarian Sinhalese Buddhist government and minority Tamils. Though ardent nationalisms have pitted Sinhalese and Tamils against each other since time immemorial, Sri Lanka's ethnic identities and affiliations are rather more recent historical developments, made politically meaningful first through British colonial governance and later as Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) developed as a postcolonial nation-state.

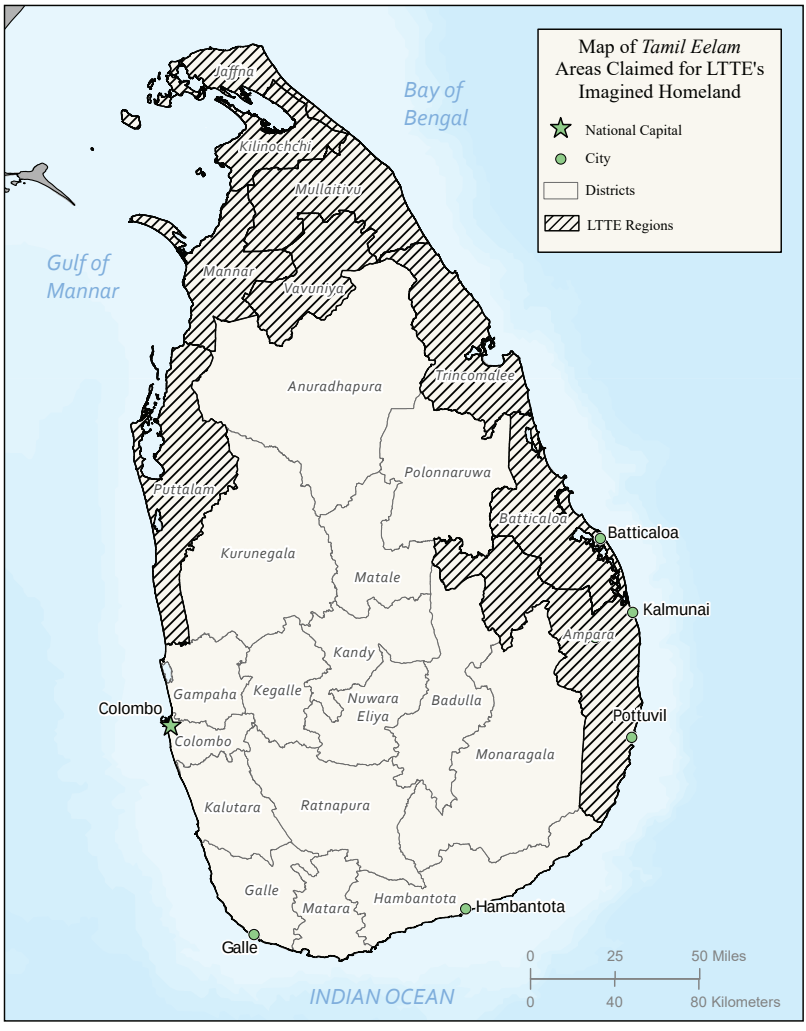
While the British did not "invent" ethnicity (Thiranagama 2011), they did foster notions of "racial" difference that attained increasing significance through political structures. In the gradual centralization of state power after independence, a new and powerful Sinhala nationalist consciousness alleged that the majority community—the Sinhalese—had been exploited by colonial rule, which had also given undue influence to minority groups including Tamils, Muslims, and Christians (Jayawardena 2003; Tambiah 1986; Thiranagama 2011). The idea of Buddhism as a response to colonialism "laid the groundwork" for both Sinhala Buddhist identity and Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (Gajaweera 2015). This hegemonic Sinhalese national consciousness resulted in discriminatory policies that I outline in detail in chapter 1.[8] The Constitution of 1972 changed the nation's name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka, removed protections for minorities, and enshrined Buddhism as the official state religion, illustrating the growing power of a Sinhala *and* Buddhist national identity. The exclusionary power of these various

ethno-religious political developments is evidenced by the numerous anti-Tamil riots in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983.

Through the 1970s, intense state-sponsored Sinhalization led to the social tensions which gave rise to Tamil political movements (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999; Venugopal 2018). Facing increased marginalization and racism in Sri Lankan politics, the major opposition party, Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), emerged, and with it the notion of an independent state of *Tamil Eelam* (see map I.2). Composed mainly of middle-class and upper-caste educated Tamil gentlemen, TULF was committed to a nonviolent solution.[9] Despite this, the notion of an independent Eelam roused suspicion among the Sinhala-dominated government. This suspicion was heightened by the growing presence of a militant group of young, lower-caste Tamil men—the Tamil New Tigers—who had begun committing acts of robbery and killing Sinhalese police officers. As Ahilan Kadirgamar (2020) recounts, this armed presence, combined with the 1977 anti-Tamil riots after elections and growing state repression, created more patterns of violence on the island.

By July 1983, then, social tensions had been mounting. During this period, the New Tigers continued to gain control of the Eelam movement, claiming to be the sole voice of Sri Lankan Tamils as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and fighting for what they saw as their rightful monoethnic imagined homeland of the northern and eastern regions of the island.[10] The violence against Tamils that police were committing with impunity in Jaffna stoked the flames of the Tiger militants, eventually leading to retaliatory actions by both parties. The final act that led to the violent riots of July 1983 was the killing of a convoy of Sinhalese policemen by the Tigers in their northern stronghold of Jaffna. Riots against Tamils ensued in areas all over Sri Lanka. The most striking aspect of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots was the state-sponsored nature of their disorder and violence: police, if not committing violent acts themselves, stood by and watched as they unfolded (Jeganathan 2000; Manor 1984).

After 1983, the war would take several twists and turns, with many failed attempts to come to a peace accord or resolution. These various parts of the civil war are divided into four phases: Eelam War I, beginning in July 1983 and ending in 1987; Eelam War II (1987–1993); Eelam III (1994–2001); and Eelam IV (2005–2009). These phases reflect periods of intense hostilities and fighting.



MAP I.2. Tamil Eelam: Areas claimed for the LTTE's imagined homeland. Credit: Sara Dale.

Throughout the war, many atrocities would be committed. Both the government and the LTTE demonstrated their willingness to terrorize civilians. In addition to the LTTE, the Sri Lankan government's anti-terrorism efforts brutally put down the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP or the People's Liberation Front) and their anti-state insurrectionist movements in 1971 and again in the late 1980s.[11] The LTTE, under the direction of their leader Velupillai Prabhakaran, forcibly recruited child soldiers, killed and assassinated vocal critics and fellow Tamils, and was credited with the invention of suicide bombing. Though the LTTE committed many acts of terrorism throughout the decades-long conflict, other actors—including the Sri Lankan state, the Indian Peacekeeping Force, the JVP, and other paramilitary groups[12]—also perpetrated violent overtures and extrajudicial killings. Militarization became embedded in social and political life, and in administrative culture, with state efforts to securitize spaces with soldiers and checkpoints (Pieris 2018).

Perhaps the most hopeful moment for a peace negotiation came in 2002, when the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government signed a ceasefire agreement mediated by the Norwegian government. However, the relative break in fighting would not last long; relations began to sour between the two warring parties again. In March of 2004, LTTE colonel Karuna Amman broke away from the Tigers, alleging that they had long ignored the needs and interests of eastern Tamils. Karuna's departure, and the defection of some 6,000 LTTE soldiers to the Sri Lankan Army, debilitated the LTTE's strength and reach in the east. Tensions between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka grew increasingly heated until the tsunami crashed into Sri Lanka's already war-weary shorelines in December 2004, after which the final phase of the war, "Eelam IV," would begin. By that time, the death toll of the war had exceeded 60,000, with internally displaced populations sometimes as high as 800,000 (Le Billon and Waizenegger 2007). Tsunami reconstruction would be folded into the government's war campaign.

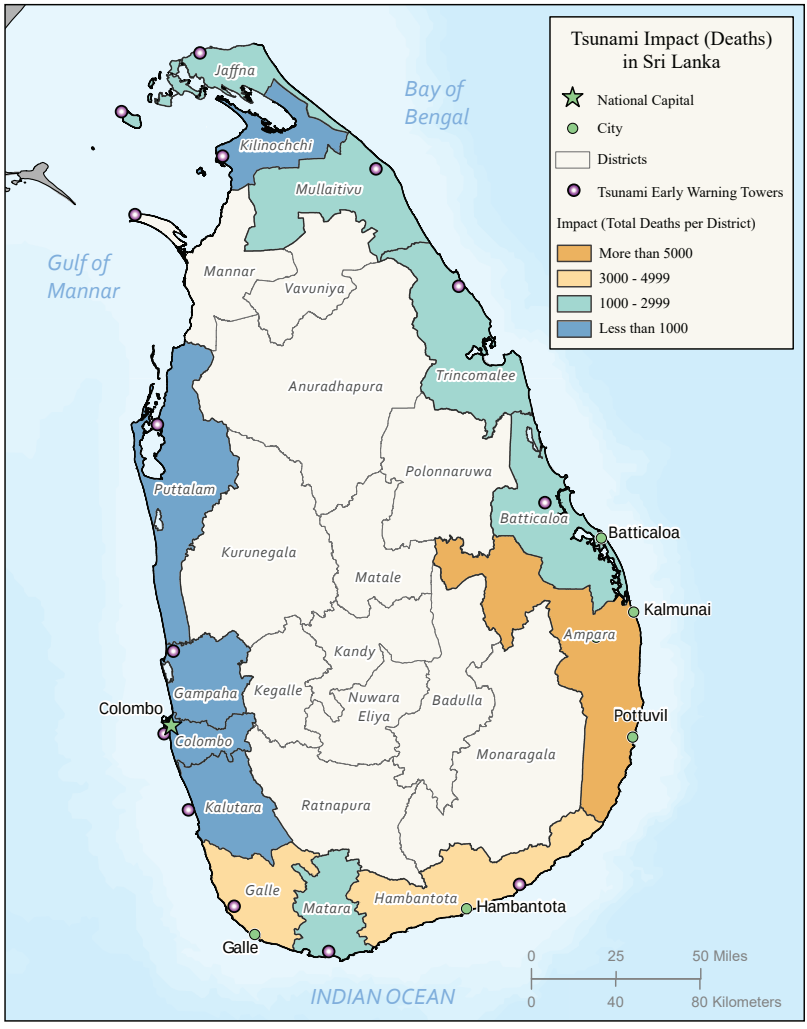
DISASTER MANAGEMENT: A SAFER SRI LANKA?

With thousands dead and missing and nearly three-quarters of Sri Lanka's coastline inundated, then president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga and the government of Sri Lanka were chided locally and internationally for their slow and disorganized response to the crushing devastation. Heeding these criticisms, Kumaratunga declared a state of emergency, ushering in new

institutionalized practices and legal frameworks around disasters and disaster management. For, if anything, the tsunami brought into sharp relief how *unprepared* Sri Lanka was for tsunamis and other natural disasters. Friends and administrators in Sri Lanka lamented to me that before 2004, they had no idea that tsunamis even existed. In response, the Sri Lankan government formed the Parliamentary Committee on Natural Disasters, whose mandate was to assess Sri Lanka's level of preparedness for such unexpected catastrophes. The culmination of this committee's work was Disaster Management Act No. 13, which "provides for a framework for disaster risk management in Sri Lanka and addresses disaster management (DM) holistically, leading to a policy shift from response based mechanisms to a proactive approach toward disaster risk management [DRM]" (Ministry of Environmental and Natural Resources 2007, 67; Ministry of Disaster Management 2005).[13] This proactive risk management approach was also presented in the committee's "Towards a Safer Sri Lanka: Road Map for Disaster Risk Management," in which risk and vulnerability assessments figured as key to creating a state of preparedness, as opposed to responsiveness, for whatever type of disaster may come.[14]

In this preparedness approach, risk figures as potential disaster and future threat to national security, and national threats are not limited to natural disasters but can also include health pandemics and terrorist attacks (Knowles 2013; Lakoff 2008; Lowe 2010; Massumi 2005). Under the purview of risk management, a preparedness rationale solicits new technical Band-Aids and infrastructure: warning systems, evacuation drills, event simulations, and overall attempts to increase government management and control. The impetus of such programs and collaborations is to invoke a continual state of readiness and maximum security of state territory: it is not a matter of *if* a disaster strikes, but a matter of *when*. The imminence of disaster is well-represented in the circular temporality of the disaster risk management framework: Mitigation → Preparedness → Response → Rehabilitation → Mitigation. In Sri Lanka, this shift toward preparedness was overseen by the National Disaster Management Centre (DMC). While specialized disaster agencies existed in Sri Lanka before the tsunami, there was no legal framework for disaster management and thus no holistic mechanism by which to coordinate it, and the DMC would fill this institutional gap.

The establishment of Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Act and "Roadmap for a Safer Sri Lanka" aligned with the Hyogo Declaration and Hyogo



MAP I.3. Tsunami deaths by district in Sri Lanka. Credit: Sara Dale. Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Framework for Action 2005–2015, which was endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction immediately following the tsunami in January 2005. The Hyogo Framework, while new, followed an existing ethic of prevention and conceptions of disaster risk management proposed by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) in 2000 (UNISDR 2007).[15] In the Hyogo Framework, disasters are limited to events "caused by hazards of natural origin and related environmental and technological hazards and risks" (UNISDR 2007). Alongside the tasks of rebuilding homes and villages and reestablishing livelihoods for people, new national disaster preparedness projects were also being implemented as post-tsunami projects with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which aimed to work closely with the Sri Lankan government's development strategies. Sri Lanka's Disaster Management Act of 2005 defines disasters and risks more expansively. It categorizes disasters as "the actual or imminent occurrence of a *natural or man-made* event, which endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person or group of persons in Sri Lanka, or which destroys or damages or threatens to destroy or damage any property" (Ministry of Disaster Management 2005; my emphasis). These "natural or man-made" events include floods, landslides, industrial hazards, tsunami (seismic waves), earthquakes, air hazards, fire, epidemics, explosions, air raids, civil or internal strife, chemical accidents, radiological emergencies, oil spills, nuclear disasters, urban and forest fires, and coastal erosion.

The shock of the tsunami raised hopes among citizens and politicians alike that the destruction might lead to a unified effort to rebuild the nation. As unprecedented amounts of humanitarian aid poured into Sri Lanka, Chandrika Bandaranaike and the Government of Sri Lanka attempted to forge a joint aid-sharing mechanism, the Post-Tsunami Operation Management Structure (P-TOMS), between the government and the LTTE.[16] Compared to the southern coast, tsunami aid distribution lagged in the LTTE-controlled north and east; the P-TOMS was intended to move aid in more quickly.[17] Unfortunately, the P-TOMS stoked already existing social and political cleavages and fears (see also Hyndman 2007). The Tigers clamored to have as much control of the funds as possible. Muslims (based on a history of distrust and vulnerability and exclusion in broader conflict-related peace talks) and Sinhala-Buddhist nationalist hardliners decried the P-TOMS as giving into LTTE's secessionist and sovereign demands with the support of international

donors (Keenan 2010; McGilvray and Raheem 2007).[18] Tsunami-affected Sinhalese in Southern Sri Lanka saw the P-TOMS as a "precursor to dividing the nation" (Gamburd 2013, 12), in addition to concerns that the aid would be misappropriated into LTTE war funds, rather than actually used for tsunami aid. Fears of "unethical conversions" by Christian humanitarian organizations further "threatened" Buddhist foundations on the island (Mahadev 2014; see also Korf et al. 2010).[19]

Though the P-TOMS was eventually signed in June 2005, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court issued a stay to block its implementation in July. So while the 2004 tsunami did provide a fleeting respite from the volatile relations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, disputes over the P-TOMS seemed to cast the final blow to the already tenuous ceasefire (Uyangoda 2005).[20]

Just a month after blocking the P-TOMS, the Supreme Court also announced that President Bandaranaike's term would end in December 2005. In November 2005, Mahinda Rajapaksa was elected on a platform to end the war. He soon replaced the previously established Task Force to Rebuild the Nation (TAFREN) with the Reconstruction and Development Agency (RADA), claiming that reconstruction would be parallel to the peace process. By 2006, the LTTE and the government were engaged in retaliatory fighting. The Sri Lankan government took military advantage of Karuna Amman's breakaway from the LTTE and their weakened hold over the east. In 2007, the eastern region of Sri Lanka, once considered part of Tamil Eelam, was under the control of government forces. By January 2008, the Sri Lankan government had declared the already tenuous ceasefire officially null. Sri Lanka's roadmap for a safer Sri Lanka would continue along a path of war.

DISASTER NATIONALISM

When I arrived in Colombo to begin my fieldwork in 2008, President Mahinda Rajapaksa's aim was clear. "Mahinda Chinthana [Mahinda's Intention]: Vision for a New Sri Lanka" pledged to bring a swifter resolution to the war, with an agenda that "renounced separatism" and promised a national security policy that would prioritize the sovereign and territorial integrity of the island. This vision was articulated in billboards that decorated Colombo and its suburbs, like the one pictured in figure I.1, which depicts the government's objective for the year of its sixtieth anniversary of independence: "The Year for War."

FIGURE I.1. "2008: Year for War" billboard in Colombo. Photo by author.

The far-left image in figure I.1 demarcates in bright red the areas controlled by the LTTE in 2005 and reads, "areas under terrorists." The center image illustrates the "areas where terrorists are hiding at the end of 2007." In 2007, the government seized military control of the eastern bloc of Eelam, leaving only the LTTE stronghold of the north under the control of "terrorists." The last map on the right is a fully green, glowing Sri Lanka—a nation freed from the clutches of terrorism. The bottom reads: "Let us build a country where all nationalities can live in freedom." This billboard was displayed for Sri Lanka's Independence Day celebrations; at the top it says: "Let us celebrate sixty years of independence with pride." Though the government did not fulfill their goal of ending the war in 2008, they did finally proclaim victory over the Tigers on May 19, 2009.

This national projection of a "free" Sri Lanka worked in tandem with the government's disaster management strategy following the tsunami. Disaster nationalism—a militarized logic and practice of managing potential risks to the nation—justified the state's approach to natural disasters *and* terrorism. Consider an address given by Minister of Disaster Management and Human

Rights Mahinda Samarasinghe a few months after the war's dramatic end. In his speech at the Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, the minister discussed the successes and potential successes of a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) framework and of mainstreaming DRR in national development planning. He ended the address by shifting his focus from natural disaster to the recent end of Sri Lanka's "man-made" disaster:

> My country—Sri Lanka—has just overcome a human-made disaster of a magnitude unparalleled by any similar recent events elsewhere. We have overcome the scourge of terrorism that has beset our island nation for well over two decades. . . . The Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa has taken on the task of reconstructing a nation which has suffered much in its efforts to reunite its people ensuring that all Sri Lankans are now able to lay claim to one, undivided territory as their common Motherland.
>
> All our efforts at renewal, rebuilding and resettlement, however will be put at risk if the cause factors of the conflict and terrorism are not addressed and our President has committed himself to evolving a home grown political response to those factors. *Borrowing from DRR methodology*, our political response will reduce the risk of a renewed human-made disaster, i.e. terrorism and conflict, through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the causal factors, evolve consensual responses and improved preparedness for adverse events. We do not for a moment think that Sri Lanka's national renewal will be quick or easy.
>
> There are ever-present threats that we must, and will, guard against, including the threats of new violence and destabilization. (Samarasinghe 2009; my emphasis)

According to this institutionalized logic, disasters—both natural and human-made—remain ever possible, even after their supposed ends.

This logic would be reiterated again just a month later. In July 2009, I attended a symposium on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Variability with Farood, a man from the east who was also working on disaster-related development work. Once again Minister Samarasinghe offered his words on disaster governance in Sri Lanka. He did not immediately discuss climate change or the tsunami, but instead addressed the situation of some 280,000 war-displaced Tamils in the north, interned in military-guarded camps. He approached the topic by way of his recent trip to L'Aquila, Italy, devastated by

an earthquake, where he had "toured" the displacement camps. In his speech, he emphasized that the entire visit was escorted and vetted by the Italian government and, further, that no agency had unrestricted access. By sharing the story of this "escorted visit," he suggested that "free media access" would disrupt the "fragile area." My friend jabbed me in the side with his elbow: "Write this down!" he whispered loudly into my ear. Samarasinghe stressed that it was unreasonable for international aid agencies to ask for unrestricted access, as "unrestricted access is contrary to the national framework." International assistance is welcome, the minister reiterated, as long as it falls within the national framework of an "independent nation." "You see," my friend told me later, "they cannot resist talking about war when it comes to disaster." Echoing the billboard discussed earlier, in the Sri Lankan state's fantasy production (Aretxaga 2003)—the reality of a purified nation—terrorism and nature are cast into the same category of an "other" or imminent "threat" that must be continually managed.

My term *disaster nationalism* builds on Naomi Klein's (2005) notion of disaster capitalism. For Klein, the "shock" of disasters including wars, natural disasters, coups, and terrorist attacks invites the conditions for advancing neoliberal economic reforms and restructuring under the guise of democracy building. Key to her analysis is not just the possibility of profiting from disaster but also the ways in which disasters and moments of shock and terror are exploited to impose radical social and economic engineering. In Sri Lanka, rebuilding efforts favored and drove profit-minded projects, in which strategic and predatory land grabs from vulnerable communities were used to facilitate lucrative tourist development (Wright, Kelman, and Dodds 2021). Along the southern coast, where the "golden wave" of humanitarian aid was competitive and steeped in patrimonial politics and neoliberal logics (Gamburd 2013; Korf et al. 2010; Stirrat 2006), concessions to the one-hundred-meter no-build buffer zone were made for hotel construction and tourist development. Meanwhile, those living in buffer zones, often fishermen whose livelihoods were at stake, were not allowed to rebuild their homes (see Gunewardena 2010). Along the eastern coast, some areas such as Arugam Bay were also being primed for tourist development. Further north, in Ampara District, where I worked, the creation of buffer zones exacerbated land and housing shortages and made reconstruction slow and difficult, but because there was hardly any tourist infrastructure to rebuild, it was not a priority.

Disaster capitalism has gained traction and drawn critical attention to the aftermaths of disaster, including other tsunami-affected regions such as Thailand (Cohen 2012; Rigg et al. 2008) and Southern India (Swamy 2021). However, as Schuller and Maldonado (2016) note, this theory or conceptual framing does not account for the long-term historical, racial, and colonial structures that create the conditions for predatory and accelerated forms of dispossession and development (see also Bonilla 2020). Disaster nationalism is certainly inspired by Klein to explore the ways that disaster opens the door for political restructuring in Sri Lanka, and also adds to it by considering the broader historical, ethnic, social, and political—in addition to the economic—foundations that enabled national and militaristic restructuring in Sri Lanka after the tsunami.

Disaster nationalism, then, does not preclude modes of disaster capitalism or work outside of capitalism. Rather, disaster capitalism, and neoliberal forces more generally, are also nationalist projects that resonate together amid state practices of security (Amoore 2013). As with economic development projects in the 1970s, post-tsunami and postwar development were not just "compatible with but reincarnated" ancient indigenous, Sinhala Buddhist national culture (Tennekoon 1988, 297; see also Jazeel 2013; Venugopal 2011). At the aforementioned disaster symposium, Minister Samarasinghe acknowledged that disasters, whether human and natural, could be impediments to national development and economic growth. Referring to the end of the war, the minister suggested that conflict resolution also required climate mitigation strategies. After all, he explained, Sri Lanka had been given another chance to live in "unity." These remarks aligned with rhetoric justifying the government's war campaign: defeating the Tigers would allegedly yield "peacetime dividends" for the island. Tracking with forms of disaster capitalism already in place after the tsunami, the state viewed the island's war-torn northeastern regions as blank slates for development and economic reconstruction "compatible" with Sinhala Buddhist nationalist power; in these areas, the Sri Lankan Army colonized newly "freed" land to build beachside resorts and hotels and to erect war victory monuments (see Buultjens, Ratnayake, and Gnanapala 2016; Hyndman and Amarasingam 2014).

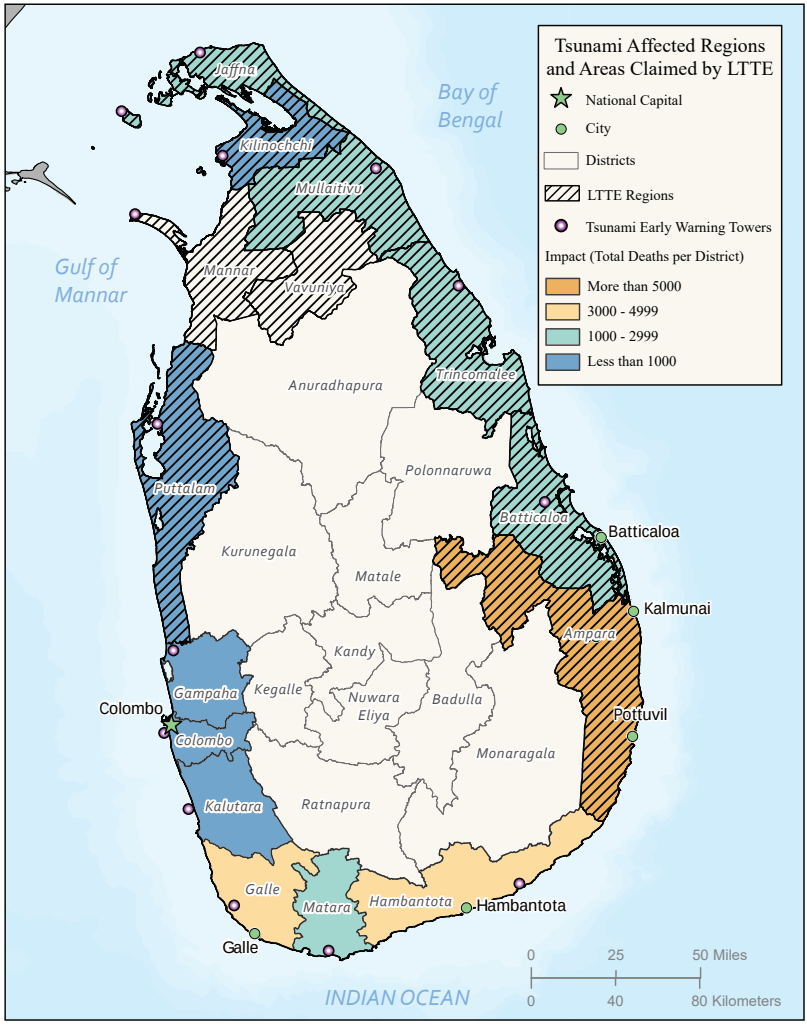
As Benjamin Schonthal notes, "configurations" of Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka have been organized and motivated since at least the 1940s by the perception that Buddhism in Sri Lanka is under threat. Tracing three different Buddhist national movements, he stresses that while the move-

ments may seem distinct, they are, in short, "new variation[s] of [this] older discursive template" (Schonthal 2016, 98). These are neither inevitable nor identical movements and histories. What is emblematic of these nationalist movements—and in governmental actions after the tsunami—are perceived threats to the territorial sovereignty and stability of a (by May 2009, victorious) Sinhala Buddhist nation. Thus, post-tsunami reconfiguration of Sri Lanka's majoritarian nationalist imaginary, though not necessarily new, was emboldened and galvanized by newly implemented logics and practices of disaster management. This was not the negotiated unification hoped for immediately after the disaster, but rather an ever-vigilant nation purified of enemies, threats, and risks through expulsion, death, and dispossession. Studying the tsunami and the civil war together *as disasters* illuminates how new technologies and techniques of statecraft also engender national fantasies. Disaster nationalism, then, highlights how these technologies and techniques define and use disaster to further national and political agendas, resonating with a familiar social and historical trajectory of violence propelled by ethnic and religious majoritarianism in Sri Lanka (Calhoun 2017; Simpson and Corbridge 2008; Simpson and de Alwis 2008).

This book traces the practices and technologies of disaster management as a mode of national securitization sustained by these national fantasies. As I will go on to show, rhetoric about preserving and upholding Sri Lanka's newfound freedom provided moral justification for increased militarism and securitization of areas of Sri Lanka after the tsunami and after the war, perpetuating insecurity and precarity for many Sri Lankans who have endured decades of disasters.

ETHNOGRAPHY IN TIMES OF DISASTER

The research for this book was primarily conducted in this context of post-tsunami reconstruction as it intersected with the end of the civil war, between 2008 and 2009, with follow-up visits in 2014, 2015, and 2017. I have spent time in Sri Lanka off and on since 2003, when I first worked with a Colombo-based Sri Lankan NGO immediately following the signing of the ceasefire agreement. I arrived at a hopeful moment, a hope that seemed to diminish each time I returned. When I started my fieldwork in earnest in 2008, I was aware of the crumbling ceasefire agreement and growing hostilities between the LTTE and the government; I never imagined that the war would



MAP I.4. Tsunami-affected areas and areas claimed by the LTTE. Credit: Sara Dale.

finally end, let alone that I would be in Sri Lanka during that final declaration. As I followed through with my post-tsunami reconstruction and disaster management research, the war shadowed everything, hovering over every place, every movement. No one was immune to or untouched by the conflict. How could it have been otherwise? The war was on everyone's mind, coming up in conversations everywhere. There were constant reminders that a war was happening in the country, even as the physical battles played out in a distant place, seemingly far away, unreachable without government approval (a situation discussed in more detail in chapter 4). It seemed that one could get used to all the billboards, handbills, news reports, text messages—even the armed police and checkpoints—only to have that sense of normalcy punctuated by, for example, a surprise air raid attack by the LTTE, a police roundup of the Tamil men working on a post-tsunami reconstruction project in the east, the accidental sounding of a tsunami warning siren, or rumors of an earthquake.

My fieldwork in Sri Lanka, which began in February 2008—just after President Rajapaksa declared the 2002 ceasefire null—was conducted over fifteen months during the Sri Lankan government's aggressive military campaign. I was still in the midst of my field research when the war came to a dramatic end on May 19, 2009. The beginning months of my field research were spent acclimating to the security situation, establishing connections in disaster management settings in Colombo, and figuring out how best to establish life and research in the east, where a tight security situation remained in place despite the region having been "liberated" by the government. Unfortunately, after six months, I had to return to the United States because my father was ill. I arrived in Sri Lanka in January 2009 for another nine months, nearly seven of which were spent on the east coast during the height of the war campaign in 2009. My decision to work in the east was enabled by the government's newfound control of the region, but was largely motivated by a desire to learn about a region referred to as the "crucible of conflict" (McGilvray 2008) in Sri Lanka, still recovering and reconstructing after years of trauma.

As I will further detail in chapter 1, I was interested in this region in particular because of its complexly layered social and political histories of violence, migration, displacement, and resettlement. Being predominantly Tamil and Muslim, the east has a history of being marked by border zones, front lines and no-man's-lands from war (de Alwis 2004; Hyndman and de Alwis 2004). My research was concerned with how new spaces and complexities engendered

by the tsunami and national disaster management mapped onto the livelihoods of coastal communities already affected by years of war (see map I.4). The east coast was the area hardest hit by the tsunami, as the region closest to the epicenter of the tsunami-generating earthquake and also the most densely populated place on the island. For many years, and especially during the 1990s, the Eastern Province was much fought-over territory. Along with the Northern Province, the Eastern—where the Tamil language is dominant—is considered part of the LTTE's problematically imagined monoethnic homeland and during the war was controlled by them, until 2007, when government forces "liberated" the east.

I could not have done my research in the east without the company and knowledge of my two research assistants, Usha and Nitharshini, who also helped to translate from Tamil the complex and moving stories shared in this book. Smart, ambitious women from the east, with great intuition, they also offered their opinions on my fieldwork ideas, on where to go and with whom to talk. After hearing many sad stories in one day, Usha told me that even though she had heard so many stories, the "route of the sadness" was always different. I have tried to follow those routes with care. I maintain contact with her and with other friends who are able to provide me with general updates, community feelings, and other local insights that are not always conveyed in national news outlets. When I left in late September 2009, Sri Lanka's post-conflict situation was still tense. The state of emergency had just been extended by Parliament, Tamil civilians were still interned in camps in the north, and the government had increased the military budget by 20 percent and increased the size of the military by 50 percent, all in the name of protecting its fragile "security."

Over the course of my field research, I worked with disaster management practitioners, community leaders, and communities of people displaced by both the tsunami and the war. Given such complex histories of destruction and adversity, the following chapters paint an intimate portrait of how life persists under conditions of perpetual threat—from either another natural disaster or another outbreak of state-sanctioned and war-related violence. Many of the people I came to know shared with me their experiences during some of the worst moments of fighting between government and LTTE forces and their current experiences and interactions with police and military personnel. I also met regularly with local and district-level disaster management officers and coordinators, participating in community disaster preparedness

workshops and evacuation drills. Their dedication and care for their communities was admirable. I spent time in several coastal villages across the Eastern Province, mostly near Kalmunai, the largest city on the east coast and one of the few Muslim-majority municipalities in Sri Lanka. I interviewed district-level planners, the mayor, and even the special branch of the police, the Special Task Force (STF), whose work continued because Sri Lanka's state of emergency was still in effect even after the government's declaration of peace. I also interviewed local and international humanitarian aid and development workers conducting reconstruction projects in the region.

At the national level, I made regular visits to the National Disaster Management Centre in the capital city, observing disaster protocols and learning about the technical coordination of the national disaster warning system. I met with meteorologists, disaster management officials, national coordinators, and systems technicians, whose efforts and genuine concern about disasters and disaster preparedness was evident. I also attended national rallies in support of the government's war efforts and victory. My fieldwork gave me the opportunity to examine different forms, fantasies, and scales of nationalist projects unfolding during this significant moment in Sri Lankan history. I also acknowledge that despite the complex security situations across the island, my positionality as a perceived "white" (*vellai* in Tamil, *sudhu* in Sinhala) researcher from the United States allowed me to move through spaces without garnering suspicion (experiences of immobility in the east I discuss in more detail in chapter 3).[21]

DISASTER AS/AND NATIONAL FANTASY

> By "fantasy" I mean to designate how national culture becomes local—through the images, narratives, monuments, and sites that circulate through personal/collective consciousness.
>
> —Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*

The day following President Mahinda Rajapaksa's official announcement of war victory was declared a national holiday. When the war ended, I was in the east. Streets were quiet, and the mood in town was decidedly somber. The television, however, displayed another story. In other parts of the island, the Sinhala south and the capital, Colombo, residents had erupted in celebration. On the streets, cauldrons overflowed with *kiribath* (milk rice), a food

traditionally prepared for auspicious occasions and for the Sinhalese New Year. Throngs of people crowded streets, their boisterous shouting enlivened by the banging of drums and popping of firecrackers. On-screen images were saturated with the golden and crimson hues of the Sri Lankan flag, the Sinhalese Lion proudly on display. These cultural emblems of the nation became more palpable with the multiplying proliferation of flags displayed on shops, homes, and three-wheelers as I made my way from the Tamil and Muslim east, through the predominantly Sinhalese south, and further westward to the capital, Colombo. Traffic was slow entering the suburbs of the capital while weaving through the rambunctious and clamorous crowds. I had entered the circulating national fantasy that I had previously watched on TV.

National fantasies are not illusory constructions and cannot be cast aside merely as ideologies. As Berlant (1994) notes, they become localized and embedded in collective consciousness; they are forms of reality with real, material effects (Aretxaga 2003; Navaro-Yashin 2002; see also de Mel 2007). The technologies of disaster nationalism employed by the Sri Lankan state are legitimized through the discursive, imagined, and objective components of national fantasy: the securitized, united, and liberated nation; the impending future of disasters and catastrophe; the rallying around a common enemy (Thiranagama 2022).[22] These fantasies of nationalism erase histories of disaster such that by 2010, Sri Lanka's "pristine coastlines" could be the *New York Times'* number one place to visit, victory memorials could be erected and LTTE cemeteries in the war-torn north could be razed, and President Rajapaksa himself could disavow the violent end of the civil war.[23] In an interview with *Time* magazine entitled "The Man Who Tamed the Tamil Tigers" (Thottam 2009), Mahinda Rajapaksa was asked if a Truth and Reconciliation Commission would be implemented in the aftermath of the war, to which he responded, "I don't want to dig into this past and open up this wound."

The pristine, romanticized fantasy production (Tadiar 2004) of a peaceful Sri Lanka and the desire to quickly move forward while burying the past were mobilized and fed into this new imagination of the nation, sustaining the power of President Rajapaksa's governmental and military regime. Indeed, this imagination gained traction, and was needed, in part because Sri Lanka did not have a "normal" past to which to return. Sri Lanka's "normal" was a seemingly interminable war, around which lives, politics, and economies had been organized (Rajasingham-Senanayake 2001; Ruwanpura 2006; So-

masundaram 1998, 2013; Winslow and Woost 2004). The future nation, in turn, could be marshaled by the Sri Lankan government as both a nation of endless possibility and growth and a vulnerable nation in need of protection, its fragile order always at risk of being punctured by natural or human-made catastrophe. With an eye cast toward a future of foreign investment and tourism, Rajapaksa's regime presumed that this new Sri Lanka would be poised to cash out on the peace dividend.

Fantasies are also crucial to developing national affects and imaginations of disaster. In the United States, as Joe Masco (2008) recounts, Cold War civil defense strategies created a new social contract based on a national contemplation of ruins. Building the bomb and communicating its power through epic images of nuclear explosions and annihilation introduced a collective national consciousness of destruction and death. As he further explains, by the 1950s, witnessing nuclear annihilation had become a "formidable public ritual"—a core act of governance, technoscientific practice, and democratic participation. Highlighting the legacies of these Cold War international and national strategies, Masco argues that these "willful fabulations" and "official fantasies" were politically useful, generating an affect of "productive fear" and an endangered nation through the imagination of it in ruins (Masco 2008). In Sri Lanka, however, a collective consciousness of destruction did not necessarily need to be cultivated because for many, the unimaginable, the impossible had already happened. Rather, the ruins of the past would have to give way to a new vision of the nation: a Sri Lankan nation prepared for disaster and freed, finally, from the scourge of terror.

Sri Lanka's fragile peace, then, necessitated the securitization and protection of territory and infrastructure. In Sri Lanka, certainly, war-related infrastructures were in place, yet other everyday infrastructures had long been neglected or affected by the war. The task of "Building Back Better" and projects of disaster nationalism were not necessarily aimed at protecting existing infrastructures, but rather at building new ones. Buffer and border zones, national disaster early warning systems, military checkpoints—these technologies of securitization and modes of preparedness materialized the construction of the newly liberated yet always endangered nation, inviting state intervention.[24] The nation thus becomes the object and purpose of struggle, management, and control. The perception of imminent disaster, whether tsunamis, earthquakes, civil unrest, or terrorist attacks, becomes a technology of power that continually conjures national fantasies of securitization (Heath-Kelly

2018). National fantasy "thus entails a certain sense of security, fixity and fullness by rationalizing the past, justifying the present and prescribing for the future" (Mandelbaum 2019, 22).

DISASTER CHRONOPOLITICS

> It is important to remember that historical events are never really punctual—despite the appearance of this one and the abruptness of its violence—but extend into a before and an after of historical time that only gradually unfold, to disclose the full dimensions of the historicity of the event.
>
> —Fredric Jameson, "The Dialectics of Disaster"
>
> Disasters aren't events that float freely in history, unmoored from politics: they are processes, playing out in uneven temporalities, and always with deep histories.
>
> —Scott Knowles, "Slow Disaster in the Anthropocene"

The "historical event" Fredric Jameson refers to in the aforementioned quote is the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. The publicly shared sentiment of national devastation in the United States proffered through media spectacle, he and Knowles remind us, should not be presumed or viewed as self-explanatory, unmoored from history and politics. Time is a technique of power (Bear 2016; Gutkowski 2018; Zee 2017); history and futurity can be manipulated by the state in moments of crisis to legitimize institutions of law and politics (Greenhouse 1996; see also Alonso 1994).[25]

Thinking with the vast scholarship of nationalism in Sri Lanka and beyond, alongside the growing body of work on disaster, risk, and insecurity, the preemptive temporality of disaster and risk management converges with the temporality of nationalism.[26] Inspired by Walter Benjamin, Benedict Anderson characterized collective national consciousness as the time of capital, or homogeneous, empty time (Anderson 1991); he proposed that the nation was made possible by imagining other citizens, near and far, as living and existing in the same national space and moving together through a shared sense of linear time and a shared sense of history. In Sri Lanka, the homogeneous time of disaster nationalism is more than a collective consciousness or shared sense of linear time. Nationalism is not only upheld by traditional, timeless narratives of the past but also maintained through the insistence of a future

horizon of disaster (Kim 2016; Masco 2014). In Sri Lanka the homogeneous time of disaster nationalism hinges upon and imposes a future-oriented time of securitization, preemption, and preparedness (Anderson 2010).

Yet time, as Sarah Sharma reminds us, "is lived at the intersection of a range of social differences" (2014, 138). As such, I resist folding experiences of disaster into the teleological history and narrative of disaster nationalism. As John Kelly (1998) points out, Walter Benjamin too refused this linear image of history. The lived realities and experiences of Sri Lankans I came to know complicate the chrononormative (Freeman 2010), homogeneous composition of the imagined community of the nation, illustrating that it is, rather, fragmented and heterotopic (Chatterjee 2004, 2005; Duara 1996; Foucault 1984; Wickramasinghe 2014)—an unattainable political project that has incommensurability and exclusion at its core (Hansen and Stepputat 2006; Jeganathan and Ismail 1995; Lomnitz 2001; Sur 2020). As Beth Povinelli writes, "we find that although all people may belong to nationalism, not all people occupy the same tense of nationalism" (2011, 38): the nation has never been homogeneous (Spencer 2003; Tsing 2011; see also Latour 1993). State desires for national domination, while powerful and comprehensive, are never absolute or complete.

Each chapter of this book traces how national security fantasies play out, and the emergent forms of life they enact and engender (Fischer 2003; see also Thiranagama 2022). The chapters that follow examine these generative forces of state power after and amid disasters, as well as the ways in which people *endure* the experience of disasters and the effects of disaster nationalism. I look for the articulation of these experiences and negotiations of power in maps, in memories, in tsunami warning towers, in military checkpoints, in broken foundations of old homes, in hot tin shacks in which people await their new tsunami homes (Navaro-Yashin 2012). As Kathleen Stewart (2007) offers, the mundane and the "ordinary" are the very building blocks of life. What is it like to live with both the fetishization of catastrophe and the everyday negotiation of catastrophe that renders it banal? This ethnography holds both the spectacular and the mundane together, for the spectacular in Sri Lanka is also the mundane. The disaster is multiple (Mol 2002).

These questions point to the tempos and rhythms of living with disastrous futures, the ways that the future catastrophes of the *now* are tempered by the possibilities of survival. In Sri Lanka, enduring disasters is a condition of possibility, of possible futures and pasts that might differ from the national

contemplation of catastrophe (Das 2007; Honig 2009; Puar 2007).[27] Kathleen Stewart writes: "Things do not simply fall into ruin or dissipate. . . . [They] fashion themselves into powerful effects that remember things in such a way that 'history' digs itself into the present and people cain't [*sic*] help but recall it" (Stewart 1996, 111). The past offers a condition of possibility, of speaking back to history and the present and keeping them open (Yoneyama 1999), of unsettling that which seems settled (Fortun 2001). The tsunami and the war are certainly different, as are their legacies, but their histories run into each other, layer upon each other—they are both evoked through the reconstruction of the nation.[28] A new post-disaster peace was not a *terra nullius* (Klein 2005) upon which the damages of the past could be forgotten.

Security, violence, militarism—these are familiar terms for many scholars of Sri Lanka and beyond, who have shown how violence characterizes everyday aspects of life and who importantly point to the forms of power embedded in the social and political structures that create the conditions for inequality, injury, and suffering.[29] Violence manifests not only in spectacular or episodic moments but also in subtler, slower, and more ordinary ways. Too much of a focus on discrete events or crises that invite political intervention draw attention away from the fact that crises are constitutive of contemporary social life.[30] In tsunami- and war-affected Sri Lanka, moving beyond a framework of risk and vulnerability, I trace how disaster is also constitutive of life and politics, and how disaster nationalism perpetuates existing forms and conditions of precarity and insecurity in a society where violence and militarization have already long characterized life (Choi 2021; de Mel 2007; Hewamanne 2013). It is the very ordinariness of insecurity and violence that is disastrous (Thiranagama 2011). This book details how Sri Lankans have persevered through the tsunami and outbreaks of war-related violence, and continue to negotiate the possibilities of natural disaster or state-sanctioned violence. Here, disaster as event or nonevent is spectacular *and* banal, punctuated *and* chronic (Das 2007; Massumi 2005). The persistence of insecurity in Sri Lanka shows that the beginnings and endings of disasters cannot be easily demarcated (Samuels 2019).

Each chapter of the book juxtaposes the tsunami and the war, invoking a modality of time. They can be read in order or out of order, suggesting that these modes of time exist contemporaneously, in concert with, against, and alongside the temporal horizon of impending disaster, of the impending failures of an authoritarian state and the unrealizable fantasies of

nationalism that give structure to its power (Holbraad and Pedersen 2013). In these overdetermined spaces of disaster—these spaces of militarization, death, economic insecurity, tsunamis, and cyclones—what of Sri Lankan lives and experiences? Social experiences of time are multiple and uneven (Bear 2016), evincing the complex and undisciplined chronopolitics of life for those impacted by tsunami and war in eastern Sri Lanka. Recognizing this chronopolitics is not just a gesture toward an apolitical pluralism, but an effort to reconcile the vestiges of past violences with the traumas of the present and imaginations of the future. That is, if the nation has never been homogeneous, these chapters make clear that the political ordering of disaster nationalism that seeks to colonize the future and the past is always a fraught and fricative project (Tsing 2005). The nation-state as an inherently unstable project works to both undermine and justify modes of governance and securitization in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 1, "Emergence," provides more context regarding Sri Lanka's fraught postindependence politics, with a particular focus on the east of Sri Lanka, where much of my fieldwork was conducted. The chapter's inspiration came from an attempt to research the 1978 cyclone that devastated the eastern coast of Sri Lanka, the country's biggest natural disaster before the 2004 tsunami. The year 1978 in particular was a watershed for Sri Lanka: a new constitution; a new president; the state-authorized liberalization of the economy; and the development of an anti-terrorism bill. While much has been written about this particular time period's political and economic shifts, I have never found the cyclone referenced, much less figured meaningfully into, these accounts. The chapter does not attempt to insert the cyclone into these histories, but rather explores its absence in order to trace the *emergence* of legacies of state governance leading up to the Sri Lankan government's disaster management practices after the tsunami. Given Sri Lanka's history of war, the militaristic turn after the tsunami is perhaps no surprise. The chapter uses "disaster" as a lens to highlight how disaster nationalism is a new dimension of national governance and state power and also is contiguous with a longer history of institutionalized exclusion and Sinhala Buddhist majoritarian politics and nationalism. Finally, drawing a longer history of political "disaster" in Sri Lanka underscores the recursiveness of violent nationalist politics on the island, illustrating the difficulties in locating the beginnings and ends of disaster.

The following chapter, "Anticipation," traces how the notion of future disaster is negotiated. I show how, amid momentous social and political

changes in Sri Lanka, many people have experienced a seemingly palpable lack of change. Despite a cessation of war, I found that an anticipation of violence persists. I depict how it is to live with that specter of violence, in addition to the possibility that life can also be disrupted, taken, broken by a natural disaster. These anticipations are part and parcel of everyday life in Sri Lanka. I weave together various states of anticipation—from a mode of technocratic governance, to the everyday emotional and sensory infrastructures people employ to face daily life, to geology and to astrology. By juxtaposing these "anticipatory states," the chapter illustrates how forms of state power are enacted and articulated, and how the limits of these powers are exhibited by the very practices of the Sri Lankan state.

Amid this sense of ongoing or ever-present disaster, the next chapter, "Endurance," highlights the texture and rhythms of life on the east coast as they unfold in the everyday, in places where death and destruction have been so swift and sweeping, in places still highly militarized after the tsunami and supposed liberation from terrorism. In this chapter, I develop the notion of "slow life" to draw attention to the ways in which life—not just in the biological sense—persists in contexts of insecurity and social and political anxiety. The chapter contains two main sections that follow these enduring forms of slow life. First, I detail the experiences of those living in a temporary post-tsunami housing scheme and awaiting their newly built tsunami homes, nearly five years after the tsunami. In the second section, I shift ethnographic form to present a series of text messages distributed by the Sri Lankan government, coordinated with the Ministry of Defence, to provide updates on their war efforts. I juxtapose these messages with excerpts from daily conversations taken directly from my field notes corresponding to the dates these messages were sent. This section and these juxtapositions more performatively illustrate the chronopolitics of disaster nationalism: enduring forms of (slow) life in a disaster-obsessed state. The chapter moves through these modes of endurance in the everyday: waiting for new homes; waiting at a checkpoint; waiting for the next tsunami; passing time; making conversations—alongside, within, and sometimes against the national narrative of catastrophe and erasure of the past.

Chapter 4, "Reiteration," explores iterative productions of the Sri Lankan nation through the visual culture of the tsunami and the war. I highlight how national politics are continually made and unmade through the production, use, reuse, and distribution of images of the tsunami and the war.

After the tsunami, images and maps were given much credence and heralded for their value in representing damage and destruction. By contrast, maps of the conflict became highly fraught, illustrating different political interests. Because the Sri Lankan government forbade the presence of independent journalists and international organizations into the war-torn north, rumors of the "ground truth" swirled in both local and international media. During this time, the unknown became a productive political moment. The chapter follows images' unruly and unstable qualities as they were attached to various political modes, motives, and contradictions of truth-making in the war by governmental and nongovernmental regimes. In doing so, I show the ways in which disasters live on through the contestations and politics surrounding images and how, after May 2009 in Sri Lanka, peace became the continuation of war by other means (Foucault 2003).

Brush and sand cover upturned wells and broken foundations, as new houses are built on top of liberated landscapes where previously mines were buried, where blood was shed, where lives were swept away. I saw the wreckage of the past all around me as President Rajapaksa claimed that he "did not want to dig up the past." This selective amnesia upholds the victor's vision of a united Sri Lankan nation and attempts to foreclose the narratives and complexities that have constituted it.

The chapters that follow keep these narratives open, for, as Saidiya Hartman reminds us: "History is an injury that has yet to cease happening" (2002, 771). Working through other modalities of time disrupts the circular, future-oriented, and linear temporality proposed by disaster risk management frameworks—Mitigation → Preparedness → Response → Rehabilitation → Mitigation—drawing attention to and challenging recursive and enduring disaster teleologies of nationalism in Sri Lanka.[31]

Come. Let us sift through the rubble.[32]

Notes

PREFACE

1. For more detailed information on these events, see, for example, Centre for Policy Alternatives (2023); Fedricks et al. (2023).
2. For example, a major blunder was summarily banning chemical fertilizers, causing a major drop in agricultural production, especially of rice. Gotabaya Rajapaksa also implemented a major tax cut after his election, further shrinking the country's economic reserves.
3. As Ahilan Kadirgamar (2022) writes, Sri Lanka's economy has been crisis-prone since liberalization.
4. This and many other dimensions of the Aragalaya were discussed by speakers Swasthika Arulingam, Marisa De Silva, and Farzana Haniffa in the virtual panel "The People Revolt: Sri Lanka Panel," hosted by the University of California Santa Cruz Center for South Asian Studies, October 11, 2022. Available on YouTube at https://youtu.be/9VAK2PaOaZM?feature=shared.

INTRODUCTION

1. On militarization in Sri Lanka, see de Mel (2007). As Catherine Lutz (2002) proposes, militarization is more than an intensification of resources toward military purposes; it is also the shaping of institutions congruous with military goals.
2. See Remes and Horowitz (2021) on disaster as analytical conceit.
3. With thanks to Kim Fortun for this challenge.
4. In expanding the boundaries of what might be included by "disaster" and, in particular, understanding forms and techniques of governance as disaster, I also am thinking with Adi Ophir's (2010) theorization of

discursive catastrophization, in which he uses "man-made" disasters to revise concepts of political theory and the "catastrophization" of the Occupied Palestinian Territories and contemporary zones of emergency. See also Vázquez-Arroyo (2013).

5. There is a growing body of critical scholarship on disasters, especially over the last two decades; for example, Fortun (2001); Petryna (2002); Dowty and Allen (2010); Adams (2013); Bond (2013); Knowles (2013); Kimura (2016); and Morimoto (2023).
6. The idea of disaster as method draws on the work of Knowles and Loeb (2021), who employ disaster as method in their interscalar work examining the "voyage of the *Paragon*" within the broader (slow) disaster of Hurricane Harvey.
7. The Department of Census and Statistics completed the 2012 census for the entire country—for the first time since 1983. Because of the war, the 2001 census only surveyed eighteen of twenty-five districts in the country. Unsurprisingly, the missing districts were in the north and east (Department of Census and Statistics 2012).
8. In providing this abbreviated history, I do not intend to suggest a singular or monolithic Sinhalese identity. Rather, I show how ethnicity is instrumentalized in national politics.
9. Following independence in 1948, and the passage of several Parliamentary Acts, Tamil representation and political power were reduced. In particular, one of the Acts made Indian Tamils "non-citizens" in Ceylon, thus reducing the Tamil minority. According to Hoole et al. (1990), elite Tamils were willing to disenfranchise their lower-class Tamil counterparts in order to preserve their status in politics, a deal made through personal guarantees by the prime minister of Ceylon at the time, Don Stephen Senanayake. The leftist parties, such as the Trotskyists, the Bolshevik-Leninists, and the Communist parties, were all vehemently against the disenfranchisement of the Indian Tamils. Though Kumari Jayawardena (2003) points out that the progression of Sri Lanka's early democratic politics could be better understood through class interests rather than through ethnic ones, a Sinhala majority would come into power.
10. On the development of Tamil political consciousness, nationalism, and the LTTE, see *The Broken Palmyra* (Hoole et al. 1990), *Sri Lankan Tamil Nationalism* (Wilson 2000), and *Learning Politics from Sivaram* (Whitaker 2007), which also highlight different militant Tamil nationalist groups beyond the LTTE.
11. The 1987 Marxist JVP insurrection was the second anti-state revolt on the part of this movement, which initially began in the early 1970s to address the economic struggles of rural youth. After being ruthlessly put down by the Sri Lankan state in the late 1980s, the movement later

reemerged as a viable electoral party in the 1990s. The late '90s and early 2000s saw the JVP embrace and ally with Sinhala nationalist ideologies and groups, drawing support by mobilizing class and economic anxieties and precarities through nationalism (Venugopal 2010; see also Moore 1993; Uyangoda 2008).

12. The Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was formed under the 1987 Indo–Sri Lankan Accord. In 1987, president of Sri Lanka J. R. Jayawardena and Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the Indo–Sri Lankan Accord, which was an effort to end the conflict. Under these conditions the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution established the devolution of powers to Provincial Councils, and the IPKF would be sent to Sri Lanka to enforce the ceasefire and to disarm the LTTE. The Accord was not well received, especially by Sinhala nationalists including the JVP, who waged an anti-state insurgency against the government soon violently put down by the state, led at the time by Jayawardena's predecessor, Ranasinghe Premadasa. Once the JVP had been quelled, Premadasa secretly colluded with the LTTE to push the IPKF to leave Sri Lanka. In the north and east the LTTE fought the IPKF, harming civilians in the crossfire. The IPKF's response led to hundreds of deaths, arrests, and rapes, and eventually to the group's withdrawal in 1990. This retreat allowed the LTTE to consolidate its power in the north and east (Hoole et al. 1990; Shastri 2009).
13. Note that, while this was a Parliamentary meeting on "natural disasters," the document covers more than just "natural" disasters—as does the ensuing National Disaster Management Act. The terms *disaster risk management* (DRM) and *disaster risk reduction* (DRR) can be used interchangeably, but it is also possible to consider DRM as the application or implementation of principles of DRR.
14. See Choi (2009) for a discussion of risk management rationale and technology after the tsunami in Sri Lanka.
15. Risk reduction had in fact been promoted by the United Nations in the 1990s, according to the United Nation's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). In this approach, "there are no such things as natural disasters, only natural hazards" (UNISDR 2019). Disasters happen after a natural hazard strikes. The impetus for disaster risk reduction is to reduce the damage caused by natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, droughts, and cyclones through an ethic of prevention. National governments are primarily charged with the task of disaster risk management (DRM, another term for DRR). This includes the broad development, application, and assessment of policies, strategies, and practices to minimize vulnerabilities and disaster risks throughout society. Whereas previous systematic approaches to natural disasters focused primarily on responses to them, beginning in the 1990s (designated by the UN as an

International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction), early conceptions of disaster risk management were initiated in a "global culture of prevention." In 2000, following the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the United Nations created the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction as an official interagency task force and interagency secretariat (UNDRR, n.d.).

16. For a discussion comparing how post-tsunami international aid and the presence and practices of international nongovermental organizations (INGOs) factored into, on the one hand, "peace" between the Free Aceh Movement/GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) and the Indonesian government and, on the other, an increase in hostilities between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, see de Alwis and Hedman (2009); Enia (2008).
17. On the tsunami and failure of the P-TOMS as a "missed political opportunity" for peace, see Fernando (2015).
18. For a more detailed analysis of the P-TOMS, see Keenan (2010).
19. For more on post-tsunami recovery efforts in Sri Lanka, see McGilvray and Gamburd (2010).
20. Much of the literature on conflict and disaster focuses on whether natural disasters lead to peace or to more conflict, examining the causal relationships between conflict and disaster. Yet, as Peters and Kelman (2020) caution, causal frameworks obscure the complexities of both disaster and conflict; disasters do not create "new" conflicts or peace, but rather reproduce or rearrange political processes of conflict and peace.
21. Elsewhere, I have discussed the complexities of my race and "whiteness" while conducting fieldwork as a broader, persistent issue within anthropology (Choi 2020). On conducting fieldwork as a woman of color, see also Funahashi (2016); Navarro, Williams, and Ahmad (2013). On the dangers and violence toward women of color, see Berry et al. (2017); Williams (2017); and, in a Sri Lankan context, Jegathesan (2020).
22. Thiranagama describes postwar violence and militarization in Sri Lanka as ambiguous, dispersed, and ever-present, such that "the state and its militarised life search for and mobilise around an *object* of menace—Tamil and Muslim minorities, the LTTE, COVID-19—while its *solution* to national menace remains the same: more militarisation" (2022, 202). On the state and fantasy, see also Aretxaga (2001). On fantasy and disasters, see also Clarke (2001); Liboiron and Wachsmuth (2013).
23. The *New York Times* (2010) effuses, "The island, with a population of just 20 million, feels like one big tropical zoo: elephants roam freely, water buffaloes idle in paddy fields and monkeys swing from trees. And then there's the pristine coastline. The miles of sugary white sand

flanked by bamboo groves that were off-limits to most visitors until recently are a happy, if unintended byproduct of the war."

24. See also Jackie Orr (2006) on how governance of the future can become "psychopolitical."
25. As a related aside: Greenhouse also argues that anthropologists remain stuck in the time of the nation-state, what Wimmer and Schiller (2002) call out as "methodological nationalism." I agree with this diagnosis, though I do not tackle it in this book. However, not unrelatedly, my effort is to trace and critique the formations of nationalism and to illustrate the effect of such persistent forms of violence, rather than to assume the nation as a primordial or ontological social thing.
26. On nationalism in Sri Lanka (and gender), see de Alwis (1995); Jeganathan and Ismail (1995); Rogers (1994); Spencer (1992, 2003); Whitaker (2007). On nationalism in other contexts, see Aretxaga (1999); Chatterjee (2004, 2005); Puar (2007); Verdery (1993).
27. On "thinking against crisis logics," see Elinoff and Vaughan (2021).
28. The temporality of the 2004 tsunami, as Helmreich (2006) finds, includes tensions and intersections of different parsings of time and history as they pertain to nature, bureaucracy, science, and emergency.
29. For some examples, see Daniel (1996); Das et al. (2001); Jayawardena and de Alwis (1996); Jeganathan (2000); Nesiah and Keenan (2004); Ruwanpura (2006, 2009); Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004); Tambiah (1992, 1997); Visweswaran (2013).
30. On violence manifesting in more ordinary ways, see Ralph (2014) and Stewart (1996, 2007); see also Ahmann (2018); Coronil and Skurski (2005); Nixon (2013). On crisis, see Berlant (2011); Dillon and Lobo-Guerrero (2009); Moten (2003); Povinelli (2011); Roitman (2013); Vigh (2008).
31. With thanks to Seulgi Lee for this insight.
32. This is inspired by Shannon Dawdy's (2006) "taphonomic" approach to sifting through post-Katrina rubble and detritus. Borrowing from Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, taphonomy is the archeological record, which is not just a reflection of social process but is a social process itself.

1. EMERGENCE

1. Notably, in a speech during a visit from US president Ronald Reagan in 1984, then president J. R. Jayawardena proclaimed: "Sri Lankan nation has stood out as the most wonderful nation in the world because of several unique characteristics. Sinhala nation has followed one faith, that is Buddhism for an unbroken period of 2500 years . . . there is no