Behind the 2009 Tamil Diaspora Protests in Canada:
A Critical Analysis of the Production of Race, Resistance, and Citizenship across Borders

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Critical social workers emphasize activism for social justice, and acknowledge that global justice movements can inform the evolution of social work practice. Yet, scholarship on community practice and citizen participation has shown varying levels of attention to the interests and context of racialized populations. This dissertation engages this discussion by developing an understanding of what activism comes to be for migrant communities who experience social injustices across local, national and transnational scales. I draw upon a framework of citizenship, racialization and spatiality to problematize conditions of resistance through the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada.

Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of print media and key informant interviews, I explore the following: (1) What are the ideologies underlying media representations of the movement in Canada? (2) How can social work researchers ethically represent the resistance movements of others? (3) Why and how does race frame the production of suffering and spectacle through protest? (4) How can we unpack representations of racialized local groups who protest an issue unfolding elsewhere?
This project highlights the challenges experienced by racialized communities’ in their struggles towards citizenship, social justice and decolonization. Chapter 1 presents the context of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, the conceptual framework, and methodology guiding this study. In accordance with the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work’s 3-paper dissertation format, Chapter 2, 3 and 4 are stand-alone papers geared towards different peer-review journals. Chapter 2 problematizes how we should represent contested resistance movements in the age of terrorism. Chapter 3 examines how racial logic frames the expression of protesters’ suffering, and the construction of the Canadian public’s racial apathy. Chapter 4 explores how national media discourses racially and spatially mark protesters as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders.” The findings of this interdisciplinary study demonstrate how resistance by racialized groups in a white settler state is distorted by the indirect and direct representational politics imposed by a hegemonic West. In Chapter 5, I offer implications for social work theory, practice and education to reconsider the boundaries of social justice, incorporate a conceptualization of transnational activism as citizenship, and forefront the politics of protest.
To the past, present and future activists who work towards the decolonization of Sri Lanka,

and

To the social workers who work among them
Acknowledgments

This dissertation was made possible through the support and collaborative spirit of many. Foremost, I am deeply grateful to the activists, academics and journalists who thoughtfully shared their stories of strength, pain and power with me. Your wisdoms and knowledges have inspired this work; I hope I have done them justice through the writing of this dissertation.

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Locating this work

Beginning in 2008, news reports from Sri Lanka’s North shared narratives of escalating violence and the impending genocide of Tamil people. Hundreds of thousands of Tamils around the world organized for months to gain the attention and engagement of their new hostlands with the goal of intervening and preventing further bloodshed and loss. 2009 was a critical year for the Tamil diaspora who had once fled Sri Lanka in response to decades of political repression, subjugation and structural genocide. While the history of the Tamil diaspora’s struggle for equality, social justice, and a separate state of Eelam is complex and cannot be subsumed into a single story, for many in the community, this moment highlighted not only the journeys of individuals and their families, but the collective struggle of a people against an oppressive, colonial state. The events of 2009 marked the brutal massacre and displacement of hundreds of thousands of family and kin; it also represented the culmination of a life-long struggle for decolonization in their homeland. In addition to the death and dispossession of Tamils in Sri Lanka, the diaspora came face to face with a disturbing apathy by the international community. In Canada, protesters were largely met with outrage by the general public. As Toronto Police Service’s Chief Bill Blair reported to the Toronto Star a year after the protests, “I had people calling me and insisting we should drive them and beat them off the street. Somebody suggested we push them off the street with snow plows, that we shoot them in the knees” (Stancu 2010). These media reports and public responses to the Tamil diaspora protests exacerbated the immeasurable loss and suffering of a community who did not belong. In my life, this period

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1 I draw upon Cheran’s (2007) framework to consider the multiple ways the Tamil community functions as a transnational community and situate the importance of exploring the context of networks within both “homelands” and “hostlands” as a single socio-economic and political field transcending the traditional boundaries and boundedness of nation-states
manifested an interrogation of my own identity, politics and activism, as an individual and a social worker in a white settler society in the age of terrorism.

This dissertation shares part of my journey in unpacking how the Tamil diaspora came to be constructed through their activism in Canada, to present not only the tremendous mobilization of the community but also highlight the complex challenges experienced by racialized communities’ in their struggles towards citizenship, social justice and decolonization. The analysis I share in the following chapters of this dissertation highlight our responsibilities as social work researchers who report on the struggles of diasporic communities. It problematizes how we should represent contested resistance movements in the age of terrorism. It includes an examination of how racial logic framed media and public discourse through the expression of protesters’ suffering, and the construction of racial apathy by the Canadian public. It also engages in an exploration of how national media discourses racially and spatially marks protesters as an origin of threat to (symbolic) national space. This work brings forward the ongoing tension of social work’s commitment to social justice that is limited by, if not at odds with, its conceptualization as bound within the nation-state.
Chapter 1

Introduction

One group who have traditionally been moved to action by “pity for the poor,” we call the Charitable; the other, larger or smaller in each generation, but always fired by the “hatred of injustice” we designate as the Radicals (Jane Addams 1910, 1).

The role of social justice within social work has been debated since the beginning of the profession. Embedded within a larger struggle between the discipline’s pull between dichotomies of “micro” and “macro” interventions, social work history is characterized through its tension between providing services to those in need, and advocating for change in social conditions and social policy. While most embrace the first role, the field has often been divided over the place of the second (Mitchell and Lynch 2003; Netting 2005; Specht and Courtney 1994). Central to this debate is the question of the necessity of social justice as an organizing value, since it is one that can contradict social work’s discourse of professionalism (Lundy 2011). This contradiction is positioned through the ambiguity of professionalism: it can refer to a high standard of practice, but can also infer elitism and relations of dominance that are incompatible with social justice. The challenge social work has struggled with in the past, and continues to in the present, is to espouse professional social work that is consistent with a commitment to social justice (Thompson 2002; Thompson 2001; Hugman 1998).

With these debates in the background, social work is still the only profession that has a critical concern over the fundamental role of social justice: it is also a discipline that is intimately connected to the development of human rights and the pursuit of social justice (Lundy 2011; CASWE 2014). While the concept is engra
Worker’s Code of Ethics (IFSW 2004), the nature of social justice within the profession is an evolving construct—one that cannot be defined as a prescribed set of principles that are applicable in all contexts and situations (Miller 1999). However, as a politically diverse profession, competing conceptions of social justice emerge: distributive justice dominates social work discourse, yet it is simultaneously presented as a liberatory, utopian ideal (Barusch 2009; Wakefield 1988, a; 1988, b). I question, as Solas (2008) does, in our contemporary context, “what kind of social justice does social work seek?” (p. 813) Solas asserts that the utilitarian approach that dominates social work’s current approach to social justice, must be replaced by a radically egalitarian conviction to confront oppression through a “theory of social justice that does more than respond to inequality as though it were bad but inevitable” (Solas 2008, 814).

Arguably, “by not taking an active part in genocide or a pogrom one may claim to avoid being party to unequal treatment: however, it does nothing to promote equality” (p. 820); instead, social work’s “intervention is justified any time the sovereignty of an individual, as a separate and independent being, is jeopardized” (p. 821). The intrinsic paradox of social work practice that envisions structural issues as peripheral, rather than central, to social work ethics requires critical re-thinking (Weinberg 2010).

I connect this notion of radical egalitarianism to Jane Addams’ (1910) historic quote presented at the opening of this chapter, to posit that the construction of “hatred for injustice” defining radical social work has been an enduring one. In doing so, I do not intend to evoke an idealistic optimism for an altruistic radical practice, but argue, as Healy (2000) does, that cautious attention must be paid to social work’s claims towards democratic, responsive and inclusive social transformation: “postmodernists reject visions of massive social transformation as a chimera and demand, instead, greater caution and constraint in the formation of critical
practice objectives and processes” (p. 2). I suggest, through this dissertation, that in the face of communities’ complex experiences of social injustice, a call for social change alone is futile; social work must engage in a critique of the practices that construct its professional and moral stance for social justice in relation to the discursive and material conditions of their clients’, as well as, their own resistance.

Since the early part of the last century, social workers practicing in the settlement tradition have advanced the role of social justice through social activism. They have consistently allied with what revolutionaries at different points in history have defined as social justice, mobilizing for social reform and policy change through labour movements, health care, child labour, child welfare, civil rights and women’s rights movements. This interrelationship between social movements and social work have prompted scholars to account for the ways social movements have influenced the practice and thinking of social work (Mullaly 2001), as well as question whether social work itself can be considered a form of social movement (Thompson 2002). However, social work’s rich literature on citizen participation (Rose 2000; Staples 1990) and community practice (Cox 2001; Piven and Cloward 1971; Alperovitz 1986; Franklin 1990), has shown varying levels of attention to the interests and cultural context of diverse ethnic populations depending on the political context of the times (Garvin and Cox 1987; Alvarez et al. 1996). Furthermore, while social workers recognize that in a globalized world, the lived realities of migrants often do not fit within the neat geographical boundary of a nation-state (Foner 1997; Furman and Negi 2007; Kastoryano 2000; Negi and Furman 2010), the field is yet to extend this understanding to practices of community organizing and activism.

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2 In contrast to the Charity Organization Societies model characterized by a case-by-case response to individual client problems
The concept of social justice through migrant communities’ transnational activism is at the centre of this work. I contend that while social action in community organizing “focuses on power, pursues conflict strategies, and challenges the structures that oppress and disempower constituents” (Fisher 2005, 51), migrant communities’ pursuits for social justice are challenged in profound ways. In Canada, despite the constitutional guarantees for the protection of citizens’ rights, and the promise of multiculturalism encouraging immigrants to engage in transnational social practices (Fleras and Elliot 2002; Satzewich and Wong 2006), diasporas’ transnational activism is often viewed as a contradiction to forms of citizenship and political participation that are bounded by the nation-state. As Sunera Thobani (2007) puts it, the fabric of the nation is threatened by “outsiders [who] have routinely been depicted as making unreasonable claims upon the nation” (p. 4): their distinctive racialized experiences come to be known as the inadequacies of their communities, their culture, or their race. Their conflicts are constructed as a marker for Third World savagery imported into an otherwise progressive nation. Within this context, such groups and their resistance are racialized and threatening. As such, racialized communities’ practice of citizenship, when performed through protest, is highly precarious. Furthermore, the age of terror presents significant challenges to social justice resistance in the West as bodies representing the racialized figure of the “terrorist” are further targeted for surveillance, discipline, and deportation.

Social workers have argued that forging relationships with, and working within, interest-based movements will require that social work practitioners address issues of diversity and ethnicity as “these issues will be the center of community practice rather than pushed to the margin” (Cox 2001, 45). This will also necessitate an acknowledgement of historical and sociopolitical contexts to review the forms of community organizing that are recognized and
those that are rendered invisible (Cox 2001), alongside a consideration of social work’s conceptualization of, and practices for social justice. However, while social work research focuses on the importance of social activism and anti-colonial resistance (Lundy 2004; Mullaly 2002; Carniol 2005), these ideas are yet to intersect with research examining how the transnational activism of racialized, migrant communities are constructed in a white settler society. This dissertation bridges this research gap by exploring media representations and the conditions of citizenship practice underlying the 2009 Tamil diaspora’s transnational activism through an analysis of racialization, spatiality and citizenship.

My theorization of protest as citizenship practice is based on new conceptualizations of “activist citizenship” and the constituent character of “citizenship understood as political subjectivity” (Isin 2008, 383), through which actors claim to transform themselves and others from subjects into citizens. As such, citizenship is conceived of, and functions as, an adaptive concept through which process and outcome are in a dialectical relationship to each other (Lister 1998). In this framework, protest and citizenship are mutually constitutive because activism demands that we pay attention to the specificities of active citizenship participation. Acts of citizenship, like protest, disrupt socio-historical patterns through individual or collective performances; “whereas practices like voting, paying taxes or learning languages appear passive and one-sided in mass democracies, acts of citizenship break with repetition of the same and so anticipate rejoinders from imaginary but not fictional adversaries” (Isin and Neilsen 2008, 2). Protest enters the public sphere as a heightened moment of dissent. Through the practice of protest, negotiations of space and citizenship are heightened. As Madison (2010) argues, “a public space is a promise of a democratic space, and a public performance becomes an open invitation to participate and (or) witness how democracy can be variously conjured and re-
imagined” (p. 7). For critical social work, this framework of citizenship helps us position the strategy of protest as one that brings about change for marginalized communities, but also one that encourages engagement with communities’ own acts for change. As a process, protests for social justice inform relationships between communities, social workers and the state; as an outcome, protests strengthen movements against human rights violations, global injustices and colonization that social workers can and should contribute to.

Drawing upon the work of critical race and post-colonial theorists, I explore the transnational resistance of a community who are themselves resisting in a post-colonial, imperial state of Canada. In the traditions of these scholars, I do not see formal citizenship or equality as the only ideal, but assert that principles of social justice emerge from decolonial struggle. The aim of this work is to develop an understanding of what social activism comes to be for migrant communities who experience social injustices and inequalities on dual scales: transnationally connecting them to the struggles and violence of decolonization in the East, and simultaneously, the criminalization and marginalization they experience in their hostlands in the West.

Understanding migrants’ citizenship as a struggle for redistribution in the East, and as a process for recognition in the West will strengthen social work’s understanding of social justice through protest as citizenship practice with, for and by migrant communities. It will broaden our conceptualisation of social justice, citizenship and resistance through post-colonial theorists who encourage us to think about resistance “from below,” and allow us to consider how dynamics of race, space, and citizenship bear upon processes of protest.

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3 To be clear, I draw upon the term *decolonial* to emphasize that nation-states like Canada and Sri Lanka are not past the structures and processes implemented through colonialism, but that the agency of the colonized within, across and between borders is critical to addressing and eliminating the unique and destructive legacies of their continuing colonialisms. Therefore, in my evocation of the term *indigenous* in this dissertation, I refer to the local spaces and identities of Canada’s indigenous peoples and the Tamil minority of Sri Lanka respectively, as groups that originate from a territory and remain culturally and politically distinct from the ethnic identity of the nation-states they exist within. The complex relationship between the two following migration is further explored in Chapter 2.
For this aim, I explore the following questions through three interrelated papers:

- What are the political ideologies underlying contested media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada that situated the protests as a “terrorist movement,” a “separatist movement,” an “ethnic conflict,” or a movement against “genocide”?

- How can we, as social work researchers, ethically research and represent the resistance movements of others?

- Why and how does race frame the production of suffering and spectacle through protest?

- How can we unpack representations of racialized local groups in Canada who protest an issue unfolding in another part of the world?

These questions allow an interdisciplinary exploration of the representations surrounding the Tamil diaspora protests, while locating its significance for social work. In what follows, I present the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada, provide some background to the protests and the events leading up to 2009, and explain the importance of studying them. I then provide a roadmap for the rest of this dissertation. In accordance with the 3-paper dissertation format of the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work PhD Program, the following chapters of this dissertation are stand-alone contributions containing their own literature review, methodology and associated article components to target different audiences.

What were the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada about?

The term 2009 Tamil diaspora protests refers to the global mobilization against the escalating violence in Sri Lanka’s North. In Canada, and around the world, activism took many

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4 Here, as in several other places in this dissertation, I use quotation marks as a political and analytical strategy to draw attention to and trouble the term. I intend the use of this device to highlight the socially constructed nature of language that is simultaneously political and ideological.
forms: public protests, candlelight vigils, marches, sit-ins and hunger strikes were performed in several major cities. In conceptualizing protest, I acknowledge that individuals protest in numerous ways: they distance themselves from policies and practices they dislike or disagree with; they voice dissent through criticism or complaint; they may even sabotage efforts they do not want to see succeed. Quiet resistance can grow more public when people speak out in public spaces, or write letters to newspapers or their elected officials. While these forms of protest provide significant insights into the ways people strategize their dissent, in this study I primarily refer to public demonstrations of protest in my evocation of the term.

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, like all other cultural productions of resistance, were contested and constructed through multiple social structures and various spaces of national and local discourse. Media reports cited the goals of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada to be threefold: they aimed to persuade politicians to intervene in the 26-year conflict and establish a ceasefire; to appeal to humanitarian aid organizations to provide resources and investigate internment camps in affected areas of the country; and to restore civil rights to the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. However, I do not assume that these were the only goals of the protests, nor do I assume that these goals were shared across participants of the protests or members of the Canadian Tamil diaspora unanimously or equally.

Following Foucault (1982), I position the Tamil diaspora protests as, and in opposition to, “government”—one that encompasses the broader political relations involved in shaping the ‘conduct of conducts’ (Foucault 1982, 138). This understanding of the relationships of power, discourses, technologies, practices and subjectivities involved in governing the self and others enables me to untangle the connection between this resistance movement and the state. This

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5 A. Duffy, and M. Blanchfield, “Worried” about hostilities in Sri Lanka, Canada calls for ceasefire, Ottawa Citizen, 10 April 2009, A.1; Student became the voice of her people, Toronto Star, 22 December 2009, GT.1.
broad conceptualization allows me to articulate the protests in and through the Canadian state, as a movement that takes place beyond, between and across states, as well as through state actors, non-state actors and individuals through their governance and self-governance. The media reports and interviews that serve as data for this project provide insight into these processes. Through this study, public protest is a useful site of analysis as it provides insight into diasporic movements that transcend the spatial boundaries of one nation-state, and in doing so, disrupt the underlying assumptions guiding Canadian conceptualizations of belonging, citizenship and public participation. This theorization allows us to engage with protest as a form of citizenship participation and relational practice that emphasizes an expression of agency in the political arena: community organizing challenges the conceptualization of marginalized groups as passive victims while keeping sight of the discriminatory and oppressive political, social and economic institutions that deny them full citizenship. It forefronts the challenges racialized communities face in their claims for social justice, social intervention and social change.

However, as Mamdani (2001) pointed out, by engaging in the topic of genocide—in this case, the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict and the horrific events that provided the background to the protests—I run the risk of presenting it as “unthinkable.” As such, I provide the following historical background to the political context and crises to encourage us to “problematize the relationship between the historical legacy of colonialism and postcolonial projects” (Mamdani 2001, 8), and arrive at the present moment of the Tamil diaspora’s representation in Canada.
How can I make the “unthinkable” thinkable?

A brief history: The story of the dispersion and mobilization of the Tamil diaspora from Sri Lanka is one that connects a legacy of colonialism, migration and displacement. Like many other countries around the world, Sri Lanka has endured long periods of colonization by the Portuguese (1505-1658), Dutch (1658-1796) and British (1796-1948) before gaining independence from Britain on February 4, 1948 (Wilson 2000). Since its independence, this religiously, linguistically and ethnically diverse country, has struggled with political and social grievances as the Sinhalese-dominated state legislation enacted following Independence has largely been discriminatory against the Tamil minority group; this resulted in small numbers of migration out of Sri Lanka. Unequal access to education and public service employment, state-implemented settler programs for Sinhalese farmers in Tamil populated areas, and discriminatory language policies and practices, all affected the citizenship, employment, education and mobility of Tamils (Stokke and Ryntviet 2000). Consequently, the Tamil minority faced frequent

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6 The migration of Tamils stems from two major sites: the Tamils from South India and the Tamils from Sri Lanka. The dispersion of Tamil people goes as far back as thousands of years, with significant Tamil populations now living in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, the Middle East, South Africa, Burma, Trinidad and Tobago, Europe, Australia, the United States and Canada and other countries around the world. However, the Tamil diaspora from Sri Lanka is often described to begin during the period of British colonialism, when people left for work as labourers, merchants and clerks. While a steady stream of Tamils left Sri Lanka during and following independence, the events of 1983 induced the widespread dispersal of refugees and asylum claimants to India, Europe and Canada, which continue to the present day. My reference to the “Tamil diaspora” in Canada largely pertains to this latter group. However, this term is contested and evolving. During the mobilization of 2009, Tamils from around the world evoked the “diaspora” label in their struggle for a ceasefire in Sri Lanka to signify belonging to an ancient collective society of Tamils.

7 Sri Lanka is religiously, linguistically and ethnically diverse: the majority Sinhalese (74.9% of the population) lives in the south-west and central parts of the island; Tamils (11.2%) live predominantly in the north-east of the island, Moors (9.2%) who descended from Arab traders that settled in Sri Lanka live primarily in concentrated urban areas. Indian Tamils who constitute 4.2% of the population were brought into Sri Lanka by the British in the 19th century to work on tea and rubber plantations (Department of Census & Statistics 2012). Smaller minority groups include the descendants from South East Asian settlers, the Malays, and descendants of European colonists from Portugal, the Netherlands and the UK, known as the Burghers. While the 1978 Constitution assures freedom of religion, it grants primacy to Buddhism, the religious practice of most Sinhalese. Different ethnic groups primarily practice different religions: Tamils are mostly Hindu, the Moors and Malays are mostly Muslim, the Burgher population is mostly Roman Catholic or Presbyterian, and a sizeable group of Sinhalese and Tamils are Christians. While identities of groups are often distinguished by language and religion, these populations share many common features such as traditional castes, popular religious practices and customs (Tambiah 1986).

After decades of cultural and political repression by the Sinhalese state and demands of equality and political power by Tamil citizens ignored, July of 1983 marked a nation-wide attack and massacre of thousands of Tamil citizens of Sri Lanka and launched the start of a full-scale armed conflict between the insurgent organization that was at the forefront of the struggle for an independent and autonomous Tamil nation, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the Government of Sri Lanka. The LTTE, a separatist militant organization also known as the Tamil Tigers, fought to create an independent Tamil state named Tamil Eelam in the north and the east of the island. The pogrom of 1983 also resulted in a large-scale migration of Tamils to countries that were open to refugees, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and countries of Western Europe; the largest majority of the Tamil population fled to Canada. The massacre of 1983, commonly referred to as Black July, bound the Tamil diaspora, not only growing in numbers, but also reinforced their oppression and need for nationalism through a collective identity of resistance. The significant displacement of Tamil civilians caught in the crossfire starting in the 1980’s, escalated during the events of 2009, and continue still.

During this conflict, social workers and aid workers in Sri Lanka have been actively engaged in wartime relief through civil society groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). They have led humanitarian efforts, peace processes, and educational campaigns, and have provided social services. However, their

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8 Therefore, depending on one’s perspective, the LTTE are either freedom fighters trying to establish a state for Tamil citizens or insurgent terrorists whose goal is to destabilize the country
relationship to the Sri Lankan state, foreign development assistance and aid is a complex one (Orjuela 2005). While the influx of foreign aid has influenced the professionalization of civil society organizations, there continues to be a considerable gap between paid, professionalized NGO workers in Colombo (where Sinhalese populations are concentrated), in comparison to voluntary groups in other areas of the island (Orjuela 2005). Furthermore, Tamil aid workers have been directly targeted in the violence. For example, in August 2006, 17 Tamil civilian aid workers were executed at point-blank range by the Sri Lankan Army. The work of, and violence directed towards, social workers (or those working within a social work capacity) in wartime is a chilling dimension of social welfare and social relations within the Sri Lankan state.

The escalation of the conflict and the genocide of 2009: Over the following three decades, peace negotiations, international involvement and aid have gone through several phases of acceleration and deceleration based on multiple contributing factors. Following the official and final demise of the ceasefire agreement in 2008, the Sri Lankan military dramatically accelerated the armed conflict. The conflict claimed over 80,000 lives (Reuters 2008), with over 146,000

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9 The first, short lived, round of negotiations between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE occurred in Thimpu, Bhutan in 1985 (Coy 1997). The next phase in 1995, led by former President Chandrika Kumaratunge through the People’s Alliance Party, promised constitutional reform that would grant more power to Sri Lanka's eight regions, including greater autonomy for Tamils (Orjuela 2003). However, the proposal generated great opposition from Tamils who argued that it granted too little, and the President's Sinhalese supporters who argued that it gave too much. In 2001, attempts at a ceasefire agreement brokered by Norway after an attack on the Bandaranaike International airport, was signed by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and LTTE leader Prabhakaran in 2002 (Bivand Erdal 2006). During this peace process, six rounds of negotiations were held between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, before the LTTE withdrew from the talks in 2003 stating that there were inadequate steps taken to rebuild the war-hit areas (Bivand Erdal 2006). During the steady escalation of violence and aggression, the Sri Lankan Army targeted the civilian population as well. In August 2006, seventeen Tamil civilian aid workers were executed at point-blank range. Another significant incident also occurred in August 2006 when the Sri Lankan Army bombed the Chencholai orphanage, a school where girls were receiving first aid training. During this strike, 55 girls and staff were killed. While the Sri Lankan government claimed that they were targeting a Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) training facility instead, both UNICEF and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) have publically confirmed that the target was in fact the orphanage. Along with the Tamil people in Kilinochchi, the Tamil diaspora around the world responded through grief and outrage, reaffirming a bond bringing together the Tamil nation and the need for a nation-state. The final ceasefire agreement officially ended in 2008.
people unaccounted for (Correspondent 2012) and 130,000 people displaced in 2009 alone (Amnesty International 2009). This violence resulted in claims of genocide by the Tamil population in Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora—claims that have been denied by the Sri Lankan government who instead frame the increasing violence as their pursuit to end terrorism in Sri Lanka (UN News, 2009). Despite these claims, two years later, a UN report confirmed protesters’ pleas that, in stark contrast to the Sri Lankan government’s version of the final stages of the conflict, a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws were committed. The report went on to corroborate that “the conduct of the war represented a grave assault on the entire regime of international law designed to protect individual dignity during both war and peace” (United Nations 2011, 4). Emerging reports continue to uncover the atrocities committed during the final months of the armed conflict, many of which are ongoing (Harrison 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013). In January 2014, an in-depth study and judgment by the Permanent People’s Tribunal (PPT) in Geneva stated that not only was the Sri Lankan government guilty of a “genocidal coordinated plan of action [that] reached a climax in May 2009” and “continue to the present day with ongoing acts of genocide against Eelam Tamils” (p. 28), but that the United Kingdom and the United States of America were and are guilty of complicity to this crime (Permanent People's Tribunal 2014).

**The Tamil diaspora in Canada:** Canada was not named as “complicit” in the PPT report. However as I demonstrate in Chapter Two, the history of the Tamil diaspora in Canada in relation to the Sri Lankan conflict is a complex one that has evolved through the social and political context of Canada’s immigration policy, its participation in the “war on terrorism,” and engagement with its own history of separatism, sovereignty and decolonization. In Canada, the
Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, sometimes referred to as Eelam\textsuperscript{10} or Eezham Tamils, has grown from less than 2,000 before 1983, to becoming the largest Tamil diaspora in the world, ranging between 110,000 and 200,000 to 400,000 (as cited in Hyndman 2003). Canadian immigration policies, as Sarah Wayland (2003) documents, facilitated the migration of Tamil’s escaping the violence of Sri Lanka in the 1980’s by exempting them from one or more of the refugee hearing processes. In 1998, Tamils from Sri Lanka were accepted as refugees more than from any other country; they had an average acceptance rate of 85 percent, compared to 60-70 percent acceptance rates overall (Wayland 2003). However, over time, public policy and perception of the Canadian Tamil diaspora have grown tense. This can be partly attributed to evolving resistances to multiculturalism and immigration, as well as backlash to the constructed criminality of the community.

Anti-Tamil public sentiment representing the diaspora as a terrorist community was well-established prior to Canada’s official participation in the war on terrorism. According to Henry and Tator (2002), the Tamil population in Canada has become controversial due to the community’s alleged involvement in a variety of criminal activities, mainly based on allegations that some Tamil organizations in Canada were fronts for the LTTE. These reasons appear to be the basis for the campaign that the mainstream news media has waged against this community.\textsuperscript{11} This trend sheds light on the significance of the discourse of criminality and terrorism and the

\textsuperscript{10} Derived from the ancient Tamil word for Sri Lanka
\textsuperscript{11} According to their research, between May 6th to July 20th and August 25th to October 31st, 2000, the Post alone published 34 articles linking Tamil organizations to terrorism (Henry and Tator 2002). Through their textual analysis, Henry and Tator (2002) argue that the Post seized on any event to report on the Tamil community’s organization in a negative light, even when those events took place in a foreign country. In response to this concerted campaign, the Tamil community, organized by the Colleges and Universities Tamil Student’s Union, responded to being targeted by the National Post by holding a press conference in June 15, 2000, at Queen’s Park. A press release by the Union stated that the community was “outraged and appalled” and went on to argue that the Post was mounting a “calculated effort to marginalize and silence the Tamil community.” In addition, the community’s newspaper, Eelam Nation, also sent an appeal to the post on June 14th, 2000, challenging the Post’s assertions of the community’s involvement in crime, monetary support for the conflict, the use of the term “terrorist” and their undesirability as immigrants.
role of the news media. However, the discourse conflating the Tamil community’s activism with terrorism has found new zeal and virulence in the age of terrorism, as preoccupation with the threat of terrorism has reframed global politics. As I argue in the following chapter of this dissertation, in this era, the Canadian nation-state mobilizes civilizational values through national security—“the crazed non-Christian savage of an earlier era of western expansion has been made to re-enter the global stage with a vengeance” (Thobani 2007, 27). Heightened securitization through public discourse has conflated categories of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants (Isin and Turner 2008). To varying degrees, all migrants, including economic migrants, are now depicted as being parasitic to the host society: “these workers do not easily fit into a welfare model of contributory rights in an age of terrorism, when states have turned to the maintenance of security as their principal contribution to the functioning of society” (Isin and Turner 2008, 11). Through this process, the discourse of terrorism exalts the nation as “Western” and racializes the threat of fanatical, barbaric, non-western, terrorist others. This threat has transformed the meaning of Canadian nationality, while simultaneously increasing restrictions on immigration, citizenship, and civil liberties. Scholars demonstrate how “anti-terrorism” measures in the West have evolved into the institutionalized suspicion, criminalization, and racialization of “Muslims” and “immigrants”— brown and black bodies who “look” like they might constitute part of this danger (Thobani 2007; Razack 2007; Ismael and Measor 2003; Bahdi 2003). Now, “racialization renders the distinction between citizen and immigrant all but meaningless in the

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12 This is not to discount the individual subjectivities, state processes and public discourses that differentiate between categories of migrants. The politics and processes related to Tamil peoples’ migration to Canada have been largely framed in relation to their exodus from the state violence they faced in Sri Lanka. Yet, as the issue of refugee subjectivity did not appear in this sample of data, I do not engage with it more deeply in this dissertation. However, it requires further questioning: to what extent do differentially constructed subjectivities underlie, or at least contribute to, the racialization of Tamil in Canada? (How) Do these unique forms of racialization influence exclusionary public discourses?
eyes of nationals, who in the post-9/11 era imagine themselves to be terrorized” (Thobani 2007, 246).

Why study the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests?

*Lives are supported and maintained differently, and there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as “grievable” (Butler 2006, 32)*

My justification for the importance of this topic is multifaceted as the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests allows us to problematize theory and practice related to social justice in multiple ways. First, a study of this protest movement offers theoretical contributions for social work’s burgeoning theory on power, resistance and anti-oppressive practice (Carniol 2005; Mullaly 2002; Rose 2000; Dover 2010; Lundy 2004; Baines 2007; Sakamoto 2007; Siddiqui 2011). Community organizing challenges the conceptualization of marginalized groups as passive victims while keeping sight of the discriminatory and oppressive political, social and economic institutions that deny them full citizenship. As the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests suggest, it encourages a consideration of the multiple scales and spaces that inform and impact the exclusion of racialized communities, even within acts of resistance. While transnational activism operates across borders, representations of protest continue to depend on negotiations of spatial and racial boundaries of the nation. As such, they continue to rely upon, and deploy the oppression and privileges that accompany traditional conceptions of identity politics within and
between nation-states. As I explore in Chapter Four, participation in activism marked protesters as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders.” Engaging with countries’ complex struggles emerging from colonialism, like the Sri Lankan conflict, through multi-layer, multi-scalar dynamics that construct and maintain apartheid, colonial and imperial systems of domination is of critical importance for the social justice struggles for racialized, migrant communities.

Second, this study encourages us to expand our professional and moral obligation for social justice across borders. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW 2000) stipulates that regardless of where social workers or their clients may be, the fundamental concepts of holistic social work remain human rights and social justice:

> The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. (p. 1)

Based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, three areas of rights are fundamental, universal (i.e. all humans have these rights regardless of culture, ethnicity or other characteristic) and indivisible (i.e. all humans should have all rights): political and civil rights; social, economic, and cultural rights; and collective rights. These ideals are not without critique. For example, some critics challenge that social work cannot argue for both human rights and the rights to one’s own culture, as human rights cannot be both universal and culturally relevant (George 1999). Others, like Ife and Fiske (2006) argue, that in practice, “universality does not mean ‘sameness,’ rather it is a principle that emphasizes the worth of every human being without the need to reach a certain status or fit a certain model of desirable citizen” (p. 302).
With these factors combined, if we conceptualize social justice and human rights as the core of social work with an emphasis on the worth of people’s humanity (without requiring that they achieve the tenants of socially constructed “desirability”), the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests provide insight into social justice across dimensions of political and civil rights; social and cultural rights; and collective rights. It allows us to extend social work’s commonly-held view of social justice as one that “means arranging social, economic, and political institutions in such a way that all people, especially poor, vulnerable, oppressed, and marginalized people, are able to meet their basic and developmental needs including democratic participation in decision-making processes” (Banerjee 2011, 209). Through this study, it is evident that social justice and injustice is constructed across spaces and scales; it is constituted (and negotiated) through public discourse and social structures. The material and discursive struggles for political and civil rights experienced by transnational communities do not neatly fit within the boundaries of one nation-state.

Third, a study of representation allows us to problematize the universality of national and international laws protecting human rights and citizenship. For instance, despite Canada’s participation in the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Geneva Conventions and its subsequent protocols, through this larger framework of resistance against “government” (Foucault 1982), contradictions emerge: we come to understand how national and local constructions of racialized protesters calling for humanitarian action in other parts of the world continues to be framed through racialized discourses, practices and technologies of space and citizenship. While the Canadian nation-state may endorse the right to protest and oppose violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws, the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests problematizes the socio-political conditions these principles
exist within. It also problematizes the conditions of formal Canadian citizenship. Situating the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests as a movement that brings together both transnational and national practices of citizenship by a group demanding recognition within the nation-state and human rights internationally, invites us to question how we understand the interconnectedness of people and localities around the globe and to confront what taken-for-granted categories, such as citizenship and activism could look like when they are constituted across space. Undeniably, the national activist landscape has recently been influenced through social movements such as protests against the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, the Occupy Movement and the Idle No More movement that gained prominence globally, yet the study of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests provides a valuable framework in conceptualizing how representations of racialized bodies in protest within Canada continue to be framed in problematic ways.

Fourth, an examination of this resistance movement provides insight into the lives and experiences of racialized individuals within transnational communities. Canada, as immigration scholars assert, is “a nation of immigrants.” While immigration scholars have generally drawn from nation-centric understandings of immigrants’ lives, more recently, theorists are moving away from nationalist conceptualizations to understand immigrants’ relationships between their home countries and their host countries. This affects the conceptualization of social work practice with immigrant communities in two significant ways: at an individual level, we come to see how social workers work with people from transnational communities, who are in essence living within or belonging to more than one nation space; at a societal level, while transnational protests struggle for agendas of social justice abroad, they also influence the perception of immigrants, and in turn, immigration policy and the conditions of belonging that mark others in the West. Understanding transnational protests may help us engage with issues that face others
who have divisive histories of violent conflict and systemic injustice from their country of origin, as well as their continuing challenges of active citizenship within Canadian civil society. It may allow us to consider the limitations of dominant public discourses of Canadian multiculturalism as a social process that does not uniformly and unconditionally recognize the transnational identities and practices of all communities.\(^{13}\) Representations of transnational protest also point to relations between Canada and the parallel state, in this case, Sri Lanka. The treatment of the protesters in media and public discourse reflect this relationship.

Furthermore, this work speaks to a growing movement within social work that has come to critique the exclusions rendered by the acceptance of formal citizenship status as unsuitable for interpreting the *practice* of citizenship, which instead focuses on the community and a relational mediation of political, economic and social participation and belonging (Lister 1998; George et al. 2004; van Ewijk 2009; Moosa-Mitha 2005; Bhuyan 2012). This notion of citizenship further advances a social work framework which embraces principles of partnership, solidarity, anti-oppressive practice and an inclusionary stance: “as a process, it informs relations between social workers and users; as an outcome it represents a strengthening of rights to which social workers can contribute” (Lister 1998, 16). An exploration into transnational activism as citizen practice further encourages social workers to engage with client’s citizenship through “an actor oriented perspective,” one that is “based on the recognition that rights are shaped through actual struggles informed by people’s own understandings of what they are justly entitled to” (Nyamu-Musembi 2005, 31). It also allows us to work within the strained margin between the formal promise of citizenship granted by the state and the lived experiences of migrant others.

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\(^{13}\) As Sriskandarajah (2010) points out, Tamil Canadian diasporic identities, renegotiated through the 2009 protests, cannot be understood through popular constructions of multiculturalism that are still premised on the nation-state model; a more nuanced conceptualization of Canadian multiculturalism that incorporates transnational political and cultural practices is necessary.
within the nation. Rooting the study of the Tamil diaspora protests as a site through which the complexities of citizenship unfold, helps combat the somewhat abstract nature of citizenship theory.

Fifth, as social workers are uniquely positioned as state agents with “discretionary power” (Lipsky 1980) to navigate systems and structures, the topic of resistance against states and subjectivities is particularly relevant. Lipsky’s (1980) seminal work suggested that the encounters individuals have with service providers are “a kind of policy delivery” (p. 3), as non-profit service providers are endowed with discretionary power that enables workers to conform to or resist policy directives in their everyday decision making. Their high levels of discretion and relative autonomy from authority allow service providers to play a critical role in deciding who is included within the boundaries of citizenship and to what extent individuals can successfully claim social rights from the state. As such, I suggest, as Ong (1996) does, that attention must be paid to the regulatory roles of civil institutions and social systems as part of a wider governance structure that influences people’s lives. Addressing the discretionary power and tensions between social work’s roles of social control and social change is particularly poignant in the case of social work with racialized populations in the West. The profession has a long tradition of working with immigrant populations through its settlement house history and neighborhood centers as “pioneers of social work assumed the roles of mediators and advocates on behalf of the immigrants in their adaptation to their new environment” (Balgopal 2000, 15). This role continues in the present day through NGO’s, the nonprofit sector and social service agencies that social worker’s work within as sites of citizenship formation and citizenship practice (Veronis 2006). Recent work explores the role of settlement services and immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies in assisting newcomers to overcome social exclusion and in turn,
strengthen their citizenship practice, by addressing inequalities in access to resources. Recent work has also focused on improving access to information in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate for all members of immigrant families; and recognizing immigrant and racialized groups as equal partners in the community and facilitating civic participation (Mwarigha 2002; Quirke 2007; Omidvar and Richmond 2003; Galabuzi and Teelucksing 2010). This suggests a myriad of activities and avenues social workers can, and do, engage with to foster the citizenship practice of marginalized groups within social and political spheres.

However, social work has also played a role in racist, discriminatory and exploitative state-endavors that have criminalized, marginalized and violated the humanity of “othered” groups (Park 2008; Blackstock 2003; Pollack and Caragata 2010; Blackstock 2011). To name a few documented histories, social workers facilitated all aspects of the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II (Park 2008). Social workers not only played a pivotal role in the mass removal of First Nations children from their homes during the well-known “60’s Scoop,” but Cindy Blackstock (2003) critiques that the reality is that the overrepresentation of First Nations children in the current child welfare system has reached record levels eclipsing both the residential school system and the “60’s Scoop.” Social workers are also intimately and continually connected to the construction of limiting subjectivities of those embedded within the welfare system14 (Pollack and Caragata 2010). Despite being located in different periods of history, and within different demographics, these examples urge us to critique how social work interprets and negotiates its professional obligations to their clients and the state, at times, at the expense of their obligation to social justice. In the current era of the “war on terrorism,”

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14 In this article, Pollack and Caragata (2010) specifically explore social workers’ construction of lone mothers accessing the welfare system as “wounded souls” who are “damaged.” While sympathetic, this discourse leaves little space for clients’ agency or liberation from oppressive encounters with the state, labour market, poverty, immigration and other systems that frame their lives.
questions of nationalism and citizenship are linked again to another visible minority population whose civil and human rights are similarly threatened through their participation in social institutions.

As I explain in Chapter Three, various social structures are implicated in the marginalization of the Tamil community during the time of the protests. This includes the school system, law enforcement, health care, and mental health care—all spaces that include the presence and practice of social workers. In the contemporary context which is marked by globalization, resistance and a growing number of transnational migrants, we must critically interrogate the community issues we organize for, the solidarities we form, and the kind of social justice we seek through our practice. While no unified vision of justice exists (Miller 1999), we must critique how our practice within neoliberal institutions construct and limit our professional obligations for radical social justice. We must problematize how our participation in these spaces encodes moral regulation that is often at odds with clients’ own embodiment of self-determination and justice. Furthermore, we must more cautiously consider, and aim to disrupt, the material and discursive conditions limiting client’s resistance, as well as our own.

Finally, as social work’s reach continues to spread around the world into areas ravaged by apartheid, colonialism and post-colonial conflict (Ramon et al. 2006), a deeper engagement with the conditions that create and sustain “conflict” and “peace,” as well as produce lives that are “savable” from those who are not, should be a critical concern for social work practice globally. For this work, a study of activism also provides important lessons “from below” to allow us to consider communities’ own understandings of conflict, peace, and their own agency within it. Faced with war, crisis and “social shocks”, local communities create alternative solidarities and means of meeting community need (Lavalette 2011; Jones and Lavalette 2011;
Pentaraki 2011; Xavier 2011), of which one avenue is community organizing through protest against nation-states’ ongoing, internalized and structural forms of oppression. In *Social Work in Extremis*, Lavalette (2011) argues that central to these activities are people engaged in social and welfare work; while they may have a professional qualification, many don’t, though what they are doing and what they are engaged in is clearly “popular social work.” Small and Thornhill (2008) review this phenomena closely and argue that a comprehensive record of popular forms of social work, particularly by racialized others in Canada is significantly lacking. While radical social work practice and research has engaged with and in activism through various movements, they suggest that the little known (or acknowledged) reality is that for many years, racialized groups have been continuously and untiringly organizing. Arguably, this work largely parallels the vision, values and strategies of the social work profession. Yet, the invisibility of this activism is merely one part of the obscured story of the resistance and organizing of racialized groups and their contribution to radical and critical Canadian social work.

In a field that is forthrightly committed to social justice and increasingly invested in bringing marginalized voices to the center of its practice, the erasure of the organizing of others from social work’s record is untenable. Disrupting the trend where activism by racialized groups have not been considered activism in the mainstream sense is a complex issue, reflecting, among other things, social and professional biases; the particularities of historical and sociopolitical contexts; race, class, and cultural variations; and individual preferences. In concert, these intersecting factors shape not only the profession’s theorizations around organizing and the visibility of community activism, but, by extension, the form and content of radical social work’s professional, biographical, and historical narratives around activism. Rather than appear from the outside with special knowledge and exclusivist practices, Lavalette (2011) suggests that allying
and engaging fully with forms of ‘popular’ welfare and social work such as community organizing, would likely bring ‘professionals’ in contact with forms and variations of community-based practice they can be enriched by. As Michelle Herbert-Boyd (2007) suggests in the title of her book, social work can be “enriched by catastrophe” if it is dynamic, adaptable, geared to meet human need and shaped by a commitment to social justice. Through a study of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, I hope to engage this call by contributing to a larger discourse of critical resistance aimed at expanding the boundaries of social work’s conceptualization of activism, humanitarianism and social justice.

The intersection of social work and social movements

Social work has a large, but relatively ignored (or unknown) history of social work activism (Abramovitz 1998). Historically, social work activism peaked during three significant periods in North America: (1) the turn of the century during a period of reform known as the Progressive Era (1896-1914) during which the Settlement House Movement (SHM) attempted to brand the emerging profession with its social-change oriented mission and replace the existing, individual-oriented Charity Organization Society (COS) through its support of unions and involvement with a series of movements aimed to improve the quality of urban life; (2) the 1930’s where the Great Depression incited social workers to revive social reform activities, generate debates around civic responsibility and participate in lobbying for, drafting and enacting pivotal social policies of the era;\(^{15}\) and (3) the 1960’s that fuelled a new generation of social workers who organized around the social activism of the period, and redirected their focus from coordinating services to mobilizing clients for community self-determination (Abramovitz 1998).

An engagement with social movements is vital as social work in the past has been shown to be profoundly affected by its contact with social activism and the shifts in popular thinking that various social movements bring forth (Thompson 2002). Thompson (2002) demonstrates that social movements have influenced social work’s ideology and practice by challenging the complacency of traditional models of professionalism and influencing a model for more progressive social work in which oppression is challenged and social justice is promoted. This is primarily evident in the construction of radical social work in the 1970’s that was largely the product of the significant social movements of its time: the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement for Vietnam, the women’s rights movement and the activism of trade unionists. To a lesser degree, the growth of militant user movements taking shape as “new social movements”—such as the mental health user’s movement and the disability movement—of the 1980’s and 1990’s have also influenced professional social work; this is evidenced by the widespread acceptance and adaptation of social models of health and disability (Ferguson 2012). These interactions have also helped develop an emphasis on “user participation” or “involvement” where clients are recognized as stakeholders in the development, maintenance and evaluation of social services (Thompson 2002). More recently, scholars speculate that the global justice and anti-war movements of the twenty-first century can inform the development of an evolving critical social work practice (Ferguson 2012).

For social work, the pursuit and preservation of social justice and citizenship requires a deeper engagement with the politics of resistance. In today’s political climate, this is no longer exclusively a concern for social workers with a radical politics. As Iain Ferguson (2012) argues, “neoliberalism in social work, in other words, is creating resistance. Moreover, since managerial policies undermine all forms of social work practice and values, ‘traditional’ as well as ‘radical’
or ‘emancipatory,’ it is a dissatisfaction and a resistance that goes well beyond the ranks of a small number of politically committed individuals and embraces very large numbers of workers who might not think of themselves as ‘political’” (p. 4). Yet, protests are the least commonly employed forms of political participation by social workers (LeRoux 2014). Domanski (1998) found that only 9% of social workers have participated in a protest activity.

Protest as a social work endeavor continues to be challenged from within the profession, as well as from other political and social forces (Axinn and Levin 1997). Generally speaking, research suggests that the profession faces ongoing challenges in maintaining its activist role for three main reasons: (1) the structural location of the profession in the wider social order; (2) the requisites of the professionalization in a market economy; and (3) the effects of the changing political climate during the past 100 years (Abramovitz 1998). More specifically, in the current neoliberal Canadian climate, social workers face two urgent barriers to activism: the legislation and surveillance contributing to Canada’s “advocacy chill;” and the market logics of neoliberalism which influence non-profit organizations’ ability to organize and limits the kinds of activism they can participate in. In this context, all social workers must be trained to unpack the politics of social exclusion that frames their anti-oppressive practice, as well as develop an understanding of the representational and material conditions underlying their politics of resistance.

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16 In Chapter 5, I explore these issues more closely, and examine implications for contemporary social work practice.
(i) A partial review of social movement theory

While there are definitional issues surrounding “social movements,” I draw upon an oft-cited characterization from Marx and McAdam (1994) who argue that “social movements can be defined as organised efforts to promote or resist change in society that rely, at least in part, on non-institutionalized forms of political action” (p. 3), where both spontaneity and structure exist (Freeman and Johnson 1999). Public protests are complex events created by a number of different groups coming together; as such, theorists of protest have grown more aware of the many aspects of this multifaceted activity as forms and tactics of protest have evolved over the centuries (Jasper 1997).

In the West, social movement scholars describe the chronology as follows. Protests from the medieval period until the nineteenth century, commonly referred to as pre-industrial protests, were largely comprised of peasants responding to immediate threats such as food scarcities, increased cost of living, or other oppressive actions by elites. In early modernity, with the growth of cities, residents continued to take direct action towards those who they felt were in the wrong. This included short-lived, defensive, relatively violent and local forms of protest achieved by raiding the homes of tax collectors, seizing shipments of grain, or attacking religious minorities (Jasper 1997; Harrison 1988). Overall, activism was not informed by a programme for change but the maintenance of workers’ economic position (Harrison, 1988). While pre-industrial protests demonstrated limited evidence of class awareness, new forms of protest around the period of the French Revolution categorized as industrial protest represented the attainment of class consciousness (Rude 1974; Hobsbawn 1959). Industrial protests articulated more generalized aims, such as mass petitions, urban rebellions and boycotts. Jasper (1997) argues that

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17 Freeman & Johnson (1999) argue that since movements are so diverse, it is difficult to isolate a common element that can be incorporated into a succinct definition.
these less “violent” tactics, which were first used by members of the bourgeois and later, by emerging industrial working class, inspired the more recent wave of citizenship movements.

Citizenship movements are defined as movements organized by and on behalf of groups of people excluded from full human rights, political participation, or basic social or economic protections within liberal democracy (Jasper, 1997). Unlike their predecessors, these movements were increasingly national in scope and sustained by groups of peoples demanding full inclusion for their collectives. This includes industrial workers within the labour movement, women within various waves of the feminist movement, and more recently, racial and ethnic minorities through the civil rights movement.

Over the past thirty years, a new wave of protest concerned with democratic control has emerged. While terminology varies, scholars largely categorize this trend as the post-citizenship, post-industrial, or new social movement wave. This wave is characterized by its composition of protester as people who have already integrated into their societies social, economic and political systems. Inglehart (1997) maintains that since a level of material and physical security is secured for participants, participation within a movement is not motivated primarily by the promise of direct economic, political and social benefits. As their own basic rights are secured, this group of protestor primarily pursues protections for others (Inglehart, 1997; Jasper, 1997). Demanding rights on behalf of the environment, animal rights, peace, disbarment, and the like, these protesters are largely interested in challenging and changing their society’s cultural and moral sensibilities. Due to the striking contrast between class-based or identity-based protests of the citizenship movement era, many European scholars utilize the term new social movement to mark this significant shift in social consciousness (Eder 1982; Melluci 1980).
However, the dividing line between citizenship and post-citizenship movements is a murky one. As Jasper (1997) argues, few groups are oppressed in every aspect of their social, political and economic lives. In addition, citizenship movements that once demanded full legal inclusion may now be conceptualized as post-citizenship movements as they challenge cultural meanings and imagery:

Women, for instance, now have the vote and many other legal rights—they can hardly be called an “excluded” group—but they face disadvantages in private life due to cultural attitudes and lifestyles. Such movements are typically divided between organizations concerned with legal rights and those pursuing cultural change. (Jasper 1997, p. 9)

I argue that conceptualizing social injustice within this framework limits the ways in which people’s citizenship, rights and belonging within the nation are imagined. Differences between citizenship movements and post-industrial movements emerge to challenge the construction of the nation and state repression: while exemplars of citizenship movements take state repression for granted, post-industrial movements, on environmentalism for example, have faced no obvious changes in state control for decades, and the control they have experienced could be arguably very different to ones experienced by protestors in citizenship movements. Yet, as this dominant understanding of the trajectory of protest is a largely Eurocentric one that is framed within a primarily European, and later, a North American perspective, it is important to note that this understanding of the evolution of social movements erase histories and contributions of resistance that have emerged out of other parts of the world, as well as from transnational and

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18 Critiques on this distinction between “citizenship” and “post-citizenship”/”new social movements” includes arguments that (1) it is the theories that are truly new, not the movements themselves (Calhoun 1993); (2) the conceptualization of new social movement theories focus solely on left-wing movements, to the neglect of right-wing and reactionary movements; (3) its construction lacks solid empirical evidence and as such tends to be more theoretical (Pichardo 1997).
diasporic communities from the East. In addition, this conceptualization does not account for the complexities of racialized groups’ experience of the nation through their resistance movements in the age of terrorism.

Social movements like the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest profoundly blur the distinctions between citizenship and post-citizenship activism: state-based rights and repression within, across, and between borders emerges in unique, complementary and contradictory ways. The Tamil community in Canada appealed for international intervention on the basis on their formal status as citizens, on behalf of their homeland in Sri Lanka. Yet, the repression the diaspora faced during 2009 discursively and materially operated across borders. As I explore in this dissertation, their claims to citizenship and their claims through citizenship practice were

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19 This dissertation draws upon the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest as a social movement emerging and existing predominantly in the West, in response to events unfolding in Sri Lanka. While this framing may be beneficial to examine discourses and representations of protest within North America, it limits an understanding of the complexities of varying structures of civil societies existing in the East; the effects of cultural, social and institutional contexts upon mobilization, activities and outcomes of social movements in those regions; and the utility of Western social movement concepts in explaining social movements from around the world. With the rise of social movements, transnational activisms out of the East, and the blurry lines of adaptive dynamics of social movements that function in both the “cyber-world” and the “real world” (Lerner 2010), these considerations are increasingly important. Numerous scholars have pointed to the limitations of Western social movement theory and identified limitations in the ways in which movements are defined and constructed, as well as, critiqued the scale and depth of institutional change and they have achieved through the goals, nature and intensity of the social movements (He 2010). Lundy (1999) argues that as activism in the East operates under different circumstances in comparison to practices in the West, social researchers need to take account of the local circumstances which construct, influence and curtail the activities of social movements. Such factors may include anxieties about ‘development’, clientelistic politics, the risk of losing funding and the fear for personal safety (Lundy, 1999). In addition, social movement theories from the West do not account for complexities of sociopolitical activism in societies that are characterized by political control and at times, limited means for communicative action (Bayat 2005). In response, Bayat (2005) argues for a more fragmented and fluid understanding of social movements may better explain the differentiated and changing disposition of contemporary movements. This may include the theorization of new concepts such as “imagined solidarities” that may illustrate modes of solidarity and activism building in closed political settings, such as those currently existing within the Middle East. Also important to note are the significant blind spots in theorizing around forms of protest that have historically emerged from, or are largely practiced in the East, such as protest practices that involve the death of an activist, such as no-escape challenges/attacks/assassination, suicide-in-defense, self-immolations and (ritual) suicide in protest. These acts, in addition to displaying moral resistance, function as culturally-specific acts of witness and agitation to display the legitimacy of public protest (Roberts 2007). In identifying this work, it is important to acknowledge that there is a tendency in Western culture to emphasize examples of practices of activist death as “suicide bombings” and “terrorism” from the East and overlook historical and contemporary examples from the West (Caldararo 2006). As I explore in this dissertation, exploring protest practices deemed threatening within a Western socio-political context also points to significant implications for issues of representation.
“othered” and fundamentally challenged through public discourse. As such, instead of relying on traditional categorizations to unpack the performance and public response to protest, the conceptual framework I construct in this chapter examines the socially constructed nature of protest, and response to protest, in the white settler society.

**Roadmap of this dissertation**

In the remainder of Chapter 1, I provide an overview of my theoretical framework and my methodology for this dissertation. The theoretical framework for this study draws upon the work of critical race and post-colonial scholars whose work develops an understanding of processes of othering, and the co-construction of race and space. Collectively, this framework creates the critical paradigm of my dissertation. In the methodology section, I introduce the overall data collection strategy and data analysis that guided this project. As previously mentioned, this research complies with the 3-paper dissertation guidelines for the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work—a format that allows the submission of a dissertation presented through three related papers. Together these stand-alone papers, presented in Chapters 2 to 4, form the cohesive exploration of my area of study. As the format of this thesis allows an interdisciplinary project drawing upon and engaging different audiences, it is particularly suited for my area of research.

The following visual provides a summary of the questions and theories that guide the chapters of this dissertation.
**Chapter 1: Introduction**

**Purpose:** This 3-paper dissertation explores media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora’s transnational activism to develop an understanding of what social activism comes to be for migrant communities who experience social injustices on dual scales: transnationally connecting them to the struggles and violence of decolonization in the east, and simultaneously, the criminalization and marginalization they experience in their hostlands in the west.

**Framework:** The concept of social justice through migrant communities’ transnational activism is at the centre of this work. Theories of assemblage, othering, race, space, citizenship and belonging guide the analysis of the following chapters.

**Methodology:** A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of 153 print media articles and 7 interviews with activists, journalists and community members.

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<th>Chapter 2: From terrorists to activists</th>
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<td><strong>Theories that inform my analysis:</strong> Representation, de/colonization, racialization in the age of terror</td>
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<td><strong>Method:</strong> CDA of print media and interviews</td>
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<td><strong>Research question:</strong> How can we unpack representations of racialized local groups in Canada who protest an issue unfolding in another part of the world?</td>
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<td><strong>Contributions of this study:</strong> (1) a reconsideration of the boundaries of social justice; (2) a conceptualization of transnational activism as critical social work practice; and (3) lessons on the politics of protests.</td>
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In Chapter 2, I critically reflect on our ethical responsibilities as social work researchers who report on the struggles of diasporic communities to consider how we should represent contested resistance movements in the age of terrorism. To problematize this issue, I grapple with the political ideologies guiding representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada that framed the protests through competing discourses of a “terrorist movement,” a “separatist movement,” an “ethnic conflict,” or a movement against “genocide.” Recognizing that all activism is socially constructed and that these labels inform social identities and social practices, I examine each category of resistance to reflect upon how they inform or challenge dominant constructions of immigrants, their activism, and their struggles in relation to Canada’s own history of separatism, sovereignty and colonization. Rather than employing any one term to refer to a singular, specific narrative of transnational resistance, I argue that we foreground the power structures and global relations that fundamentally mark colonized identities and their activism across spaces and movements. Through this lens, I position the 2009 Tamil diaspora movement as a historic and ongoing decolonial struggle, unfolding within a nation of many symbolic, discursive and material occupations. I conclude by drawing upon indigenous, critical and anti-oppressive research approaches to centre the transgressive potential of decolonial resistance and representation. This chapter is intended for a social work research audience.

In Chapter 3, I argue that while much social movement research focuses on how activists actively cultivate affect and how social movements benefit from shared emotions, these ideas rarely intersect with research examining how race constructs emotional responses in a white settler society. I bridge this theoretical divide by examining the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada to study dimensions of suffering and apathy through the construction of the spectacle and

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20 This paper is currently under review for inclusion in a special issue on “The ethics and politics of knowledge production: Critical reflections on social work and social sciences research” by Intersectionalities: A global journal of social work analysis, research, polity and practice.
the spectator. Drawing upon illustrations from a critical discourse analysis of 153 mainstream news articles and interviews with activists and journalists, this paper explores how racial logic frames media and public discourse through (1) the expression of protesters’ suffering, and (2) the construction of the spectacle of racial apathy by the Canadian public. The paper theorizes why and how race frames the production of suffering and spectacle, and offers considerations for social movement theory. This chapter is written for an audience engaged in social movement theory. 21

In Chapter 4, I explore how the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests functioned as a “strange encounter” that allowed the other to take shape through proximity—a face-to-face meeting with difference that invoked surprise and conflict (Ahmed 2000) by activating imaginings of race within and beyond the nation. Through spatialized representations of race thinking and its related trope of belonging, dominant Canadian media discourses delegitimized the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest(er)s as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders” who threatened (symbolic) national space. In this paper, I develop a framework of race thinking to illuminate the profound, perplexing connectedness between conceptions of racialization and belonging that are reciprocally constituted between scales and spaces. Using critical theories of representation in media analysis (Gee 2005; Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993), I examine 153 articles from mainstream newspapers. My analysis proceeds in two parts. In Part One, I explore the “strange encounter” in the media’s production of the other and the problematic conflation of the Tamil protester-terrorist through claims to space. In Part Two, I explore how scale operates through underlying national values and conceptualizes a precarious structure of belonging. Through these discursive moves, the resulting figure of the “other,” the “outlaw,” and the “outsider” came to represent the racialized/spatialized Tamil protest(er). These constructions delegitimized the protests and

21 This paper is currently under review at Social Movement Studies
defined the parameters of who “we,” “Canadians” are in their proximity. This paper is written for a sociology audience. It is published in the Canadian Journal of Sociology’s 2013 special issue on race, racialization and racisms.22

In the final chapter, I present the combined contribution of these papers. I engage with some of the limitations of this study, and provide an agenda for future social work theory, practice and research on racialized communities’ activism across borders.

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22 This manuscript was submitted following the approval of my original proposal, in compliance with the three-paper dissertation guidelines.
The conceptual framework

This study provides a preliminary examination of the protests of others through a framework that builds upon social work’s foundational principles of social justice, its historical and contemporary role of activism, and its responsibility to strengthen the citizenship practice with and within communities. To date, social work and social movement literature has conceptualized the trajectory of protest as informed by a largely Euro-American understanding of the history of protest. As a result, dominant theories of protest against social exclusion in its various forms are often framed within limited understandings of the dynamics of race, space and citizenship that come to bear upon transnational communities’ activism. As these frameworks do not account for the complexities of racial other’s protests across borders, their experience of the nation, nor their boundaries of citizenship, I place special attention to the socially constructed nature of protest and responses to it.23

Social constructionism proposes that humans together create everything we know and experience, or at the very least create the interpretive frameworks through which we filter all our experiences. These interpretative frameworks provide collections of beliefs, feelings, images and values that form the building blocks to our patterns of thinking, judging and feeling (Searle 1995; Berger and Luckmann 1966). As postmodernists insist, there are no absolute Truths on which we can construct our beliefs, understandings and responses, but our own cultural traditions inform and define our world, as well as provide patterns and tools for constructing meaningful lives (Derrida 1967). As Derrida’s controversial quote suggests, “there is nothing outside the text” (p.

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23 Due to the unique format of this dissertation, the reader will find some overlap with the literature review presented within this chapter, and the content of the individual articles. For a more complete engagement with each topic, please see the relevant chapter.
as such, nothing can be experienced outside of context and culture. Through this lens, it is easy to realize that no protest group or individual has interests that are experienced without cultural interpretation. This framework also informs which groups of people, political goals, tactics and mobilizations become appropriate and conducive to the dominant public, based on their own understanding of the political ideology and moral vision of Canada. Accepting social reality as socially constructed does not imply that it is infinitely flexible or arbitrary but that meanings and practices can exert both constraint and room for challenge, simultaneously. It recognizes that social reality is enforced by shared norms and triggers expectations that we can follow, challenge or negotiate.

The following theoretical framework incorporates an understanding of how social constructs of citizenship, race and space create and regulate bodies, produces symbolic and material forms of dominance and subjugation, and informs the embodiment and representation of otherness, through the *assemblage* of the racialized activist in the age of terror. I draw upon Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s (1987) theorization of “assemblage” as it offers the language for the multitude of connections that bodies may form with other bodies. They suggest that the

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24 I draw upon the concept of “culture” as “a learned system of meaning and behavior that is passed from one generation to the next” (Carter and Qureshi 1995, 241), which constitutes all the customs, values, and traditions that are learned from one's environment (Sue and Sue 1990). According to Sodowsky et al. (1995), in every culture there is a “set of people who have common and shared values; customs, habits, and rituals; systems of labeling, explanations, and evaluations; social rules of behavior; perceptions regarding human nature, natural phenomena, interpersonal relationships, time, and activity; symbols, art, and artifacts; and historical developments” (p. 132). As a result, culture functions as “a unifying influence. It combines the different aspects of life into a logical whole” (p. 132). In Clifford Geertz’s (1973) terms, this unification creates a “web of culture.” As standards of social behavior are unified and culturally derived, “the closer one is to one's original culture, the harder it is to recognize the culturally specific, rather than universal, base of accepted norms for behavior” (Harry 1992, 57). Moreover, Sherene Razack (1998) observes that the definition of culture that continues to have the widest currency in Western society is one in which culture is “taken to mean values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs that exist in a timeless and unchangeable vacuum outside of patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and colonialism”, an understanding that “reduces all facets of social experience to issues of culture” (p. 58). Through this framework, Razack (1998) emphasizes the process of culturalism or cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke 1995)—the complex practice and ideology that uses popularized, stereotyped representations of culture as the primary analytical lens for understanding assumed differences about different groups and communities (McConaghy 2000). Stolcke (1995) argues that these presumed differences then function to give rise to the “rhetoric of exclusion and inclusion that emphasizes the distinctiveness of cultural identity, traditions, and heritage among groups and assumes the closure of culture by territory” (p. 2).
social world is organized into discrete categories that interact to order or stratified paired hierarchies—binaries like white or other, normal or abnormal. In discussing Deleuze and Guattari’s work, Peta Malins (2004) suggests that a body’s function or potential becomings are dependent on other bodies to which it assemblages with. This framework provides a new way of thinking about connections, representations and binaries that appear in a construction, not only to describe a body but to produce and organize it (Malins 2004, 101). Unlike an intersectional model of identity “which presumes that components—race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, age, religion—are separable analytics and can thus be disassembled, an assemblage is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency” (Puar 2007, 212). In this study, the theory of assemblage provides a lens to examine how race, space and citizenship come to be co-constructed through the activism of the Tamil diaspora in Canada. Through this dissertation, I explore how media representations evoke an assemblage of the “racialized activist” to embody political ideologies interconnected across through time and space. This aspect of assemblage requires an understanding of complex and competing interconnections across seemingly distant colonial projects (Lowe 2006; Povinelli 2002). As I demonstrate in the following chapter, this understanding encourages us to unpack

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25 Since the publication of this critique, Jasbir Puar has responded to what she calls the “anxieties” elicited by this distinction. In “‘I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess: ’ Becoming-intersectional in assemblage theory” (Puar 2012), she explores the concept of intersectionality alongside assemblage to consider how they might be imagined together. She suggests that both concepts pose different conceptual problems: “intersectionality attempts to comprehend political institutions and their attendant forms of social normativity and disciplinary administration, while assemblages in an effort to reintroduce politics into the political, asks what is prior to and beyond what gets established” (p. 63). She argues that her critique of intersectional models as “disassembled” intends to highlight the unique becomings of bodies, as well as how societies control, modulate and tweak “bodies as matter, not predominantly through signification or identity interpellation by rather through affective capacities and tendencies” (p. 63). Through this critique, she highlights the ongoing attempts to destabilize identities, but also the forces that continue to enforce them. Thinking through the intertwined dimensions of assemblage and intersectionality offers new considerations for relations between difference, discipline and control. Through this dissertation, the theory of assemblage provides a lens to explore how media representations construct and enforce the “racialized activist” of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests to embody political ideologies and racial markers interconnected across through time and space.
how, for the Tamil diaspora, multiple forces and structures of colonialism and imperialism continue across geographies.

In this section, I first explore theories of citizenship to encourage us to expand traditional understandings of citizenship as a status to citizenship as a practice that incorporates local, national and transnational scales simultaneously. Drawing upon the work of post-colonial and critical race scholars, I then examine the function, construction and process of othering through a theorization of race thinking (Arendt 1973) to consider how race creates and confounds difference across peoples and spaces. Finally, I draw upon these areas of study to conceptualize the racial-spatial encounter. Through this final sub-section, I problematize conditions of belonging through moments of encounter that demark bodies who are normalized and those who are threatening in this age of terrorism.

(i) Theorizing the conditions and practice of citizenship

Traditionally, citizenship has been theorized in terms of a state-centric status – as individual rights and responsibilities, their substantive content, and the extent to which they are or are not distributed across society (Marshall 1950, 1975, 1981). However, a growing movement within citizenship studies critiques formal citizenship status as unsuitable for interpreting the practice of citizenship (Isin 2008; Holman 1993; Joppke 2007), which instead focuses on the community and a continuum of political, economic and social participation. According to Isin and Turner (2002), leading scholars in citizenship studies, a sociological reading of the conceptualization of citizenship is one in which “the emphasis is less on legal rules, and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities” (p. 4). It is now more commonly defined through “a more total relationship, inflected by identity, social positioning, cultural
assumptions, institutional practices, and a sense of belonging” (Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1999, 4). As a “momentum concept” (Hoffman 2004)—a concept that unfolds across time and space and can be re-conceptualized to ensure its egalitarian potential—citizenship can “provide tools for marginalized groups struggling for social justice” (Lister 2008, 48). These debates have been enriched through interrogations of the concept of citizenship through nation-state “others.”

In citizenship studies, this shift is generally conceptualized as a move from a struggle for redistribution (of income and wealth) aimed at alleviating social inequalities in postwar democratic societies, to a struggle for recognition, emphasizing marginalized communities’ demands for accommodation of difference and recognition of identity (Isin et al. 2008). However, citizenship scholars are now critiquing the linear, exclusive or antagonist distinction between these two classifications to argue that “the analogous separation of redistribution and recognition have resulted in essentialist (assuming that identities are fixed and immutable) and idealist (assuming that identities are compliant and floating) approaches and policies” (Isin et al. 2008, 6 italics in original text). For the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, this perspective also urges us to consider the transnational dimension of citizenship to highlight the interaction between structural inequalities and migrants’ agency and resistance within and across nation-states. As such, I draw upon an emergent area of citizenship studies that has problematized the social conditions of citizenship across multiple interrelated local, national and transnational scales and spaces (Isin and Wood 1999; Grundy and Smith 2005).

As Staeheli (2003) observes, more recently, citizenship studies appears to be polarized on whether citizenship is constructed at the transnational, national or local level. While some scholars argue that national rights are being superseded by universal discourses of human rights that are legitimated through international agreements and institutions at the transnational level
(Soysal 1994), others suggest that the city functions as a strategic site of citizenship for marginalized groups (Holston and Appadurai 1996). Through this dissertation, I evoke Ehrkamp and Leitner’s (2003) position to argue that citizenship practice incorporates local, national and transnational scales simultaneously. While the nation state functions as a crucial mediator of citizenship rights, practices and acts, interrelated scales challenge the practice of citizenship and the struggles of marginalized groups.

(ii) The racialized other

Unpacking the functions, constructions and processes of othering is a fundamental part of this project; it allows us to understand the complex and competing dynamics underlying the representation of the Tamil diaspora in Canada. In general, the “other” is anyone separate from one’s self—their existence is crucial in locating one’s own place in the world. While the term is used widely in existential philosophy, the roots of the postcolonial “other” lie in Freudian and post-Freudian analyses of the formation of subjectivity. In postcolonial studies, the colonized subject is characterized as other through discourses of primitivism and cannibalism in order to develop and reinforce the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized, while at the same time asserting the dominance and primacy of the colonizer’s world view (Bhabha 1994; Fanon 1952; Said 1979). The encounter with the other reconstitutes identities through reopening prior histories of violent encounter (Ahmed 2000). Racialized others in the West may share a historical opposition to colonial domination but may have very different cultural histories and memories of their encounters. The Canadian context is a hybrid space, “a cross between old Imperial conquest of land and resources and new Imperial conquest of social reality” (Barker 2009, 336)—because Canada is engaged in the continuing colonization of indigenous peoples.

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26 This section is an excerpt from Chapter Three, “Regarding the protests of others”
(Razack 2002), it remains simultaneously colonial and postcolonial in its interactions with racial others.

Race is “predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-à-vis one another” (Higginbotham 1992, 254). Racialization is a process that constitutes difference between groups that have “always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall 1987, 45). The production of difference is crucial for creating non-Europeans but also for creating a European self (Said 1979); Europe, as Fanon (1965) reminds us, was “literally the creation of the Third World” (p. 102). Through the similar process in which colonial others come into being where the “colonial subject is both a ‘child’ of the empire and a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998, 171), the construction of the dominant imperial Other occurs. As such, dominance through whiteness is not a “natural” condition, “phenotypically indicative of blood or genetical intellectual superiority, but the manufactured outcome of cultural and legal definition of political and economic identification with rulership and privilege” (Goldberg 2002, 13). Through its very construction, whiteness signifies social superiority, political and structural control, and economic privilege. It is achieved only through the “historically specific fantasy whereby members imagine themselves as Western” (Yegenoglu 1998, 3).

In order to unpack representations of racialized local groups who protest an issue unfolding in another part of the world through rights-based claims for intervention, I theorize a framework to untangle the co-construction of race and (trans)national space. In Chapter Four, I draw upon the concept of race thinking (Arendt 1973) that understands how social relations of
dominance and otherness are spatially constructed (Delaney 2002; Soja 1996; Razack 2002; Mohanram 1999), alongside the theoretical insights of scholars such as Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto (2008) and Nagel and Staeheli (2004) on questions of scale, political transformation, and the role of social actors across spaces to bring about and resist change. This framework assumes that public spaces are not blank and open for anybody to occupy, but that connections between people and spaces are created, repeated, and resisted over time (Puwar 2004). While all bodies can, in theory, occupy all spaces, certain bodies are tacitly designated as being the natural occupants of specific positions, while others are marked as trespassers, in accordance with how both places and bodies are imagined politically, historically, and conceptually. The spaces that bodies can inhabit, as well as, the practices that bodies can perform in spaces, are socially inscribed. Paying attention to the representational politics of transnational protest contributes insights into the powerful socio-spatial impact that others or, those Sara Ahmed (2000) calls “strangers,” may elicit through protest when their racialized bodies occupy spaces where they do not belong.

(iii) (Re)Imagining the encounter

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protests complicated socio-spatial assumptions of politics, representation, and community because their resistance transcended physical space: bodies in one part of the world represented bodies elsewhere, identifying themselves as part of the same community, while making demands upon different nations. As geographical conceptions of scale (the ‘local’, ‘national’, ‘international’ and ‘transnational’) are socially constructed and shifting, race thinking is also implicated in imagining space within and beyond Canadian borders: it functions to organize foreign bodies that are constructed as both inferiors and in need of special

27 This section is an excerpt from Chapter Four, “Since when did we have 100,000 Tamils?”
protection here and abroad, while simultaneously maintaining white supremacy within the nation. As Radhika Mohanram (1999) observes, “it is a commonplace to point out that the concept of race has always been articulated according to the geographical distributions of people. Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relations between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races” (Mohanram 1999, 3). The transnational dimension of this racial-spatial difference cannot be overlooked. Identifications of whiteness and racial superiority are continually re-formed and “rewhitened” across Western states, particularly in the age of terrorism, where an imagined set of common civilizational markers, such as modernity, liberalism and democracy, function to separate legitimate, “acceptable” transnational identities from illegitimate, “unacceptable” ones (Arat-Koc 2005). Within this context in Canada, “‘foreign-ness’ and especially the construction of ‘internal dangerous foreigners’ seems to coincide with discourses of nation-building, security and race thinking” (Dhamoon and Abu-Laban 2009, 164).

Sara Ahmed’s notion of bodies tactically designated as “strangers” (2000) is useful to understand how the Tamil Canadian diaspora protests were framed within this context. Ahmed (2000) challenges the assumption of the stranger as somebody we do not know, suggesting instead that some bodies are already recognized as stranger than others by the dominant Canadian public: “there are some-bodies who simply are strangers, and who pose danger in their very co-presence in a given street” (p. 3). Race thinking sanctions the retreat to this simple logic of encountering the “stranger”: “they” are not like “us.” In a “strange encounter,” particularly an oppositional one like protest, Hannah Arendt’s (1973) conceptualization of “race thinking” allows us to consider how humankind is categorized into races by their constructed differences or myths of common ancestry—how the races of the world are distinctly hierarchical, and were
produced through European encounters with the other. Because Canada remains a white settler society that is socially and spatially contested (Razack 2002), tactics of constructing social hierarchies through interpretations of descent frame some people as more “strange” than others within the body politic and some bodies more threatening by their very presence.

Encounters with others involve *spatial negotiations of race thinking* with those who are recognized as either normalized or strange—differences are constructed through relationships of proximity and distance, and are regulated through the state (Goldberg 2002). Through race thinking, national values conceal a racial hierarchy of beliefs about who is deserving and undeserving through values of rationality, morality, modernity, and civilization. In turn, these values spatially organize the nation to reproduce racial hierarchies through the law (Razack 2002). While theories of citizenship and rights include the right to protest for all, the otherness of the stranger creates a precarious relation between the law, the practice of citizenship, and access to protest. Exacerbated through the “war on terror,” race thinking routinizes racial hierarchy, encouraging an acceptance that suspension of rights is allowable, if not necessary, for national security (Razack 2007). Race thinking insists that some bodies belong within the nation while others may not. The normalized figure, through self-control and discipline, not only masters his own body and space (Foucault 1977), but also regulates boundaries to create and control space inhabited by the racial other (Kirby 1996).

Hage (2000) suggests that unlike *passive belonging* (which categorizes the other), *governmental belonging* is the power to construct the positioning of others in the nation; it is “the power to have a legitimate view regarding who should feel at home in the nation and how, and who should be in and who should be out, as well as what constitutes too many” (p. 46). To inhabit the nation this way is to perceive oneself as being an agent of such will, determining what
issues and which people are deserving within the national space of white settler society. As Sara Ahmed (2000) argues, “the proximity of strangers within the nation's space… is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined and exterior other” (p. 100). National representations of a transnational protest illustrate such demarcation as a process of exclusion in the context of nationhood.

This framework offers insight into the racial and spatial conditions underlying citizenship in the Canadian nation-state. Through the process of racialization that interconnects imperial and colonial projects across time and space, we come to see how a community that faces persecution in Sri Lanka continues to be repressed in the West for its racial, ethnic, and social markers, as well as through the construction of “terrorists” or “terrorist sympathizers” during the age of this threat. Differential conditions of belonging further provide the context in which racialized protesters are demonized and disparaged, and their claims are made irrelevant. Instead, as I explore in Chapter Three, their suffering incites a particular form of racial apathy and injustice that is systemically enforced. While these processes of othering mark “outsiders” or “strangers” within the nation, I also draw upon them to unpack the demarcation of bodies that do belong—bodies who are unmarked and considered “natural occupants” of Canadian space. Through the following chapters of this dissertation, I explore how these normalized Canadians come to constitute the “public” and, through the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, negotiate the boundaries of Canadian citizenship.
Methodology

Language is also a place of struggle. We are wedded in language, have our being in words. Language is also a place of struggle. Dare I speak to oppressed and oppressor in the same voice? Dare I speak to you in a language that will move beyond the boundaries of domination—a language that will not bind you, fence you in, or hold you? Language is also a place of struggle. The oppressed struggle in language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is also a place of struggle” (hooks 1990, 146)

Following hooks (1990), I recognize discourse as a site of struggle. I value critical practices of meaning making and the importance of situated knowledges and experiences to recognize complexly power-differentiated communities in our globalized, hybridized, and pluralized social spaces. Moreover, the significance of race, racial subjectivities, ideologies and disparities as basic constructions of social life and practices guides my work. I believe that conceptually exploring race as a process constituting difference between groups allows me to challenge political and social spaces that do not account for othering representations, practices and structures, and the ways in which they come into existence in and through each other. That being said, racial standpoints are not homogenous or fixed. The instability of this social construct requires reflexivity, analytical awareness, and an ethical consciousness to fully appreciate the social relations of power that form complex matrices of domination and subjugation. This reality also urges me to pay attention to the ways in which the knowledge I produce will be represented, taken up, challenged and contested in different spaces.
The aim of my work is to question the assumptions of knowledge production through media discourse to reveal what has previously, and in some cases, continues to be hidden in racial other’s lives, experiences and contributions. Through my research, I account for the power discrepancies involved in who can exist in the production of knowledge, and the multifarious ways this affects the consumption of experience and representation (including, but not limited to, the research process). Through this work, I hope to contribute to social work’s interest in power relations, resistance practices and anti-oppressive scholarship by generating new knowledge(s) that are situated, and are ultimately, emancipatory and liberating.

Data collection

A qualitative case study informed by the theoretical framework I present in the previous section of this Chapter is well-suited to examine multiple public discourses on and around the 2009 Tamil diaspora demonstrations. As a particular method of qualitative research, case studies provide a systematic way of assessing events, collecting information, analyzing data and reporting results. It is a well-established research strategy where the focus is on an in-depth longitudinal examination of a case in its context (Robson 2002), relying on multiple sources of evidence and benefiting from the prior development of theoretical propositions (Yin 2002). In this research, a case study approach lent itself effectively to the proposed research questions as it allowed me to contextualize the individual case of the Tamil diaspora protest as well as the unique phenomena that emerged through it. To obtain in-depth context-dependent insights into the research topic, this study adopts a multi-method data collection process (Creswell 1998) which comprised two phases of media analysis and key informant interviews.
In Phase One, I examined public representations of the protests by reviewing a variety of media sources that have published on this topic in Canada since January 2009—which marks the emergence of the diaspora activism in Canada. This included all articles, editorials, letters by the public, images and public commentaries in national and local English-language papers carried through the Canadian Newsstand database, retrieved using keywords “Tamil protest” (n = 53) and “Tamil AND protest AND Toronto” (n = 153). This resulted in a total of 153 articles (duplicates were removed). The following provides a breakdown of the number of articles per publication.

Figure 2: Sample of print media articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News publication</th>
<th>Number of articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ottawa Sun</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Star</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Post</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globe and Mail</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gazette</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTV News</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver Sun</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor Star</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calgary Herald</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada NewsWire</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonton Journal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star-Phoenix (Saskatoon)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times’ Colonist (Victoria)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All media articles were uploaded into HyperResearch data management software for coding and analysis.

In Phase Two, after the media analysis was completed, 7 key informant interviews were conducted to contextualize my findings and explore their views on the Tamil diaspora protests further. Through the media analysis and my own engagement in academic and activist spaces, I
identified 10 individuals who I approached for recruitment in this study. This pool included academics, activists who participated in the 2009 protests, members from the Tamil diaspora, journalists, and social service agency staff working with the Tamil diaspora. All participants were selected due to their active participation in the 2009 protests. I identified journalists who reported on the protests through their publications. I identified activists and academics that were sourced in media reports as community organizers or leaders who were at the forefront of the movement in Canada, and/or served as media spokespeople. I identified community members’ who were engaged in social services related to, or directed towards the Tamil community’s activism through news reports and online media.

Upon contact, via email, phone or in person, I provided a general introduction of the research topic and my academic affiliation. I also provided a recruitment package that was approved by the University of Toronto ethics approval process. This package included a written request for participation in the project (Appendix A); an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and the process of participation (Appendix B); and an informed consent form providing detailed information on all aspects of voluntary participation in this study (Appendix C). Of the 10 individuals I approached, 8 expressed interest in participation, and 7 interviews were conducted. One person was unable to participate due to scheduling conflicts. Most interviews were conducted in person in two different Canadian cities in a location that was most convenient to them; however one was conducted on the phone with a participant who was out of the country at the time. All interviews were digitally recorded with the expressed and written consent of the participant in accordance with the approved ethics protocol.

The interviews were conducted through a semi-structured format that took between one to three hours, depending on the participants’ availability. I approached the interviews with
open-ended questions on areas of interest based on a review of the literature, media articles from Phase One of this study, and the specific objectives of this study (Appendix D). These questions pertained to (a) a general survey of participants’ involvement in the topic and protests, (b) their perspectives on media representations, and (c) connections between their analysis of the media and their own work or activism. However, I also encouraged the space and provided the opportunity for participants to guide the interviews with their own narratives, questions and concerns. I provided time for each participant to gain familiarity and comfort with me prior to the start of the interview. I had briefly interacted with some participants in professional settings prior to these interviews; some participants were already familiar with my study having heard about it from myself or others within the community. A few participants were not familiar with me or my research upon contact. Of this group, two participants refused to participate without first engaging me in an interview to determine whether my preliminary analysis of the media and my politics made it “safe.” Overall, all key informants were enthusiastic about their participation in the study; they all mentioned being relieved and excited that someone was doing this work—work on a movement that they identified as having a very significant impact on their lives, work or activism. Despite this, I was humbled by participants’ willingness to share their stories and perspectives on the highly contentious nature of this topic.

As the protests and events surrounding it are intense and potentially upsetting, I ensured that all participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study, that they may skip any questions they did not want to answer, or end their participation in the study with no personal or professional consequences. The interviews themselves were at times emotionally draining (for participants and for me in the role of interviewer) as they involved discussing difficult memories from what was a traumatic time for the Tamil community worldwide. At different stages in

28 After this interview, both people participated in this study
almost all the interviews I conducted, professional, personal or emotional disclosures were made which required acknowledging and at times, further reflection and processing by participants. However, no participants expressed a desire to not respond to a question, or to discontinue the interview.

Based on the conditions of the informed consent process, all interviews were kept confidential, and all identifiers have been removed from the written analysis resulting from the interviews. Participants were informed that only I will have access to the research data, and all material—interviews, transcriptions and coded data—will be stored on a password protected computer. There was no monetary compensation for participation in this study.

All interviews were personally transcribed and uploaded for analysis in HyperResearch. These consultations grounded my findings from the media analysis and ensured the relevance to people’s lives and work. They give “voice” (Jackson and Mazzei 2009) and speak back to hegemonic media discourses. They also served as an extended “member-checking” (Drisko 1997) and debriefing process to establish credibility for my findings. Importantly, the key informants in this study were not a homogenous group with similar perspectives. As such, these interviews brought forth multiple positionings, debates and perspectives on the protests and Canadian responses to them.

**Data analysis**

My analysis focused on how the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest was constructed in various media sources, and how these discourses of activism function within the Canadian context and the social work profession. Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (Yin 2002), through each phase of the study. The coding process for the data from Phase One and Two
involved first reading through all the material several times to establish the context of the
protests, and the context in which each of the sources (texts and interviews) were produced. This
involved tying these conversations within larger debates to understand how they were
constructed and received at the time of publication, or the time of the interview. For the media
articles, I paid attention to the genres each source belonged to within the newspaper to further
frame the meaning and significance they offered. This process, along with a continued
engagement with the literature on the topic, offered inspiration for the coding categories I
constructed to organize my data within the data management software. I emerged with 26 codes
pertaining to significant discourse strands or theoretical categories, and one code that I created
for data that appeared relevant or significant at the time, but did not fit easily into an existing
code. Some themes allowed sub-categorization, which I performed to further unpack the data as
my analysis deepened.

This topic and data collection process resulted in an extensive data corpus. This
dissertation presents only part of the large amount of data I have coded for analysis. My decision
to present the data that I have within this dissertation is based on my personal prioritization of
the topics I decided to be the most prevalent within the data, and the most pertinent based on
participant’s own requests. During the key informant interviews, when time permitted, I engaged
participants in a discussion on what they believed to be the most important aspects of public
representation on the protest. All highlighted issues of media production, race, belonging and
social justice. As I formulated the focus of my study, these recommendations guided the work
and the analysis I present in this dissertation. That said, there are several other areas related to
the media representations of the protests and the interviews that I have not explored in this
dissertation. In Chapter 5, I note some areas of research within this area of study that I will continue to analyze and disseminate as part of my ongoing work.²⁹

Data from both phases were analyzed intertextually, drawing upon strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to provide a contextual account of language-use based in its interest in ideology, social relations and the relationship between text and context. Utilizing an **intertextual** reading of the case study through the narratives emerging from the data provided a deeper understanding of the complex representations of the protests. Fonow and Cook (2005) describe intertextuality as “the study of how the symbolic codes in one text are related to those in another which allows the researcher to compare and contrast similar themes within or among different genres of media” (p. 2221). Since meaning is produced in dialogue with another (Bakhtin 1981), interpreting text involves an engaged dialogue within the realm of the social. Therefore, an intertextual reading of data sources provided a complex engagement with the visuals, texts and narratives from the data as well as the relationship between the texts and the discourses themselves.

Drawing from CDA, I position language and discursive practices as active agents in the hegemonic process of constructing, maintaining and deploying ideology. According to Luke (1997), CDA builds from three broad theoretical orientations:

First, it draws from poststructuralism the view that discourse operates laterally across local institutional sites, and that texts have a constructive function in forming up and shaping human identities and actions. Second, it draws from Bourdieu's sociology the assumption that actual textual practices and interactions with texts become “embodied” forms of “cultural capital” with exchange value in particular social fields. Third, it draws from neomarxist cultural theory the assumption that these discourses are produced and

²⁹ I provide more detail into some of these areas in Chapter Five of this dissertation
used within political economies, and that they thus produce and articulate broader ideological interests, social formations and movements within those fields.

For this dissertation, all three underpinnings of CDA that Luke (1997) identifies are relevant: (1) the post-structuralist lens helps us understand how each label of activism comes to create activist subjectivities, inform public discourse and define the boundaries of the Canadian imaginary; (2) the sociological framework helps us unpack the political ideologies framing media representations and public discourse that also undergrid our research representations; and (3) the neo-Marxist bent allows us to consider how an analysis of media representation and research representation can and should hold onto structural conditions of displacement, colonialism, marginalization and migration. Together, these insights allow an analytical consideration of how hegemonic media representations meaningfully inscribe power relations and extend the material realities and political ideologies emerging from and elicited by the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests. Importantly, CDA differs from some other forms of discourse analysis in that it does not view the social world as purely subjective; instead, its epistemological position determines that an appropriate conceptual framework for discourse analysis is located within the structural concerns of social policy, while at the same time, not viewing all structures, such as the ‘state’ as static, stable entities.

**Research strategies and ethical considerations**

For this study, I employed several strategies to enhance the research process. Trustworthiness is ensured when various data converge into an overall understanding of the case (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I employed a triangulated interpretation of the analytical approaches of, text and narratives through both phases of data collection and analysis. Although data from the
phases were analyzed independently, an iterative reflexivity of the different data sources, feedback from stakeholders, consideration of rival propositions (Yin, 2002) and consultation with research partners enhanced trustworthiness. I also engaged with a strategy of triangulation to explore multiple perspectives, data sources and data types (Baxter & Jack, 2008) that occurred at different times and locations (Sorin-Peters, 2004). In this study, triangulation involved reviewing background reading on the topic of the protest, activism by the Tamil diaspora and Canada’s complex relationship with racialization; mainstream and counter news sources; key informant interviews; observing protests and other activist spaces; maintaining a research journal documenting the process of the research, retrospective reflections and feelings; as well as, requesting feedback from the thesis committee and dialogues with different community stakeholders.

Member-Checking—the process of “taking the data back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them whether the results are plausible” (Sorin-Peters, 2004, p. 947)—helped me seek clarity and additional perspectives from the key informant interviews. As the interviews represented the views of activists, social workers, and media personnel, they were especially well-suited to provide feedback on my preliminary data collection. In addition, the process of debriefing and support was essential to review the data collected, to establish credibility (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and obtain support. For this study, I received feedback and support from my interdisciplinary dissertation committee through emails, telephone conversations and meetings. I also relied on already established supportive relationships in the field as well as those that were formed with various stakeholders at the local level.

One of its main characteristics is CDA’s emphasis on reflexivity, strongly relying on the ‘critical’ where the researcher is “understood as having distance from the data, embedding the
data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly, and focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research” (Wodack 2001, 9). In so doing, it strongly implies a rejection of positivist notions of objectivity and affirms that no language is neutral and that a responsible social scientist should acknowledge this. I agree with Agger (1992) in that the supposed contamination of objectivity with authorial subjectivity is not a contamination at all, but is instead, an acknowledgement that all politically motivated cultural criticism is also self-criticism, that research cannot be abstract from the complex cultural fields from which we work, and that the very nature of research writing is constitutional, interpretive and subjective. Moreover, its form of critique is not ad hoc, incidental, or individual, but is framed within an analysis of power relations between social groups, identities and structures—criteria that are strongly suited to this work.

Reflexivity involves the skills to engage in a protracted series of transactions and explorations with the self, informants and the socio-cultural realities of the field research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A reflexive interpretative reading of issues requires a critical assessment of the taken-for-granted presuppositions that accounts for an insider’s point of view while adopting an outsider position in order to assume responsibly the role of a researcher. It also involves a thoughtful awareness of the multiple ways one’s social positioning affects their epistemological orientation, the data analysis process, and in my case, even the topic of the research: protest against genocide in countries fractured by the violence of colonialism. In 2004, I worked with a grassroots organization commemorating the ten year anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. This experience allowed me to work with several survivors and officials stationed in Rwanda at the time of the conflict—to hear their personal experiences and perspectives on the escalation of the genocide and our national response. More recently, I engaged with the Tamil protests against the
genocide in Sri Lanka, as the world once again, silently watched; I, like thousands of other protesters, couldn’t help but question: “what happened to ‘never again’?” I am a first-generation Canadian, born in the Middle East, whose biological parents are Sinhalese and Tamil. This combination of identities, as an “insider” and “outsider” to both ethnic groups in conflict, as well as the dominant Canadian context, provides a unique social positioning for this analysis. That being said, my exposure to the complex realities of this conflict and its context is geographically-removed, and the discursive politics I engage in are also informed by my own insights and experiences—my education, work experience, and personal experiences. However, due to my social position of academic researcher through this project, I am perceived as—and am—both an “insider” and an “outsider” to this movement.

As an activist and a researcher, I grappled with the ethical and political implications of doing this dissertation on the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests. In an age where dissent by others is criminalized, research on activism can be a powerful tool to challenge oppressive structures but it can also evoke surveillance, control, and punishment. Scholars have pointed to the moral and ethical dilemmas of representing issues in research that may lead to their participants’ prosecution or deportation (Birman 2005; Blee and Vining 2010). Participants who are undocumented, relatively powerless by virtue of their social class, race, or situation, or participants who engage in covert or illegal activities, can face a high risk of repression through their involvement in research. Similarly, activists engaged in “controversial” or contested social movements face similar risks—particularly when their bodies are already constructed as threatening. While I adhered to ethics protocols to minimize risk, as a researcher, I also asked

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30 I explore ethical and political considerations in more detail in Chapter 2, “From activists to terrorists”. This section is a partial excerpt from the chapter.
myself whether it was ethically just for these participants and their stories to be included in my research.

This was a difficult question. On the one hand, representations of communities’ activism allow one to document the struggles and agency of people who may otherwise remain silenced, and whose stories may be marginalized. Yet, this visibility can also contribute to a discourse of “other” movements that are continually marginalized and policed within the academy and the wider social context. Scholars suggest that when working with marginalized groups, the most critical question we should ask is whether the research is relevant to the community, and whether it will benefit the community rather than further cause harm (Adamson and Donovan 2002; Benatar and Singer 2000; Leaning 2001; Smith 2005). As Gada Mahrousse (2010) urges us to consider about social justice interventions, attempting to “do good” is not enough because benevolence consistently legitimizes racialized systems of power. Instead, we must directly and critically question our own complicities and reasons for doing this work, and challenge the constitution of our research and ourselves as western, benevolent, liberal subjects. For me, this requires being honest about writing with a subjectivity formed by sympathy to social movements, particularly the Tamil struggle. As such, I consciously and explicitly engage in work shaped by a commitment to emancipatory goals; through this dissertation, I attempt work that is transformative and disruptive to provoke conversations about the messy spaces between identities, politics, and social research for, within, and on social activism.

The detailed methodology guiding each paper is presented within each chapter of this dissertation.
Conclusion

In this first chapter, I problematize social work’s limited conceptualization of social justice, and argue that as a profession, we are yet to engage deeply with the profound challenges facing the transnational social movements of others. In order to draw implications from this research, I have articulated what I mean by the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, described the context of the events leading up to them, and argued why such a movement is of critical significance to Canadian social work. The positions and methodology offered in this chapter are intended to provide some background to the context of the discursive landscape surrounding this case study to allow the reader to be able to engage with the analysis I present in the following chapters.

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protests are a unique phenomenon: there is no other movement exactly like it. The context of the Sri Lankan conflict, the evolution of the events of 2009 and the mass mobilization it resulted in is impossible to generalize. The Canadian public and media response to the protests and the political landscape surrounding the crisis are embedded within a particular moment in time. Furthermore, the analysis I present in the following chapters is deeply shaped by my own engagement with the protests, the media reports I examined, and the individuals I spoke with. Yet, with all its uniqueness, this movement serves as a case study that offers insights into the social construction of activism as well as the socio-political context of resistance in Canada. Despite shifting narratives across time and space, this case study does not stand in isolation. It is part of a larger historical and ongoing anticolonial struggle, unfolding within a nation of many symbolic, discursive and material occupations. This dissertation offers a glimpse back to a history that brings us to the present moment and encourages us to envision a history yet to be written.
Chapter 2

From “Activists to Terrorists:” The Ethics and Politics of Representations of Transnational Resistance

Abstract

This paper critically reflects on our ethical responsibilities as social work researchers who report on the struggles of diasporic communities to consider how we should represent contested resistance movements in the age of terrorism. To problematize this issue, I grapple with the political ideologies guiding representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada that framed the protests through competing discourses of a “terrorist movement,” a “separatist movement,” an “ethnic conflict,” or a movement against “genocide.” Recognizing that all activism is socially constructed and that these labels inform social identities and social practices, I examine each category of resistance to reflect upon how they inform or challenge dominant constructions of immigrants, their activism, and their struggles in relation to Canada’s own history of separatism, sovereignty and colonization. Rather than employing any one term to refer to a singular narrative of transnational resistance, I argue that we foreground the power structures and global relations that fundamentally mark colonized identities and their activism across spaces and movements. Through this lens, I position the 2009 Tamil diaspora movement as a historic and ongoing decolonial struggle, unfolding within a nation of many symbolic, discursive and material occupations. I conclude by drawing upon indigenous, critical and anti-oppressive research approaches to centre the transgressive potential of decolonial resistance and representation.
Introduction

In Canada, the figure of the immigrant activist engaged in diasporic politics provokes angst, if not outright hostility. Despite the constitutional guarantees for the protection of citizens’ rights, and the promise of multiculturalism encouraging immigrants to engage in transnational social practices (Fleras and Elliot 2002; Satzewich and Wong 2006), diasporas’ transnational activism is often viewed as challenging forms of citizenship and political participation that are bounded by the nation-state. As Sunera Thobani (2007) puts it, the fabric of the nation is threatened by “outsiders [who] have routinely been depicted as making unreasonable claims upon the nation” (p. 4), when their distinctive racialized experiences come to be known as the inadequacies of their communities, their culture, or their race. Their conflicts are constructed as a marker for Third World savagery imported into an otherwise progressive nation.

In the era of the global “war on terror,” the Canadian nation-state mobilizes civilizational values through national security—“the crazed non-Christian savage of an earlier era of western expansion has been made to re-enter the global stage with a vengeance” (Thobani 2007, 27). In this process, the discourse of terrorism exalts the nation as “Western” and racializes the threat of fanatical, barbaric, non-western, terrorist others. The very threat of their presence has transformed the meaning of Canadian nationality, while simultaneously increasing restrictions on immigration, citizenship, and civil liberties. Scholars demonstrate how “anti-terrorism” measures have evolved into the institutionalized suspicion, criminalization, and racialization of “Muslims” and “immigrants”—brown and black bodies who “look” like they might constitute part of this danger (Thobani 2007; Razack 2007; Ismael and Measor 2003; Bahdi 2003). Now, “racialization renders the distinction between citizen and immigrant all but meaningless in the eyes of nationals, who in the post-9/11 era imagine themselves to be terrorized” (Thobani 2007, 246).
The age of terror presents significant challenges to resistance movements in the West when bodies representing the racialized figure of the “terrorist” are further targeted for surveillance, discipline, and deportation. The very nature of activism is reconstructed when evidence of oppositional consciousness in “threatening” communities is discursively complicated through transnationalism, ongoing colonial logics, and structures shaping the global order. The 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada provide one such case.

In 2009, thousands of Canadian Tamils and their allies—up to 45,000 protesters based on news accounts (Taylor 2009)—joined a global mobilization of the Tamil diaspora to demonstrate against the escalating violence by the Sri Lankan government against the Tamil minority in northern Sri Lanka. This period marked the culmination of a 26-year armed conflict between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), who fought to create an independent Tamil state in the north and east of the island (Wilson 2000). Since 1983, the conflict had caused over 80,000 deaths (Reuters 2008), with over 146,000 people unaccounted for (The Weekend Leader 2012). It also displaced over 130,000 Tamil people in 2009 alone (Amnesty International 2009). An estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed during this final phase of the Sri Lankan army’s offensive against the LTTE (United Nations 2011), with estimates of up to 1,000 people killed each day during the last two weeks of the conflict (Chamberlain 2009). Overlapping discourses framed the goals of the protests in Canada: protesters aimed to persuade politicians to intervene in the 26-year conflict and establish a ceasefire; they appealed to humanitarian aid organizations to provide resources and investigate internment camps in affected areas of the country; and they called for a restoration of civil rights to the Tamil population in Sri Lanka (Duffy and Blanchfield 2009; Javed 2009).
Through this movement, Canadian Tamils’ involvement in the politics of their homeland in 2009 suggested a sense of belonging within and beyond Canadian borders that challenged dominant conceptualizations of citizenship. Despite the escalating violence in Sri Lanka’s North, growing death tolls, and accounts of mounting atrocities, Canadian media discourses delegitimized the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest(ers) as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders” who threatened (symbolic) national space (Jeyapal 2013). Their activism was criminalized and stigmatized. As Toronto Police Service’s Chief Bill Blair reported to the Toronto Star a year after the protests, “I had people calling me and insisting we should drive them and beat them off the street. Somebody suggested we push them off the street with snow plows, that we shoot them in the knees” (Stancu 2010). Furthermore, through my research on the movement, I found that the basis of the activism was constructed through differing and sometimes contradictory narratives tangled across racial histories, imperial polities, and colonial geographies. Depending on the source of the media or the person, the discursive politics framing the Tamil community’s transnational activism were narrated through four recurring frames: a protest against an unfolding genocide, a separatist movement, a long-lasting ethnic conflict, or predominantly, a terrorist movement.

As a researcher, employing representations of resistance have discursive and material consequences: research representation of the Tamil diaspora’s activism is a “double-sided” political event (Agamben 1988) that locates and historicizes activism as a site of agency but also inscribes and reinscribes social demarcations within state order. As the representation of activism includes the discourse of resistance, it tacitly enforces disciplinary and regulatory practices granted through sovereign power in the age of terrorism. As such, I face deeply ethical and political questions about my research and the representations I construct: What were the political
ideologies underlying contested discourses of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests within the contested space of Canada? How can we, as social work researchers, ethically research and represent the resistance movements of others?

Recognizing research as a political enterprise that also has the possibility of revolutionary resistance, I begin this exploration from a space that Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2004) encourages us to—a space that attempts to disrupt homogenous constructions as universal, linear, totalizing, innocent, or depoliticized, and challenge epistemologies constructed through “imperial eyes.” In this paper, I consider the ethical issues framing research on social movements in the age of terror, and problematize why and how research representations come to be profoundly political. I draw upon the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests to illustrate the different political ideologies that frame the logics of activism in the Canadian nation-state, and grapple with the ways that they inform or challenge dominant constructions of immigrants, their activism, and their struggles in relation to Canada’s own history of separatism, sovereignty and colonization. Rather than employing any one term to refer to a singular narrative of transnational resistance, I argue that we foreground the power structures and global relations that fundamentally mark colonized identities and their activism across spaces and movements. Through this lens, I position the 2009 Tamil diaspora movement as a historic and ongoing decolonial struggle, unfolding within a nation of many symbolic, discursive and material occupations. I maintain that we cannot meaningfully examine resistance against colonization across borders, without first centering Canada’s own colonization of indigenous people and land. I conclude by drawing upon indigenous, critical and anti-oppressive research approaches to emphasize the transgressive potential of decolonial resistance and representation.
Ethical considerations for researching and representing resistance

As researchers, we face profoundly ethical considerations in our studies of resistance. In an age where dissent by others is criminalized, research on activism can be a powerful tool to challenge oppressive structures but it can also evoke surveillance, control, and punishment. Scholars have pointed to the moral and ethical dilemmas of representing issues in research that may lead to their participants’ prosecution or deportation (Birman 2005; Blee and Vining 2010). Participants who are undocumented, relatively powerless by virtue of their social class, race, or situation, or participants who engage in covert or illegal activities, can face a high risk of repression through their involvement in research. Similarly, activists engaged in “controversial” or contested social movements face similar risks—particularly when their bodies are already constructed as threatening. While we can adhere to ethics protocols to minimize risk, as researchers, we must also ask whether it is ethically just for these participants and their stories to be included in our research.

This is a difficult question. On the one hand, representations of communities’ activism allow one to document the struggles and agency of people who may otherwise remain silenced, and whose stories may be marginalized. Yet this visibility can also contribute to a discourse of “other” movements that are continually marginalized and policed within the academy and the wider social context. Do the representations I construct through research ultimately help or hurt the movement? When working with marginalized groups, the most critical question researchers should ask is whether the research is relevant to the community, and whether it will benefit the community rather than further cause harm (Adamson and Donovan 2002; Benatar and Singer 2000; Leaning 2001; Smith 2005). As such, we must make choices based on the risks that research participants might face, balanced with the importance of giving voice to those whose
narratives are otherwise ignored, about what we report and what we leave unsaid. As Gada Mahrouse (2010) urges us to consider about social justice interventions, attempting to “do good” is not enough because benevolence consistently legitimizes racialized systems of power. Instead, we must directly and critically question our own complicities and reasons for doing this work, and challenge the constitution of our research and ourselves as western, benevolent, liberal subjects. For most of us, this requires being honest about writing with a subjectivity formed by sympathy to social movements. We must also consciously engage in work shaped by a commitment to emancipatory goals—work that is transformative and disruptive, and provokes conversations about the messy spaces between identities, politics, and social research for, within, and on social activism. These reflections require ideological considerations because at the root of this challenge lie difficult questions: what do our research representations construct, and who benefits?

_Problematicizing representation_

Ethically considering the representations we construct in our research is critical as representation is essential to how meaning is produced and exchanged through the use of language, signs, or images between members of a culture (i.e., those who have access to a shared conceptual map) and allows the world to be classified and organized into meaningful categories (Hall 1997). Representation is at the centre of how we understand the construction of social movements (McDonald 2006; Tilly 1997; Hetherington 1998), and social movements are themselves constituted through representation. Belonging and empathy are “represented and reinforced through markers and symbols, buttons, pieces of clothing, flags, placards and so on, infused with symbolic value. These represent ‘us’ to participants, as well as marking off this
group for and against ‘others’” (Eyerman 2002, 8). Through this symbolic function, representation creates a category of sameness for people and their activism: it simultaneously “fixes” people and their politics.

While representation provides the sense that some labels are better or closer approximations of reality than others (Pitkin 1967), “what such representations in fact offer are varying illusions of reality” (Gidley 1992, 1). Nevertheless, representations constitute “reality” for the cultures that produce and consume them. As Said (1979) reminds us, representations of the other always represent the dominant group’s assumptions. Therefore, scrutinizing representations for accuracy is far less meaningful than examining how a representation is constructed and reconstructed, how it comes to appear coherent (even when incomplete), objective (even if sympathetic), and above all, authoritative. This requires us to shift our responsibility from accurately representing things in themselves to representing the web of “structure, sign and play” of social relations (Derrida 1978). Rejecting positivist definitions of “objectivity” or that one “neutral,” singular “truth” awaits discovery, postmodernists recognize the socially constructed nature of representations where competing interpretations of reality are inevitable. Therefore the researcher’s goals is “not to discover the ‘true’ interpretation, for none exists; instead the challenge is to uncover the multiple voices at work in society that have been silenced” (Tierney 1994, 99).

While some scholars argue that “the effect of the practice of speaking for others is often, though not always, erasure and a reinscription of … hierarchies” (Alcoff 1995, 116), others insist that the issue of representation is nuanced. The choice and responsibility of representation is more complicated than that because representing others can be oppressive while simultaneously enabling political agency. Shome and Hegde’s (2002) key concerns are a constant reminder:
“Who can speak? Who can represent? Do we position the colonized as incapable of speech? On the other hand, do we romanticize the speech of the colonized as resistant and thereby deflect the violence of the colonial encounter?” (266). Offering spaces for minority voices rather than deconstructing the political, social, and cultural context is also problematic (Sawhney 1995; Spivak 1990). As Spivak (1990) explains:

> It is a not a solution, the idea of the disenfranchised speaking for themselves, [because] this question of representation, self-representation, representing others, is a problem. On the other hand, we cannot put it under the carpet with demands for authentic voices; we have to remind ourselves that, as we do this, we might be compounding the problem even as we are trying to solve it (63).

This paper reflects upon data collected for a study on the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests to unpack tropes of contested representations of activism. It includes a review of 153 newspaper stories published on the protests in “mainstream” news sources in Canada between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2011, and 8 interviews with journalists, activists, and community members who provide context and “speak back” to media representations. I draw upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it is well-suited to explore the relations between discourse, power, social inequality, dominance and the role of the researcher in the (re)production and challenge of dominance (van Dijk 1993). CDA positions language practices as active agents in the hegemonic process of constructing and deploying ideology. According to Luke (1997), CDA builds from three broad theoretical orientations:

> First, it draws from poststructuralism the view that discourse operates laterally across local institutional sites, and that texts have a constructive function in forming up and shaping human identities and actions. Second, it draws from Bourdieu's sociology the
assumption that actual textual practices and interactions with texts become “embodied”
forms of “cultural capital” with exchange value in particular social fields. Third, it draws
from neomarxist cultural theory the assumption that these discourses are produced and
used within political economies, and that they thus produce and articulate broader
ideological interests, social formations and movements within those fields.

For this paper, all three underpinnings of CDA are relevant: the post-structuralist lens helps us
understand how each label of activism comes to define and create activist subjectivities; the
sociological framework helps us unpack the political ideologies framing media representations
that also undergrid our research representations; and the neo-Marxist bent allows us to consider
how this analysis of representation can and should hold onto structural conditions within the
Canadian-state. Together, these insights allow an analytical consideration of how representations
of activism meaningfully inscribe power relations and extend the material realities and political
ideologies of “terrorism,” “separatism,” “genocide” and “ethnic conflict.”

The politics of representations of resistance

I struggle with the politics involved in reproducing contested labels of “genocide,”
“separatism,” “ethnic conflict,” or “terrorism” in my research. Research representations matter
because they are a concrete outcome of discourse practice that is interpretative, and subjective
and constitutive. Each representation of activism evokes a different narrative of resistance,
embedded within different stories of ongoing struggle and each functions to legitimize and/or
delegitimize activists’ voices in different ways. Importantly, each category of representation
erases others that also tell an important story about the political framing of the conflict and the
production of discourse itself. This is particularly powerful in a controversial conflict like the
one in Sri Lanka. As Sharif (2002) points out, the “two sides [were] fighting vastly different ‘wars,’ based on vastly different views of reality” (p. 18). Official Sri Lankan government discourses framed the conflict as one against a group of terrorists attempting to destroy the government, while the LTTE represented themselves as leading a national liberation movement against a Sinhalese government bent on exterminating the entire Tamil minority. The portrayal of political contexts in research can problematize these diverse interpretations that then influence the public consciousness, political constructions, social behaviours, and self-conceptions of people who are exposed to and react to them.

In representing social movements, dynamics and ideologies of assigning blame are an important consideration because they also influence political constructions and create the conditions for public sympathy and support:

Blame for recurring wars and militarism depends on whether they are seen as originating in the plans of the aggressors, the authoritarian character structure of some cultures, the chance occurrence of a sequence of events with which diplomats cannot cope, the logic implicit in industrialized societies, or the will of God. Each origin reduces the issue to a particular perspective and minimizes or eliminates others. Each reflects an ideology and rationalizes a course of action. (Edelman 1988, 12)

Exploring the idea of blame, Derrida (2005) suggests that identifying “rogue” discourses helps uncover deeper-rooted fears that are rationalized and masked. Specifically exploring the Sri Lankan conflict, Korf (2006) argues that the rogue rationale reveals deeper anxieties that connect security with ethnic homogeneity and insecurity with multi-ethnicity and the “other.”

Representations of activism in Canada also allow us to consider how discourses shift the population in crisis: the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, the LTTE (generally conflated with the
entire Tamil population), the Sri Lankan majority, the Tamil diaspora, and in the case framed by
the “terrorist movement,” the Canadian public.

The following analysis is not a thorough review of the political context(s) framing each
discourse, nor an attempt to identify the “truth” or “authentic” label for the Tamil diaspora’s
activism. Instead, I examine the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests to illustrate the different political
ideologies that frame the logics of activism in the Canadian nation-state, and grapple with the
ways that they inform or challenge dominant constructions of immigrants, their activism, and
their struggles in relation to Canada’s own. In what follows, I juxtapose the “threat of terrorism,”
Quebec’s movement for separatism, the Tamil diaspora’s struggle for an autonomous state in Sri
Lanka and the ongoing colonization of Canada’s indigenous peoples to disrupt the geopolitical
and temporal boundaries of anti-colonial struggles between the East and the West. Despite
shifting narratives across time and space, I explore how these discursive representations are
accompanied by material conditions of power, sovereignty, displacement, and colonialism.

(i) The terrorist movement

As Jeyapal (2013) demonstrated, the mainstream media largely represented the 2009
Tamil diaspora protests as a terrorist movement. While this construction was aided by the
Conservative government’s controversial 2006 decision to ban the LTTE as a terrorist group,
dominant media sources unabashedly estimated that 99.9 percent of the Canadian Tamil
population were LTTE-supporters (Reinhart 2009), and painted the entire community as
terrorists. As news articles reported, “in the minds of most of the public, Tamils are all Tigers”
(Mraz 2009). Conflating all protesters as “terrorists” or “terrorist supporters” erased the
heterogeneity existing within this community and discursively framed the politics of the
movement to emphasize the indiscriminate violence and threat of “terrorist” groups in the age of terrorism.

While the construction of “terrorism” is as ancient as the political history of human civilization, it finds renewed legitimacy in the global war on terror. In Sri Lanka, terrorism as a label for Tamil resistance was in circulation for decades prior to 9/11 (Aryasinha 2001). However, the post-9/11 political climate allowed these hegemonic discourses to find new relevance. A month after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States, the then-president of Sri Lanka wrote a letter to The Times based on a speech she planned to make to the Commonwealth Heads of Government in Brisbane. In it, President Kumaratunga argued that terrorism was not isolated to Western governments, and appealed, “Do not forget us in your re-ordering of the world. We too merit help” (cited in Austin 2002). Through this commonly shared discourse of terrorism, in January of 2008 the Sri Lankan government officially ended its ceasefire with the LTTE and vowed to eliminate them. As the Toronto Star reported, President Rajapaksa claimed at the UN General Assembly that the LTTE were in fact “exploiting perceived ethnic grievances” to indulge in “blatant and brutal acts of terrorism” (Parsons 2008). On 19 May 2009, marking the brutal end of the armed campaign in Sri Lanka’s north and the death of LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran, the president of Sri Lanka solemnly addressed Parliament: “The writ of the state now runs across every inch of our territory…we have completely defeated terrorism” (No mention of Prabhakaran in Rajapaksa’s victory speech 2009) This moment also ushered in media reports acknowledging and supporting Sri Lankan’s victory against “terrorism”(Iran congratulates Sri Lanka on defeating terrorism 2009; Sri Lanka proved terrorism could be defeated 2009; Panti 2010; US officials in Sri Lanka say Tamil Tiger terrorism "abhorrent" 2010). Despite the violent onslaught that “ended” the
conflict, news reports portrayed the military offensive as a success that offered valuable lessons in fighting terrorism (Sri Lanka far ahead in fighting terrorism - new envoy 2013). Unpacking the material consequences of this discursive move is critical because these realities together discursively limit what is known and knowable in the Canadian context.

First, by echoing and appealing to the dehumanizing tones of the “war on terror” prevalent in the West, the Sri Lankan government not only enforced an extreme level of state violence against a civilian population, but framed the necessity of doing so in terms that would appeal to the West—as the first nation to completely eradicate terrorism. This also demonstrates global complicities where the “post 9/11 ‘war against terrorism’ milieu tolerates states resorting to terrorism to defeat terrorism” (Devotta 2008, 15). However, in Canada, the diasporic activism’s representation as a terrorist movement provided the conditions to question the legitimacy of the movement and the activism surrounding the 2009 escalation of the conflict.

Second, the terrorist rhetoric that continues to dominate Canadian politics also affected journalistic practices, which in turn framed popular media representations of the diaspora’s activism worldwide. In 2009, it was well documented that the Sri Lankan government removed all journalists from the front lines of the conflict leading up to the final months of the war, to ensure a “war without witness” that was difficult to verify (Cockburn 2009). Canadian Press regulations further affected what journalists could and could not report in Canada. Journalists I spoke with explained that this meant “rebel leaders cannot be quoted as a credible source.” Activists in the diaspora were painted in the same problematic light—a distinction was made between the “everyday Tamil” (read: neutral participant) and the “activist Tamil” (read: terrorist supporter) who by default could not be sourced or believed. Journalists admitted that despite the large numbers of protesters, it was difficult, if not impossible, to find people who weren’t
“activists,” and weren’t “scripted.” Further complicating these reports, journalists in Toronto argued that they couldn’t take a community member’s word for the events, death tolls, and atrocities unfolding in Sri Lanka based on anecdotes shared by family members in affected parts of the country, without evidence. Emerging video footage through ethnic media and online sources was questioned as propaganda from the Tamil diaspora — even though they’ve since been validated. One journalist spoke of how difficult it was to trust because she couldn’t understand how people in the front lines of a war were taking this footage and getting it out to the international community, if the situation “really was as bad as they said it was.”

The issue of anonymity further contributed to the biases of media representations. Like any community that has experienced persecution and state violence, there was significant distrust and fear associated with being named in any coverage associated with this conflict. Historically, it meant the persecution—in many cases, torture and death—of family members in Sri Lanka. Documented cases of harassment and blackmail within the Tamil community in Toronto also circulated (Reinhart 2009) — this history of extortion in the diaspora reinforced the criminalization of the entire community. Media representations (specifically the National Post) seized on any event to report on the Tamil community in a negative light, even when those events took place in a foreign country (Henry and Tator 2002). Despite these legitimate issues requiring anonymity, journalists complained that the community was also responsible for how it got represented, because no other attributable perspective was shared, noting that their editors rarely approve of anonymous narratives. In effect, they suggested that in some ways the community silenced itself. While the atrocities of the 2009 conflict are now well-documented and ongoing (Harrison 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013), at the time these journalistic practices
indirectly amplified the protestors’ precariousness, erasing their voices and the legitimacy of their claims.

Third, framing the LTTE as a terrorist group and then conflating all protesters as supporters of a terrorist group constructs them as rogue, untrustworthy, and unethical. Constructions of their deviance emerged and circulated through various narratives. Stories of extortion in Toronto by the Tamil community to support the liberation movement in Sri Lanka were deployed to discredit the community’s current activism. This narrative constructed the community as dangerous even to itself. One reporter evoked this narrative to question the presence of 45,000 people at the protests, asking whether it was possible to imagine such a large mobilization by any community. She said she couldn’t help but wonder whether people were being “forced” to participate in the protests by missing school or work, and shutting down their businesses. The 2009 context was referred to and challenged as a “manufactured crisis.”

Activists spoke of how the media and public questioned the diaspora’s legitimacy as representative of the Sri Lankan Tamil population. This also implied a difference between the interests of Tamils in Sri Lanka in contrast to the interests of diasporic Tamils. The transnational dimension further painted Tamils in Toronto as manipulative, dishonest, and inauthentic — they were not real or representative of the actual bodies in conflict. These discourses elicited a highly racialized set of narratives that were activated and endorsed in the age of terrorism.

While there is no wrong or right way to represent the activism of the Tamil diaspora, some representations are undeniably more favourable than others. Rejecting the oppressive labels that mark others—labels of “terrorist” or “terrorist sympathizer” in the case of my work—is a critical and fundamental part of this project. By troubling the connections between how this construction of the terrorist outlaw is created and who is entitled to create it in the age of
terrorism, I attempt to explicitly challenge relations of power and reject the ever-growing industrial complex of criminalization and securitization in the age of terror. However, the issue of research representation becomes more complicated when contending with representations that community members themselves grant their movements.

(ii) The separatist movement

Sometimes discourses framing the movement as the result of an “ethnic conflict,” “genocide,” and “separatism” also circulated within media and activist discourse. Since 1983, the LTTE has deployed a militant agenda in an effort to create an independent homeland for Tamils—one that would usurp the Sri Lankan homogenous state and the supremacy of the Sinhalese majority culture. Political psychologist Jerrold Post (2007) refers to this agenda as “ethnic-nationalist-separatist” terrorism which emerges when a minority group believes that the majority group within a nation aims to eliminate them. Because such a group’s motivation is to serve their own group, they can sometimes be seen as altruistic (Staub 2011). In Canada, the media discourse of the 2009 Tamil diaspora movement as a separatism movement emerged as an extension of the discourse of terrorism because it continued to frame the population as the aggressor. It positioned the protests as “a last-gasp effort by the Tamil diaspora to save the apparently doomed military campaign by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—better known as the Tamil Tigers—to carve out a separate homeland in Sri Lanka” (Anonymous 2009).

The representation of a “separatist” struggle uncomfortably echoes Canada’s own historical relationship with Quebec which has been attempting to secede from Canada in varying degrees since the 1960s. But in my media sample, not a single article mentioned Canada’s own
struggle with separatism. Only one poignant letter from a reader published in the *Toronto Star* challenged this disconnect:

Some years ago a minority group felt it was being subjugated by the majority, and felt it was necessary to secede to preserve its culture and its people. It used terror on the government and the unsuspecting public, which resulted in innocent deaths. The government stepped in to stop the uprising, but the fight continued underground, and the war for independence had begun.

Reading the above, one might think of Sri Lanka and its war with the Tamil Tigers. However, the passage actually describes the October Crisis of 1970 and Canada's fight with the FLQ. If the Canadian government opts to show support for the Tamils, does this mean it will soon show support for the FLQ and Quebec's desire for independence? (Not all Tamils were protesting 2009)

The representation of separatism was disconnected from Canada’s political landscape and also failed to acknowledge indigenous groups’ claims to recognition or sovereignty. This absence creates the illusion that conflicts of this kind are exclusive to other nations unlike our own.

(iii) The ethnic conflict

In the West, the representation of the ubiquitous “ethnic conflict” triggers images of immigrants’ ancient wars (Thobani 2007). It positions activism as “not about Toronto's Tamils… [but] about the people of Sri Lanka, Tamil and Sinhalese, who have been killing each other for a generation, and hating each other for generations before that” (Cohn 2009). The undertone of inevitability racializes the conflict and the protesters as primordial. As one reporter from the *Toronto Star* reminds us, it incites a formulaic response by the Canadian public: “Yes, another
thousand of your relatives were slaughtered on the weekend in your homeland, but what's that got to do with us in Toronto?...Settle your foreign grievances among yourselves without bothering us” (Anonymous 2009). The “foreign grievances” of other nations are constructed as beyond our national concern: “There's nothing wrong with lending our ear, and our empathy, to the estimated 200,000 Tamils who have settled in Canada and are overwhelmed by the plight of loved ones still in Sri Lanka. But that doesn't make it right for Tamils to impose roadblocks and wave Tiger flags as a way of pressuring Canadians to support Tamil independence, any more than one would tolerate Sikh separatists blocking University Ave.” (Cohn 2009). It also points to the limits of our sympathies, should they be expected to be extended to other racialized groups who are also in conflict.

While “ethnic conflict” is still popularly used to frame the Sri Lankan struggle, recent work argues for a more nuanced understanding of relations between Sinhalese and Tamil communities. Theorists urge us to consider economic issues and global pressures that shift the focus of the conflict from a domestic problem toward an international context; this includes an understanding of South-Asian geopolitics, concerns of the Tamil diaspora, international nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and other actors in the international context who are all influential and contribute to the construction of the conflict (Bandarage 2009). In exploring dominant discourses on ethnic conflict, Sadowski (1998) attempts to uncover common (mis)understandings of them. He suggests that despite popular belief, most ethnic conflicts are not rooted in ancient tribal or religious rivalries but are largely products of the twentieth century. He claims that despite their depiction, ethnic conflicts are no more “savage” or genocidal than conventional wars and there is no consistent difference between ethnic or non-ethnic wars in terms of their lethality. In response to the popular discourse about the savagery of
ethnic conflicts, Sadowski (1998) explains that (a) ethnic wars are usually fought by regular armies, and that (b) regular armies are quite capable of vicious massacres. However, representations continue to frame “ethnic wars” within these constructs. This may represent a larger social and political bias or generalized desensitization where racialized violence through “ethnic conflict” is considered less than; ultimately, unless an audience is receptive to the depiction of a condition as a relevant issue, interests groups are unable to address and challenge it.

(iv) The genocide

Through media reports, activists appealed to the Canadian public to stop the genocide in Sri Lanka (Taylor 2009; Bell 2009; Hanes 2009; DiManno 2009). Media reported on protestor’s chants demanding “Stop genocide!” while carrying banners asking “Democratic Society! Stop Sri Lanka’s State Terrorism on Tamils” (Funston and Freed 2009); these messages problematized the conditions of state-sanctioned violence against civilians and international obligations to intervene. As one reported interviewee pleaded, “We can't wait for another Rwanda,” he said. “We need to prevent, not recognize it” (Daubs 2009). While the sustained military offensive against Tamil civilians in the northeast of the country undoubtedly justifies this term, the category of “genocide” is complicated on the global scale. On the one hand, the discourse of genocide used to frame the 2009 crisis may have appealed to Canadian human rights constructs that commonly conceptualize human rights as granted to all people by virtue of being human, but this process also requires legal sanctions. “Genocide” challenges the universality of human rights and conventional understandings of human rights as normative setbacks on sovereignty (Brown 2004; Agamben 1988; Daly 2004; Douzinas 2007). Giorgio Agamben (1988) argues instead that these “rights”—which the label “genocide” is part of—simultaneously reinforce the sovereign
powers that produce “bare lives”—lives that are produced as a result of sovereign decisions regarding what is human—lives that are irredeemably constructed as unworthy or non-human and thereby continually exposed to violence. Prevalent in conflicts worldwide, the “genocide” label is always contested and often denied—possibly because naming any conflict “genocide” requires a specific response by the international community. As such, the representation of genocide is a highly political tool.

Through my interviews, organizers spoke of how politicians offered to participate in rallies (one activist questioned this by asking “where else would they get such a large audience of potential voters?”) as long as the term genocide wasn’t used. Further complicating this context is the reality that the name “genocide” can gain credibility and be granted only through state-sanctioned processes by national and international players after the violence has ended, again delegitimizing the lives of the Tamil people and the voices of the Tamil diaspora. Activism against genocide implies an ahistorical moment that removes resistance from long-enduring suffering. However, while mass violence may appear sudden, it in fact involves an evolution of increases in hostility that were already present, just not acknowledged (Staub 2011).

Moreover, the crime of genocide is not easily enforced. As John Rawls asserts, “human rights are different from constitutional rights, or from the liberal democratic citizenship,” as they are “a special class of urgent rights” (Rawls 1999, 79) that protect people from atrocities such as genocide when states have failed to protect their own people, or in the case of Sri Lanka, are instrumental in the violence. Yet, there is no sovereign power in place to uniformly enforce human rights globally, and paradoxically, “the purpose of international concern with human rights is to make national rights effective under national laws and through national institutions” (Henkin 1990, 512) Yet, as one article in the National Post reminds, “in any case Canada cannot
make it happen—though provincial and federal politicians have put on their most pious faces and promised to do what they can, which is approximately nothing. Canada might influence the UN but there’s no reason to think the UN can dictate Colombo's policies” (Fulford 2009). These narratives help justify an international community’s ambivalence.

Labeling activism against “ethnic conflict,” “genocide,” and “separatism” is justified, and stems from specific historical narratives that address the oppression of a people and the struggles of a diaspora. Each discourse embodies spectral figures of otherness that haunt and authorize the sovereignty of the Canadian nation-state. As a researcher, I suggest that the most meaningful position may be to reflexively interrogate my own practices pertaining to the formation and contestation of representation to combat the logics that marginalize immigrant activism in Canada. In recognizing the historical contingency in the meanings and representations of activism, I want to foreground what I see as the fundamental political and ethical danger of an unproblematised reliance upon categorical approaches to resistance. This danger relates to representations that reify categories of activism as “true” entities that can inform appropriate social practices and identities, instead of approaching these categories as socially constructed labels that are dynamic and in the process of being and becoming. “Fixing” singular categories of resistance places limitations upon analysis, and reproduces wider forms of stereotyping and essentializing a struggle. As researchers representing resistance, we must recognize that there are dissenting voices within all categories and groups of activists. When it comes to activism, like all other forms of social phenomena, we must resist assuming that “we” are all agreed upon what “we” are resisting and what “we” are organizing for. Researchers must reject the idea that we might be in fundamental agreement about the content of the “political interventions” our
communities engage in, or about the politics our own research should enact. While all representations are shaped by ideology, regardless of the label framing its activism, we cannot lose sight of the issue: extreme violence means extreme suffering.

**Positioning the Sri Lankan conflict as a decolonial struggle**

As Dru Gladney (1998) reminds us, “majorities are made, not born” (p. 1). As such, I initiate a critique of representation “which assumes that Western ideas about the most fundamental things are the only ideas possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings” (Smith 2004, 56). For the Tamil struggle, this requires returning to the underlying root of the oppression, and the need for separatism, which are not about an ancient conflict but are about undoing the destruction of colonialism (Wilson 2000; Bandarage 2009; Spencer 1990). In Sri Lanka—similar to other nations who have experienced and are experiencing civil conflicts around the world—British colonial policy established the ethno-religious differences and competition between groups through language, economic, and employment policies that survived and exacerbated differential experiences and powers between the Tamil and Sinhalese populations. Arguably, the persistence of colonialism after struggles for independence can and do continue as forms of “internal colonization,” where dominant groups continue to enact similar forms of administrative, political, and material power over minority groups (McClintock 1994). Oppressive Sri Lankan state politics continue to limit the parameters and representations of resistance through practices and distinctions implemented by colonialism.

In our research representations, it’s paramount that we position our politics of resisting these colonial realities with an understanding of complex and competing interconnections across
seemingly distant colonial projects (Lowe 2006; Povinelli 2002). For the Tamil diaspora, multiple forces and structures of colonialism continue across geographies. A community that faces persecution in Sri Lanka continues to be repressed in the West for its racial, ethnic, and social markers, as well as through the construction of “terrorists” or “terrorist sympathizers” during the age of this threat. The majority politics erasing the liberation struggle of Tamil people in Sri Lanka bind similar systems of media and knowledge production to marginalize the diaspora’s voices in the West. These “spectral figures of indigeneity,” to use Renisa Mawani’s (2012) phrase, continue to evolve, be appropriated, and deployed to further the effects of colonialism. As she reasons, it is critical to “question and unsettle the presumed linearity of colonial time implicit in the configuration of indigenous and non-indigenous subjectivities and in colonial legal histiographies that depict encounters among indigenous peoples, Europeans, and non-European migrants in successive spatiotemporal terms (p. 373). Therefore, following the work of anti-colonial and indigenous theorists who demonstrate how colonialism is not simply a historical relationship but a continued process of domination and oppression (Barker 2009; Razack 2002), I claim, as Lewis (2012) does, that we “as academics and activists committed to social justice, need to incorporate and further develop an anti-colonial analysis to expand our ethical research considerations” (p. 227). We need to employ this anti-colonial ethic to research representations of resistance by diaspora communities as they produce unique cultures that both maintain and build on the perceptions of their original cultures and their unique decolonial struggles (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998). In representations of these cultures and their movements, it’s crucial to recognize the imperial forces that historically led to people’s displacement, but also the continued subjugation they and their movements face in white settler
society that discursively erase regimes of violence and revolution rooted in the legacy of colonialism.

**Locating research representation as decolonial resistance**

Indigenous, critical, and anti-oppressive approaches centre the transgressive possibilities of research to establish a position of resistance (Kirby and McKenna 1989; Ristock and Pennel 1996; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Brown and Strega 2005). I refrain from granting one research methodology the status of “truth,” but call upon researchers across frameworks to position their representations of resistance within the wider emancipatory project of decolonization. While this position brings new challenges in white settler society, representing resistance through an engagement with anticolonial representation also takes us to a new place, a different “beginning.” It connects collective struggles across time and space to other movements grounded in localized communities and in subjugated knowledges that also resist residues of colonialism. These discursive tactics allow us to make visible and speakable the normalization of colonization in the contested settler state. For indigenous peoples across borders, these discourses are never separate from the loss of lives and the theft of land and resources. These considerations are not meant as a solution but as a point of departure — uncovering the tense interdependences, entanglements, and ruptures between representations of resistance may allow us to more fully valorize resistant thinking and resistant action.

This discussion must be centred within the reality that Canada is engaged in the continuing colonization of its own indigenous peoples (Barker, 2009; Razack, 2002). It is vital to understand the complex ways that diasporic settlers and colonials maintain aspects of this ongoing colonization. In their seminal work, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) demand
that the issue of land as a contested space must be taken up by antiracist theory and practice. Although racialized communities may be marginalized in the colonial state, they also participate in colonialism by living on and acquiring appropriated land, accepting the apartheid-like segregation of indigenous communities, and by decontextualizing their own histories of oppression from that of indigenous populations in Canada (Lawrence and Dua 2005). While debates complicate the conflation between different forms of migration and settler colonialism, question the possibility of securing decolonization through a nationalist project (Sharma and Wright 2008), and posit that settlers aren’t necessarily colonial—because the “settler” is a statement of situation, whereas a “colonial” actively participates within the empire and spreads the imperial sphere of influence (Barker 2009)—for indigenous people living in the Canadian state, imperial forces colonizing indigenous bodies and spaces remain foreign empires, regardless of resemblances to early imperial and colonial forms. Therefore, in exploring the contemporary context of imperial domination, we have to recognize not only the creative ways in which the Canadian state remains simultaneously colonial and postcolonial, but also the heterogeneous experiences of racial others and encounters within the white settler society that may challenge or validate settler colonialism. As activists and researchers on indigenous lands, we must represent anti-colonial movements by seeking to stand in solidarity with indigenous people against all forms of oppression, regardless of the complicated, uneasy, and unsettling nature of this alliance.

My argument for anticolonial research representations is not meant to imply that various aspects of decolonization can or should be embodied under the flag of a single theoretical term. In this call, I hear Tuck and Yang’s (2012) appeal:
Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization is not a swappable term for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools. Decolonization doesn’t have a synonym (p. 3).

I draw upon Duara’s (2004) definition of decolonization as the processes by which colonial powers transfer institutional and legal control over their territories to indigenous, formally sovereign nation-states. The term decolonization embodies the dual spatial and temporal significance of thinking through the colour line’s perspective. It captures an intellectual activist project that challenges anti-democratic policies of imperialism along the global colour line to develop more egalitarian societies (Luis-Brown, 2008). As Luis-Brown (2008) suggests, working within a decolonizing theoretical framework provides the opportunity to build on the Gramscian theory of hegemonic coalition building. By embracing a counter-hegemonic perspective on the colonial encounter, its discursive and institutional resistance allows us to further historicize the global contestations to exclusion and imperial powers. Representing “decolonial resistance” allows us to embody a new epistemic frame of the de-colonial project. Mignolo (2007) explains that a basic assumption of the project takes knowledge-production as a fundamental aspect of “coloniality” — the process of the capitalist/patriarchal/imperial western metropolis’s domination and exploitation of the rest of the world. Therefore, the contemporary decolonizing encounter may expand our theoretical and conceptual framework to challenge the
project of modernity by relocating prior moments of revolutions and resistance. Mignolo (2007) suggests that rethinking independence movements,

means to think of them as moments of de-linking and opening within the processes of de-colonizing knowledge and being; moments that were veiled by the interpretive mechanism of the rhetoric of modernity, the concealment of coloniality and, in consequence, the invisibilization of the seed of de-colonial thinking. In other words, decolonizing independence movements were interpreted within the same “revolutionary” logic of modernity. (p. 15-16)

Decolonial thinking requires not only an epistemological delinking, but also a political delinking from imperial knowledge and disciplinary management (Mignolo 2009). It encourages us to trace decolonial practices that have challenged Western power—it allows us to enlarge the scope of the conversation and shift enduring epistemological and political implications by decoding subaltern knowledge and struggles as a necessary process for us to recognize our present moment despite the totalizing (and criminalizing) narratives of the West. Situating the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests as a decolonial struggle lets us account for colonial inheritances of otherness, while commemorating activism for a world beyond imperialist and colonial sovereignty.

Conclusion

As social work researchers who report on contested social movements, we are forced to make political and ethical decisions on how to study and represent the movements we engage with. The movements we choose and the labels we grant these struggles are not only symbolic of an intellectual project, but are deeply grounded in the material conditions of resistance in the age of terrorism. As competing conceptions of racialization, sovereignty and power are mobilized
rhetorically through the implicit claims of contested struggles, we must pay attention to the ways circulating discourses come to reinforce and legitimize Canadian sovereignty, while erasing contestations of racialization, land, and the dispossession of indigenous peoples. My intention through this paper is to problematize popular categories of transnational activism and expand the conversation beyond the representation of a singular struggle against a unitary, oppressive nation-state by acknowledging the complex global project where claims and reparations of sovereignty and land are delegitimized through multiple, intersecting international and national bodies. In the case of the Tamil struggle, it requires us to recognize and challenge the historical violence and present-day complicity and responsibility of British colonial and Canadian imperial forces (Coles 2011; Hyndman 2003) — during the 2009 militant crisis as well as through the ongoing domination of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka.

Through our research, we need to interrupt colonial histories of subalternity, critique geopolitical forces, acknowledge economic globalization’s reach, and research the conditions of international humanitarian intervention. We need to acknowledge the marginalization of the Tamil diaspora in Canada and around the world. These are people who’ve been, and are continually, criminalized for their activism. In doing so, we also need to consider how to frame diasporic struggles for resistance in ways that do not disempower the resistance of Canada’s indigenous peoples, but foster solidarity between groups targeted for travelling conditions of colonial violence. The entanglements of imperial histories and colonial power that become visible and persistent across time and space, govern and order suppressed knowledges including alternative visions of nationhood and sovereignty. Through these considerations, we may begin to expand the limited Western version of the present, where “ethnic conflicts,” “separatist movements,” and “genocides” are themselves marginalized, and “terrorism” discourses dominate
public consciousness. By problematizing these constructions, we may more critically examine
different geo-political and social positions that are deeply marked by the histories of imperialism
and racism—to not only mark our continual fight against the biopolitical colonization of people,
land, and resources, but to expand our struggle toward decolonial nation-states, self-
determination, and freedom within, across, and between borders.
Chapter 3

Regarding the Protests of Others

Abstract
While much social movement research focuses on how activists actively cultivate affect and how social movements benefit from shared emotions, these ideas rarely intersect with research examining how race constructs emotional responses in a white settler society. I bridge this theoretical divide by examining the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada to study dimensions of suffering and apathy through the construction of the spectacle and the spectator. Drawing upon illustrations from a critical discourse analysis of 153 mainstream news articles and interviews with activists and journalists, this paper explores how racial logic frames media and public discourse through (1) the expression of protesters’ suffering, and (2) the construction of the spectacle of racial apathy by the Canadian public. The paper theorizes why and how race frames the production of suffering and spectacle, and offers considerations for social movement theory.
Introduction

After failing to respond to the mass atrocities of WWII, the international community vowed “never again”. Despite the development of peace, security, and justice mechanisms, the world has witnessed over 250 international and domestic conflicts with causalities estimated widely between 70 million and 170 million over the past 60 years (Bassiouni 1999). With very few exceptions, these crimes have been met with resounding silence or with an ineffective or inadequate response by the international community (Askin 2006). However, in contrast to the limited role of political intervention, civil society has responded with a global outpouring of grassroots mobilization against contemporary genocides. Over the past few decades, Canada has been home to several such transnational protests by Rwandan, Sudanese, Tamil, and other communities demonstrating against the systematic killing of thousands of people in their countries of origin. While diaspora communities and civil society groups continue to mobilize to spread public awareness and influence national foreign policy, the Canadian record of preventing or intervening in mass atrocities is surprisingly poor. Widespread public apathy in the face of these protests has been equally disturbing.

Beginning in mid-2008, an extraordinary series of global protests were organized by the Tamil diaspora against the genocide of the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka’s North. In Canada, the 2009 Tamil diaspora demonstrations were a powerful mass mobilization by a racialized community against genocide. While the community staged ongoing demonstrations for five months in response to the organized violence in Sri Lanka, with up to 45,000 protesters taking to the streets of Toronto, media accounts narrated a different story about an ambivalent nation. This paper is interested in unpacking and understanding the racialized dimensions of public apathy.
While much social movement research focuses on how activists actively cultivate emotional response and how social movements benefit from shared emotions (Chatterton, Fuller, and Routledge 2008; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Jasper 1998; Gruszczypska 2009), these ideas rarely intersect with the critical race theory that examines how race constructs emotional response in a white settler society (Farley 1997; Hartman 1997; Razack 2007). I bridge this theoretical divide by examining the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada to weave social movement literature’s considerations of emotion and the spectacle of protest with theorizations on the production of the “other.” I develop a framework that explores the social construction of the protest spectacle through the social relations informing it.

*Emotion, spectacle and the other in protest*

Protests are emotional events. Recent work by social movement scholars demonstrate how emotional labour and emotional ties relate to the recruitment, construction, and sustainability of activist networks (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Jasper 1998; Taylor 1995). The act of protest itself can be conceptualized as an expression of emotion as protesters transform their feelings about the world into political action despite unfavourable contexts (Chatterton, Fuller, and Routledge 2008; Gruszczypska 2009; Juris 2008; Woods et al. 2012). The literature has urged us to grasp activism’s affective dimensions by uncovering the engaged, embodied dynamics of emotions involved in ongoing acts of protest (Benski 2011). The significance of emotion is increasingly important as a critical element in channeling the practice of activism, but also in understanding the process by which the spectator is drawn to, or away from, relating to its spectacle.
Mass protests are modes of social performance in “public space where dissent becomes visible” (Mitchell and Staeheli 2005, 798). Such a performance is a spectacle, a central concept developed in the situationist theory by Guy Debord in the *Society of Spectacle* (1968). A spectacle reduces personal or social significance but “exaggerates the visible, magnifies and foregrounds the surface appearance, and refuses meaning or depth […] its emphasis on excessive materiality foregrounds the body, not as a signifier of something else, but in its presence” (Fiske 1987, 243). Through theorizing the spectacle, we can understand how society is divided between the passive subject who consumes the spectacle and the reified spectacle itself. While the affective response to spectacle may arguably vary from spectator to spectator, social movement research has long recognized the relevance of conceptualizing protest as a spectacle. Literature recognizes that agents of the state, media, and the public all play roles in constructing the spectacle of protest by reacting to and impeding protestors’ agency (Cottle 2008; Dow 1999; McNeil 2001). However, understanding the spectacle and its relationship to the viewer requires consideration of non-normative subject positions and categories involving the dominance of the spectator and otherness of the spectacle (Dow 1999).

Through theories of the “gaze,” the “look,” and other forms of visually commodifying others (Elkin 1996; hooks 1992; Sartre 1956), feminist, Marxist, postcolonial, and queer theorists have expanded the logic of spectacle to explore viewership as a medium for domination that denies the subjecthood of the people being viewed. This area of study has theorized how the spectator and the spectacle are disembodied, immobilized, and fixed to extend power relations and transmit assumptions about the viewer/viewed (Fanon 1952; Sartre 1956), how spectactorship functions as the point of self-identification imagined in the field of the Other (Mulvey 1989), and how the “look” can result in a “double take” and a series of further “takes”
when the menace of the other’s presence is exacerbated and requires surveillance (Puwar 2004). While social movement literature has provided examples of the media’s historical attempts to reduce racialized demonstrators into a dominant characterization (Watkins 2001), and has insisted that exploring racialized bodies in protest requires a critique of previous work that has utilized reductionist categories without acknowledging the ideological, identity formations, and the social relations that sustain protest (Rael 2002), it has yet to explore how the spectacle is complicated when the bodies involved are racial others. Unpacking these dimensions of difference are critical to understanding the production of the so-called other through the visual spectacle of protest, where “seeing” becomes the primary way of “knowing.” This framework draws upon an understanding of the racial subjectivities of otherness and dominance that exist in most settler states.

In general, the “other” is anyone separate from one’s self—their existence is crucial in locating one’s own place in the world. While the term is used widely in existential philosophy, the roots of the postcolonial “other” lie in Freudian and post-Freudian analyses of the formation of subjectivity. In postcolonial studies, the colonized subject is characterized as other through discourses of primitivism and cannibalism in order to develop and reinforce the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized, while at the same time asserting the dominance and primacy of the colonizer’s world view (Bhabha 1994; Fanon 1952; Said 1979). The encounter with the other reconstitutes identities through reopening prior histories of violent encounter (Ahmed 2000). Racialized others in the West may share a historical opposition to colonial domination but may have very different cultural histories and memories of their encounters. The Canadian context is a hybrid space, “a cross between old Imperial conquest of land and resources and new Imperial conquest of social reality” (Barker 2009, 336)—because Canada is engaged in the continuing
colonization of indigenous peoples (Razack 2002), it remains simultaneously colonial and postcolonial in its interactions with racial others.

Race is “predicated upon the recognition of difference and signifying simultaneous distinguishing and positioning of groups vis-à-vis one another” (Higginbotham 1992, 254). Racialization is a process that constitutes difference between groups that have “always been an unstable identity, psychically, culturally and politically. It, too, is a narrative, a story, a history. Something constructed, told, spoken, not simply found” (Hall 1987, 45). The production of difference is crucial for creating non-Europeans but also for creating a European self; Europe, as Fanon (1965) reminds us, was “literally the creation of the Third World” (p. 102). Through the similar processes in which colonial others come into being where the “colonial subject is both a ‘child’ of the empire and a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1998, 171), the construction of the dominant imperial Other occurs. As such, dominance through whiteness is not a “natural” condition, “phenotypically indicative of blood or genetical intellectual superiority, but the manufactured outcome of cultural and legal definition of political and economic identification with rulership and privilege”(Goldberg 2002, 13).

Through its very construction, whiteness signifies social superiority, political and structural control, and economic privilege. It is achieved only through the “historically specific fantasy whereby members imagine themselves as Western” (Yegenoglu 1998, 3).

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides both the approach and the method for this paper. Central to CDA is the notion that language and discursive practices in speech and writing are active agents in the hegemonic process of constructing, maintaining, and deploying
ideology (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Gee 2005; van Dijk 1993). The broadly agreed-upon agenda in this stream of discourse analysis is “to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power” (Fairclough 1995, 132). CDA differs from other forms of discourse analysis in that it does not view the social world as purely subjective. Instead, its epistemological position determines that an appropriate conceptual framework for discourse analysis can and should hold onto the structural concerns of social policy, while not viewing all structures, such as the “state” as static, stable entities.

To obtain in-depth context-dependent insights, this study adopts a multi-method data collection process that draws from mainstream print media and qualitative interviews. An intertextual reading of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest through narratives from media and public actors provides a deeper understanding of the complex media and public responses to the protests and their framing of both the spectacle and the spectator. Fonow and Cook (2005) describe intertextuality as “the study of how the symbolic codes in one text are related to those in another which allows the researcher to compare and contrast similar themes within or among different genres of media” (p.2221). Since meaning is produced in dialogue with another (Bakhtin 1981), interpreting text involves an engaged dialogue between the texts and public discourses.

My illustrations emerge from a larger project examining national and local discourses framing the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in which I review all mainstream newspapers that published on it in Canada from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2011. This includes all articles in national and local papers carried through the Canadian Newsstand Database retrieved using
keywords “Tamil protest” (n= 53) and “Tamil AND protest AND Toronto” (n=153). A total of 153 articles were analyzed (duplicates were removed). The sample included 20 articles from *The Globe and Mail*; 25 from the *National Post*; 39 from the *Toronto Star*, and 44 from *Ottawa Sun*. Other publications such as *Canada NewsWire* (1), *The Gazette* (11), *Vancouver Sun* (3), *Calgary Herald* (1), *CTV News* (3), *Edmonton Journal* (1), Saskatoon’s *Star-Phoenix* (1), Victoria’s *Times Colonist* (1), and *Windsor Star* (3) provided 25 articles. I also draw upon 8 interviews with activists and journalists to contextualize, expand upon, and speak back to mainstream media discourse on the protests. These voices also serve as an extended “member-checking” process to establish credibility for my findings. Data from both the media and interviews are analyzed intertextually, drawing upon strategies of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to provide an account of language use based in its interest in ideology, social relations, and the relationship between text and context.

**Overview of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest**

Scholars suggest that the roots of Sri Lanka’s conflict are embedded primarily in the practices of its former colonial power’s unaddressed political and social grievances following independence in 1948 (Spencer 1990; Wilson 2000). Rising social tensions, outbursts of communal violence, and systemic political and cultural barriers against the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka led to riots in 1958, 1977, 1981, and 1983 and contributed to the formation of a strong national identity and groups advocating a separate nation state. July 1983 marked a nationwide massacre of thousands of Tamils in Sri Lanka and launched the full-scale armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a subnational separatist militant organization, and the government of Sri Lanka. The pogrom of 1983 also resulted in large-scale migration of
Tamils to countries that were open to refugees—the largest majority of the Tamil population fled to Canada. The conflict in Sri Lanka has claimed over 80,000 lives (Reuters 2008), with over 146,000 people unaccounted for (Correspondent 2012) and 130,000 people displaced in 2009 alone (Amnesty International 2009). Over the decades, the Tamil community in Canada has been highly mobilized around the conflict’s issues through various avenues of the armed, political and activist struggle for sovereignty.

2009 marked a global uprising of the Tamil diaspora against the escalating violence against Tamil people in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka. The goals of these protests were threefold: to persuade leaders to intervene in the 26-year conflict and establish a ceasefire; to appeal to humanitarian aid organizations to provide resources and investigate internment camps in affected areas of the country; and to restore civil rights to the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. In Toronto, the first notable protest began on 28 January 2009, with a few hundred people in front of the Sri Lankan consulate. The protests grew to 45,000 a few days later when protesters held hands and lined the streets of Toronto to form a human chain. Following an intensive 30-month-long military campaign, the LTTE admitted defeat on 17 May 2009. During this final phase of the Sri Lankan Army’s offensive against the LTTE, an estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed (United Nations 2011), with estimates of up to 1,000 people being killed per day during the last two weeks of the conflict (Chamberlain 2009). Protesters and critics of the Sri Lankan government alleged the conflict to be a systematic genocide of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority in the country.
Protest as pain

In 2009, staggering daily accounts of dead or missing loved ones marked people’s lived realities for several months. Tamil radio stations reported graphic tales of gruesome violence against civilian populations. Stories of torture and abuse taking place in detention centres housing large numbers of Tamil civilians circulated widely. Candlelight vigils were held on a regular basis to provide spaces for collective mourning. Funerals were held across the city of Toronto to grieve people lost in Sri Lanka. As one journalist in Toronto stated, “Even though they're not in the war zone, many homes I think, Tamil homes, felt like they were. They did. They felt like it. I don't know how they handled that grief.” Reports in the mainstream media documented their growing suffering and spectacle of Tamil diaspora protests in Canada.

Coverage recounted gripping personal stories of grief, loss, and anger (Scott 2009; Taylor 2009; Drudi 2009; Marlow 2009; Rijn 2009). There were numerous anecdotes about searching for missing loved ones (Thomas 2009), and stories about leaving loved ones who were now dead (Ratnavel 2009). Protesters’ personal and collective anecdotes of suffering framed the necessity of the protests (Andressen and Clark 2009):

For eight months, she has not heard from her five sisters, her little brother and her mother caught in the war zone in Sri Lanka as the fighting has escalated. Her phone calls go unanswered. Her appeals to the Red Cross lead nowhere. She imagines the worst: that they have starved, that they lie dead and nameless. "Every family is like this," says Ms. Charles, 40. "We can't stay home. We can't do nothing."

Despite awareness of Tamil people’s escalating suffering in Sri Lanka and the impact of these events within the diaspora, protesters were aware of the public’s growing ambivalence (Scott 2009). In fact, they were repeatedly represented as understanding about this apathy and
subsequently apologetic for taking up city space: "We understand that some people are affected by our protest. We don't want to disturb them, but we don't have any other choice" (No Byline 2009). Yet according to activists, the Tamil diaspora’s suffering was also amplified because of public apathy in the face of the protests:

People didn't realize the psychological impact on those people. The psychological impact of directly losing family members. The psychological impact of facing parents who were constantly tied to the television. And they're crying and there's so many horrible things that are happening. So much grief and sadness. And the psychological impact of just being ignored.

While narratives of the protesters’ pain were present in the media, they circulated completely disconnected from dominant Canadian narratives on the protest.

**Racial apathy and the construction of the spectacle of protest**

As Maha Zimmo (2009) argues, Canada demonstrated “aggressive apathy” in the face of the protests: the news story of the genocide and the Tamil community’s activism was ultimately reduced to a traffic story. She writes, “While reading the news coverage of the recent Tamil protests in Toronto, one could easily be misled to believe that the protests are neither in support of human rights nor in opposition to a particular political situation which has degenerated beyond redemption, because neither of these points seem news worthy. Instead, we are told by J. Jonah Jameson that: ‘Tamil protesters in Toronto hold the city hostage, disrupt traffic!’” This public response urges us to consider how apathy itself can function as a deeply intertwined, ambivalent dimension of racist rhetoric to discredit and malign racialized groups. Forman (2004) defines racial apathy as “indifference toward societal racial and ethnic inequality and lack of engagement
with race-related social issues” (p. 44). Through their study of responses to the crisis that followed Hurricane Katrina, Forman and Lewis (2006) further develop the concept of racial apathy by arguing that a specific kind of racial antipathy allows those who deploy it to not only explain away the racial inequality they know of, but avoid knowing much about it or “them” in the first place. In the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, the spectacle of apathy was achieved through racial ignorance—of not “knowing” about the other, and through othering the protesters and the conflict when they were “known”. Furthermore, apathy justifies not only lack of care about racial inequality and unwillingness to address it but when informed through racial dominance, is institutionally enforced.

Reporting and responses to the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests must be viewed through racial politics constructing the spectacle and the spectator. Social movement literature documents the historical reporting of the mainstream public’s response to racial bodies in protest (Greenberg 2000):

As in all social movements, resistance is redefined by time, experience and diverse transformations in ideals. In 1890, Jacob Riis had indicted whites for wilful ignorance. “One half of the world does not know how the other half lives. It did not know because it did not care.” A decade later northern riots shocked white social reformers into awareness. As socially prominent New Yorker Mary White Ovington noted, “To my amazement, I learned that there was a Negro problem in my city. I had never honestly thought of it before (p. 232).

Greenberg highlights the dominant public’s privilege of not “knowing” the other or the other’s problems. Over a century later in the Canadian context, we see a similar inquiry in a *Globe and
Mail editorial in which Christie Blatchford (2009) explicitly questions the legitimacy of the Tamil community’s presence in the city and her confusion encountering them:

When, earlier this month, organizers were asking 100,000 Tamils to gather in Toronto to protest, I remember a friend asking with mild bewilderment, “Since when did we have 100,000 Tamils?” The truth is, no one really knows how many Tamil are in Toronto, or Canada. (emphasis added)

The surprise about a racialized group taking up their city space, the strategic avoidance of contact, and overall indifference to the Tamil cause were highly emphasized during these protests. The spectacle of the protesters and the crisis were racialized in several ways. Narratives in the media positioned the Tamil diaspora as the other by amplifying their constructed difference and inferiority: references evoke them as animals needing to be declawed (Reinhart 2009), neutered (Andressen and Clark 2009), and caged (No Byline 2009). As Jeyapal (2013) demonstrates, mainstream media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests marked the protesters as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders” who defied and challenged the precariousness of their belonging in Canada. Through these discursive moves, the media delegitimized both the protests and the protesters. This spectacle’s representation of apathy implicitly assumed that racialized bodies do not belong, cannot stake claim in the public arena or within the body politic, and that they fundamentally were not “real Canadians.” As one activist remarked:

A lot of the coverage assumed that people were not citizens, or born here, or have been here for generations. There was this assumption of newness and unfamiliarity. And what was so patronizing was that there was recognition at the beginning of the gravity of the situation and what was happening but then it very quickly moved to the real concern which was that, you know, a lot of people were inconvenienced and that’s not going to
win you any allies [...] And what was suggested was that hyphenated Canadians are not real Canadians, right? That there’s the default Canadian which is who you really need to win.

The genocide itself was consistently portrayed, in the words of Mamdani (2001), as “unthinkable.” Providing the historical background to political contexts and crises allows us to “problematize the relationship between the historical legacy of colonialism and postcolonial projects” (Mamdani 2001, 8), and allows us to grant other groups the status of subject. Yet media reports consistently represented the issue and the protesters’ concerns as too far away to comprehend: “they should not expect any of us to support protests of what is happening thousands of kilometres away in Sri Lanka. New Canadians have the same freedoms we all enjoy. But they also have a responsibility not to abuse our right to go freely and to not be obstructed by these protests” (Hummel 2009). In this case brushing aside the conflict as unthinkable ignores the context of the genocide and the humanity of the other, while simultaneously privileging the concerns and so-called rights of “real” Canadians. It promotes the racial ignorance of not knowing and racial apathy of not caring, through the performance of racial dominance.

Apathy is more significant than an individual emotional response when subjects embody the institutionalized racial dominance to enforce and discipline through it. Systemic racism, of which apathy is one dimension, includes patterns of behaviour, practices, and policies that operate to silence a narrative that you do not want told. It facilitates the perpetuation of an unequal racialized social system and has important political consequences. In Canada, the spectacle of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests was structurally enforced through various social structures: public spaces, the school system, the media, and online discussion. Participants shared
that whether or not they were involved in the protests, being a member of the Tamil diaspora in Toronto caused them to feel marginalized, if not harassed, in their workplaces where suddenly every individual Tamil was made hyper-visible as “the spokesperson for my community.”

Participants and some news stories shared how despite the intense grief affecting thousands of students in the Toronto District School Board, students were silenced by the school system; they were all instructed that they were not allowed to mention the genocide or the protests at school “because teachers say they are only presenting one side of a political issue” (Eight Man Team Blog 2009). The enforcement of apathy in this context represents an action that is racist in its effect. Even random encounters on the street functioned to racialize the Tamil diaspora in Canada and delegitimize their activism. One participant shared a powerful anecdote about overhearing a brief conversation about the protests on the street:

This is not a coverage thing, but I remember leaving the protests that were happening in Queen's Park. I was walking down Bloor Street towards the subway station on the north side of the street and a lot of people were leaving the protests walking on the south side of the street. And I remember this older white couple walked out of one of those stores. Me passing them probably took a second and a half, but in that brief period of time I heard the wife say, “Oh honey, what's going on? And the husband saying, “The dogs are loose.” Just realizing that this was just one episode—some random white couple making these comments and they couldn't have been alone in that kind of a reaction.

Racial apathy was pervasive, subtle, and explicit. While media and public discourse did not explicitly refer to the Tamil community as dogs, numerous subtle forms of racialization dehumanized the protesters and decontextualized the protests. While a small sample of media recognized that “you don't need to be a Tamil Canadian to understand the anguish that is
gripping that community” (No Byline 2009; Drudi 2009), the Tamil diaspora recognized the general apathy in the face of their pain. As one man put it, "It's so difficult… Everyone knows there's a war in our country. Nobody cares" (Scott 2009). Every person I interviewed spoke about their disbelief at how marginalized this story was, how it was reduced to a story about traffic, without compassion or empathy or responsibility. Media coverage and public responses reinforced a marginalized, precarious form of belonging in Canada in explicit and subtle ways.

As one activist stated:

You weren't Canadian during those protests—you weren't even hyphenated Canadians. You were somebody who should've left whatever you had back home when you came to this country, but you are still carrying that. You kept hearing comments like, you know, *go back to your country and fight if you want to*. So there was a complete lack of respect for human beings. And the lack of respect for the contributions this whole community has made over the decades in this country. So I think that continued even during media coverage. Sometimes not explicitly said, but you could read between the lines and figure that out.

This affected the diaspora. Most community members and activists shared that, over time, they were unable to view the mainstream media because of how discriminatory they found it. Participants shared their surprise and horror about reading online commentaries to articles about the humanitarian crisis being protested, but found that they were “being completely shut down by the very racist, very closed minded, and sometimes very violent commentaries in return.” This had significant consequences on how the Tamil community were forced to experience their belonging in Canada and internalize their difference:
We thought we were part of this “multicultural” society where everybody was valued and where everybody was equal and all this stuff. So when you go on to the streets and you start saying things you start being told certain things in schools which didn't make sense—start being told things in workplaces which didn't make sense. Because anybody else would be treated differently than you were being treated. A lot of people felt psychologically impacted. A lot of kids didn't go back to school for a bit.

**Considerations of media and public discourse**

On the one hand, media frames and reports on protests to influence public opinion. The media can function as a mediator and translator between social movements and the public sphere (Beyeler and Hubscher 2003). On the other hand, media coverage also reflected existing public attitudes towards the Sri Lankan conflict, the Tamil diaspora, and more generally, racialized groups in Canada. In this regard, the media are themselves affected by public opinion. In this sample, it is apparent that mainstream media representations were constituted for and by the dominant public, and that the dominant public were assumed to be unmarked, non-racialized “Canadian” subjects. Through these protests, the spectacle and the spectator were co-constructed: protesters came face-to-face with their precariousness, while spectators were granted the opportunity to reinforce their dominance. The media created the “other,” but it also created the “Canadian.” The journalists I interviewed were obviously sympathetic to the protesters (as indicated by their participation in this study) and provided insight into some of the media representations. One journalist connected this news trend to how individualized public apathy was, and how alienated racialized news stories are in general:
In general, I think what was most interesting was that the core foundations for which the protests were taking place were not being told. That story was an empty space in the media. The story became about how this affects me. Because whatever they're yelling and screaming about has got nothing to do with me. What has to do with me is about my commute home and how long that’s taking me, when they're disrupting the highway. [...] I think that’s one of the biggest problems that we have with mainstream news coverage—with the 27, 29 second sound bite that’s supposed to be sexy and quick. And, relevant to the individual. In general, it’s always misrepresented. It’s us versus them. Capital T.

Why are they bothering us? This is Canada. It didn't happen here. Right?

This perspective echoes other Canadian studies about reporting on racialized communities where “the media rely on minorities as [...] a foil for sharpening the attributes of mainstream heroes, a catalyst for driving plot lines or character development, or a token dash of colour to an otherwise pallid cultural package” (Fleras and Kunz 2001, 155). Instead of being represented as subjects with something meaningful to say, minorities’ “lived experiences [are] reduced to the level of an ‘angle’...for spicing up plot lines” (Fleras 1995, 6). In this case, the primary plot line reduced the issues underlying the protests to an issue of traffic flow.

The underrepresentation of visible minorities in newsrooms and news decisions to frame and reinforce stereotypes work together to result in poor coverage of racialized groups in the Canadian mainstream print media (Joynt 1995). One journalist from a mainstream news source spoke passionately about her own challenges as a reporter trying to maintain positive relations with the Tamil community but also getting the story approved by her supervisors, as these were often in tension:
In some ways I think I tried as hard as I could to try to find people to talk about it from their perspective of Tamils living here—in the country that's accepted them, that's helped them. I mean could we have done more? But it was hard to. No bones about it. In some ways it was hard as a reporter doing that story because you were in one respect being told by the community, you're not doing enough. And on the other side, you've got, well you can't do this, it's only a traffic story. And I hated that line. Because I often got that. It's a traffic story? You're talking about lives and people and really, we're reducing it to traffic story? That's in a local news context. That's what you got.

However, even journalists reporting on the protests spoke about the public lack of concern, suggesting that media representations were in fact representations of the dominant public’s apathy. When asked about dominant public response to the Tamil diaspora protests, one reporter said:

What do people think of the protests? I'd get answers like “well, get off my roads.”

People were saying “I don't want to see these pictures of these babies. Like why are they showing me this? Keep your stupid whatevers in your homeland. Just go back.” Which is the common argument against immigrants in every context. But there were specific references to specific things in Toronto. Like posters showing war, battered [bodies], death… But I think it was a lot of people just didn't understand. Right? People just didn't understand what was happening unless you knew someone who was Tamil.

What does it mean that the “public” fundamentally couldn’t understand the pain of the unfolding events and the protests unless “you knew someone who was Tamil”? In the following section, I draw upon critical race theory to offer some understanding to the racial logic underlying this disconnect.
The racial logic of the apathetic spectator

Susan Sontag’s (2004) Regarding the Pain of Others—the inspiration behind the title of this paper—reviews historical and contemporary horrors of war to explore whether being a spectator to the pain of others can, and does, affect us as viewers and as people. Sontag suggests that these “viewing” experiences serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, they show suffering that is atrocious and unjust, but, on the other hand, they confirm that these are the sorts of things that happen in those sorts of places—and more importantly—to those sorts of people. The response to the Tamil diaspora protest characterized similar implicit assumptions of difference that construct how the “Canadian public” relates to different bodies and in turn, what they end up signifying. They inform our awareness of others within Canada and of others elsewhere. Sontag’s analysis allows us to consider the root of the public’s apathy: we don’t care because the process of racialization has already dehumanized those people. Apathy is further reinforced through the social, economic, and political superiority of the “Canadian” subject.

Farley (1997) offers valuable insights into the parallels of identity, commodification of spectacles, and the fetishization of others. He suggests that white identity is created and maintained by decorating black bodies with contempt and that the pleasure of whiteness is satisfied through the production, circulation, and consumption of images of the other—that requires aspects of humiliation, pleasure, and denial for its power. Hartman (1997) builds on these ideas to suggest a deeper understanding of the humiliation of the other and the consumption of their pain. She questions whether enabling a “witness” to the tragic scenes of colonial cruelty is no less entangled with power and enjoyment because it reinforces the pleasures of the masochistic fantasy while simultaneously glorifying the sadistic pleasure to be deprived from the spectacle of pain. Horrific images and stories about the pain of others results
in a specific process of consumption, which Razack (2007) calls “stealing the pain of others.” Razack demonstrates how and why witnessing the pain of others serves to dehumanize them further, reinstalling whiteness as morally superior, and obscuring the collective participation in the violence that is done.

While conflating representations of pain with protest may appear limited in some regards, it offers useful insights into why and how the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests were met with resounding public apathy in the Canadian context, despite Canadian national identity as humanitarian and its official positioning against genocide and war crimes. The compounded spectacle of the Tamil diaspora’s pain and protest reiterated that Tamil bodies are what Judith Butler (2009) might call fundamentally precarious lives whose suffering and deaths do not matter. Apathy over the protests and denial of this racism itself can function to reinforce white dominance in settler society, where the spectacle of pain and protest provides a moral superiority that erases the relevance of empathy and action. Here, the violence of the public’s apathy was normalized, and its dire consequences were obscured.

**Conclusion**

Because discourse is ideologically shaped through relations and contestations of power, the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests require a consideration of the relationship between the texts, public response, and state response. The print media from this sample lets us consider the news as a genre of information, but also as a representation of the Canadian public’s imagination of and relation to each other. Media representations reinforce the polarization between the spectacle and the spectator and demark the suffering of others, but also help us imagine what we cannot relate to (Silverstone 2006). They encourage us to consider how the
news constructs the visibility of others’ suffering and how it in turn encourages us to act. When suffering occurs, whose suffering are we invited to contemplate? How are emotional and moral distances between the “Canadian public” and others drawn? What and who constitutes the media, and what and who constitutes the public and is there room for contestation or contradiction?

During the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, activists publicly shared stories of individual and collective suffering over lives, loss, and land. These accounts have now been vindicated. A 2011 UN report confirmed protestors’ pleas that, in stark contrast to the government of Sri Lanka’s version of the final stages of the conflict—which arguably rationalized the international community’s apathy at the time—a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws were in fact committed. The report went on to corroborate that “the conduct of the war represented a grave assault on the entire regime of international law designed to protect individual dignity during both war and peace” (United Nations 2011, 4). Emerging reports continue to uncover the atrocities committed during the final months of the armed conflict, many of which are ongoing (Harrison 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013). However, for protesters, the impact of subtle and overt practices of apathy has ongoing effects. The diaspora cannot be separated from the discussion of colonialism because it was this historical condition that led to the displacement of people across the world under different circumstances or forms of colonial expulsion. The Tamil diaspora’s alienation during the crisis of 2009 undoubtedly triggers forms of historical, individual, and collective exclusion. Canadian responses to this crisis urge us to re-examine the ongoing, normalized perpetuations of racial ignorance, racial apathy, and racial dominance.

In white settler society, protest itself appears to reinforce some of the assumptions about the other: it can reinforce whose life can be grieved, whose loss can be valued, and whose public
participation matters. It can reiterate what we think of other places, and of the other themselves. Based on contributions from critical race theory, we learn how the pain and protest of others incites a particular form of commodification. Despite some journalistic efforts to represent the suffering of others, media and public rhetoric were consumed by apathy. While this analysis offers preliminary insight into the positioning of the spectator and the spectacle of protest, social movement theory must continue to unpack the racial dimensions of public ambivalence in the protests of others to consider their many implications for social activism and political participation in white settler society. It must consider ways to challenge the spectacle of protest and make claims on the nation-state even when bodies elicit otherness.
Chapter 4

“Since When Did We Have 100,000 Tamils?” Media Representations of Race thinking, Spatiality and the 2009 Tamil Diaspora Protests

Abstract

Beginning in mid-2008, the Tamil diaspora around the world organized in extraordinary activism against the escalating violence in northern Sri Lanka. Responses to the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada provide a unique case study to examine a contemporary moment of resistance, when race thinking and spatiality intersected within and beyond national borders. Using critical theories of representation, I conceptualize Canadian print media coverage of the protests as representations of a “strange encounter” with the other. I explore the media’s production of the other and its conflation of the Tamil protester-terrorist through constructions of space. I also examine how scale operates through underlying national values to conceptualize a precarious structure of belonging. Through these discursive moves, I demonstrate how the resulting figure of the “other,” the “outlaw,” and the “outsider” came to represent and delegitimize the racialized/spatialized Tamil protest(er).
Introduction

Beginning in mid-2008, the Tamil diaspora around the world organized in extraordinary activism against the escalating violence in northern Sri Lanka. In Canada, the 2009 Tamil diaspora demonstrations provoked vigorous debate in the media over racialized politics of citizenship, the complexities of diasporic identity, and the occupation of public space. While protesters were claiming rights consistent with national ideologies of humanitarianism (Dauvergne 2005), the media framed these protests as largely unacceptable to the public. Instead of being characterized as morally upstanding, Tamil protesters were constructed as impatient others who defied and challenged the precariousness of their belonging in Canada. Events of, and national responses to, the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests provide a unique case to examine contemporary Canadian representational politics of community organizing against genocide where resistance, race thinking, and spatiality intersect dynamically within and beyond Canadian borders.

How can we unpack representations of racialized local groups who protest an issue unfolding in another part of the world? An analysis of race thinking (Arendt 1973) that understands how social relations of dominance and otherness are spatially constructed (Delaney 2002; Soja 1996; Razack 2002; Mohanram 1999) can bridge the theoretical insights of scholars such as Leitner et al. (2008) and Nagel and Staeheli (2004) on questions of scale, political transformation, and the role of social actors across spaces to bring about and resist change. This framework assumes that public spaces are not neutral and open for anybody to occupy, but that connections between people and spaces are created, repeated, and resisted over time (Puwar 2004). While all bodies can, in theory, occupy all spaces, certain bodies are tacitly designated as being the “natural” occupants of specific positions, while others are marked as trespassers, in
accordance with how both places and bodies are imagined politically, historically, and conceptually (Puwar 2004). Paying attention to the representational politics of transnational protest contributes insights into the powerful socio-spatial impact that others, or those Sara Ahmed (2000) calls “strangers,” may elicit through protest when their racialized bodies occupy spaces where they do not “belong.”

In this paper, I explore how the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests functioned as a “strange encounter” that allowed the other to take shape through proximity—a face-to-face meeting with difference that invoked surprise and conflict (Ahmed 2000) by activating imaginings of race within and beyond the nation. Through spatialized representations of race thinking and its related trope of belonging, dominant Canadian media discourses delegitimized the 2009 Tamil diaspora protest(er)s as “others,” “outlaws,” and “outsiders” who threatened (symbolic) national space.

In what follows, I develop a framework of race thinking to illuminate the profound, perplexing connectedness between conceptions of racialization and belonging that are reciprocally constituted between scales and spaces. Using critical theories of representation in media analysis (Gee 2005; Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993), I examine 153 articles from mainstream newspapers. My analysis proceeds in two parts. In Part One, I explore the “strange encounter” in the media’s production of the other and the problematic conflation of the Tamil protester-terrorist through claims to space. In Part Two, I explore how scale operates through underlying national values and conceptualizes a precarious structure of belonging. Through these discursive moves, the resulting figure of the “other,” the “outlaw,” and the “outsider” came to represent the racialized/spatialized Tamil protest(er). These constructions delegitimized the protests and defined the parameters of who “we,” “Canadians” are in their proximity.
**Overview of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests and the Sri Lankan conflict**

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protest movement refers to the global outcry organized by the Tamil diaspora against the genocide of Tamil people in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka (Nandakumar 2001). These transnational protests aimed to persuade politicians to intervene in the 26-year conflict and establish a ceasefire; to appeal to humanitarian aid organizations to provide resources and investigate internment camps in affected areas of the country; and to restore civil rights to the Tamil population in Sri Lanka (Duffy and Blanchfield 2009, Toronto Star 2009). The protests took many different forms including Internet activism, human chains, demonstrations, sit-ins, hunger strikes, and self-immolation (Nandakumar 2001). The first protests occurred in Chennai in India in mid-2008, followed by demonstrations in London, Paris, Washington D.C., New York, Sydney, and other cities around the globe. In Toronto, the first notable protest began on 28 January 2009 with a few hundred people in front of the Sri Lankan consulate (Aulakh and Taylor 2009); with days, the protests grew to 45,000 when protesters held hands and lined the streets of Toronto, forming a human chain (Taylor 2009).

Although Sri Lanka gained independence from Britain in 1948, scholars suggest the roots of its current conflict remain embedded in the practices of its former colonial power, namely unaddressed political and social grievances following independence (Wilson 2000; Spencer 1990). Following decades of violence and cultural and political repression by the Sinhalese-dominated state, thousands of Tamils were massacred across Sri Lanka in July 1983, which launched a full-scale armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka (Wilson 2000). The LTTE, a subnational separatist militant organization also known as the Tamil Tigers, fought to create an independent Tamil state called Tamil Eelam in the north and the east of the island. The 1983 pogrom also resulted in a large-
scale migration of Tamils to countries that were open to refugees, such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Britain, and many countries in Western Europe (Wayland 2003); the largest majority of the Tamil population fled to Canada. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, commonly referred to as Eelam\textsuperscript{31} or Eezham Tamils, is estimated to range between 110,000 and 200,000 to 400,000 in Canada (as cited in Hyndman 2003).

The conflict in Sri Lanka has been ongoing, varying in intensity, since 1983. It has caused significant hardships for the population, environment, and economy of the country, with over 80,000 people officially listed as killed (Reuters 2008), over 146,000 people unaccounted for (The Weekend Leader 2012), and 130,000 people displaced in 2009 alone (Amnesty International 2009). After an intensive 30-month-long military campaign, the LTTE admitted defeat on 17 May 2009. An estimated 40,000 Tamil civilians were killed during this final phase of the Sri Lankan army’s offensive against the LTTE (United Nations 2011), with estimates of up to 1,000 people killed each day during the last two weeks of the conflict (Chamberlain 2009). Protesters and critics of the Sri Lankan government alleged the conflict to be a systematic genocide of the Sri Lankan Tamil minority in the country.

Two years later, a UN report confirmed protesters’ pleas that, in stark contrast to the Sri Lankan government’s version of the final stages of the conflict, a wide range of serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws were committed. The report went on to corroborate that “the conduct of the war represented a grave assault on the entire regime of international law designed to protect individual dignity during both war and peace” (United Nations 2011, 4). Emerging reports continue to uncover the atrocities committed during the final

\textsuperscript{31} Derived from the ancient Tamil word for Sri Lanka.
months of the armed conflict, many of which are ongoing (Harrison 2013; Human Rights Watch 2013).

(Re)Imagining the encounter

Sara Ahmed’s notion of bodies tactically designated as “strangers” (2000) is useful to understand how the Tamil Canadian diaspora protests were framed. Ahmed (2000) challenges the assumption of the stranger as somebody we do not know, suggesting instead that some bodies are already recognized as stranger than others: “there are some-bodies who simply are strangers, and who pose danger in their very co-presence in a given street” (2000: 3). Race thinking sanctions the retreat to this simple logic of encountering the “stranger”: “they” are not like “us.” In a “strange encounter,” particularly an oppositional one like protest, Hannah Arendt’s (1973) conceptualization of “race thinking” allows us to consider how humankind is categorized into races by their constructed differences or myths of common ancestry—how the races of the world are distinctly hierarchical, and were produced through European encounters with the other. Because Canada remains a white settler society that is socially and spatially contested (Raza 2002), tactics of constructing social hierarchies through interpretations of descent frame some people as more “strange” than others within the body politic and some bodies more threatening by their very presence.

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protests complicated socio-spatial assumptions of politics, representation, and community because their resistance transcended physical space: bodies in one part of the world represented bodies elsewhere, identifying themselves as part of the same community, while making demands upon different nations. As geographical conceptions of scale (the ‘local’, ‘national’, ‘international’ and ‘transnational’) are socially constructed and shifting,
race thinking is also implicated in imagining space within and beyond Canadian borders: it functions to organize foreign bodies that are constructed as both inferiors and in need of special protection here and abroad, while simultaneously maintaining white supremacy within the nation. As Radhika Mohanram (1999) observes, “it is a commonplace to point out that the concept of race has always been articulated according to the geographical distributions of people. Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relations between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races” (Mohanram 1999, 3).

Encounters with others involve spatial negotiations of race thinking with those who are recognized as either normalized or strange—differences are constructed through relationships of proximity and distance, and are regulated through the state (Goldberg 2002). Through race thinking, national values conceal a racial hierarchy of beliefs about who is deserving and undeserving through values of rationality, morality, modernity, and civilization. In turn, these values spatially organize the nation to reproduce racial hierarchies through the law (Razack 2002). While theories of citizenship and rights include the right to protest for all, the otherness of the stranger creates a precarious relation between the law, the practice of citizenship, and access to protest. Exacerbated through the “war on terror,” race thinking routinizes racial hierarchy, encouraging an acceptance that suspension of rights is allowable, if not necessary, for national security (Razack 2007). Race thinking insists that some bodies belong within the nation while others may not. The normalized figure, through self-control and discipline, not only masters his own body and space (Foucault 1977), but also regulates boundaries to create and control space inhabited by the racial other (Kirby 1996).
Hage (2000) suggests that unlike *passive belonging* (which categorizes the other), *governmental belonging* is the power to construct the positioning of others in the nation; it is “the power to have a legitimate view regarding who should feel at home in the nation and how, and who should be in and who should be out, as well as what constitutes too many” (46). To inhabit the nation this way is to perceive oneself as being an agent of such will, determining what issues and which people are deserving within the national space of white settler society. As Sara Ahmed (2000) argues, “the proximity of strangers within the nation's space… is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined and exterior other” (100). National representations of a transnational protest illustrate such demarcation as a process of exclusion in the context of nationhood.

**Method**

Discourse analysis provides the theory and method for studying how language gets incorporated “on site” to enact particular social activities and social identities through representation (Gee 2005; Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1993). Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged through the use of language, signs or images between members of a culture, allowing the classification of the world into meaningful categories (Hall 1997). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) further focuses on the politics of representation, framing media as a socio-cultural practice between writers and readers. Employing an interpretive approach, it unpacks culturally specific categorizations in media discourse, recognizing the subjective and ideological nature of all discourse as employing tacit assumptions, norms, and biases. Through subtle discursive means, the media in general, and news media in particular, express and legitimate national and international power structures. This
includes the perpetuation of racial stereotypes (Mahtani 2001), as well as influencing attitudes towards migrants and immigration (Bauder 2005; Hier and Greenberg 2002). As van Dijk (1988) argues, at societal and cognitive levels, the role and effects of news media are structural: “the media may not always tell us what to think about minorities (although they often do), but rather they define the communicative situation and the social context that dictate how most of their users think about minority groups” (224).

To examine media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Toronto, I reviewed all newspaper stories about it published in Canada between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2011. This includes all articles carried through the Canadian Newsstand Database retrieved using keywords “Tamil protest” (n= 53) and “Tamil AND protest AND Toronto” (n=153). I analyzed a total of 153 articles (duplicates were removed). The sample included 20 articles from The Globe and Mail; 25 from the National Post; 39 from the Toronto Star and 44 from Ottawa Sun. Other publications such as Canada NewsWire (1), The Gazette (11), Vancouver Sun (3), Calgary Herald (1), CTV News (3), Edmonton Journal (1), Saskatoon’s Star-Phoenix (1), Victoria’s Times Colonist (1), and Windsor Star (3) provided 25 articles. I understand the media’s role as not only reporting the protests, but as a forum where conflicting narratives of identity, belonging, and nationalism were constructed and negotiated. As Taylor and Willis (1999) remind us, “no cultural representation can offer access to the ‘truth’ about what is being represented, but what such representations do provide is an indication about how power relations are organized in a society, at certain historical moments” (p. 40). I systematically coded the content of all articles and created theoretical and data-driven codes that were reviewed at multiple stages to interpret some of the implicit values underlying media representations of the Tamil diaspora protests. At times this included the news media’s own criticisms of popularized
racist constructions. When racialized groups are depicted, overt statements of racism are rare; exclusionary media discourse instead operates through more subtle discursive strategies that tacitly legitimate discrimination.

My sample includes a range of data: editorials, news reports, columns, and letters from the public. News reporting assumes that fact and opinion are kept separate, and that different news genres embody varying values. However, media analysis recognizes that implicit opinions can be signaled even in the most “factual” news report because the very selection of one news event over another, the focus of the coverage above others, and the rhetorical point of view imply a belief system or an evaluation (van Dijk 1988). However, from a practical point of view, van Dijk (1988) argues that it is useful to distinguish between editorials, news reports, opinion articles, and letters from the public to situate varying forms of journalistic practice. News reports are assumed to contain no (or the least amount of) explicit opinions; opinion articles analyze news events from a specific point of view and may involve the writers’ opinions; and editorials are formulated from the point of view of the newspaper or the editor and involve explicit opinions through an argumentative structure intended to contribute to the reader’s opinion formation about a news event (van Dijk 1988). Letters from the public provide a glimpse into the presumed audience of the news source, and are usually meant to represent or constitute “public opinion.” While arguably each type of text has different rhetorical functions, semantic content, readership, and perceived credibility within print media, analyzing them as a whole, including their points of divergence, reveals how these varied forms of coverage converge to construct complex representations on particular issues.
**Conceptualizing the “strange encounter”**

Media coverage of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests predominately delegitimized the protests by framing the “strange encounter.” The schematic construction of the strange encounter in the media produced a coherent system of racial-spatial understandings that closely resembled the dominant public’s opinion (or at least the media’s construction of it). While news articles are generally considered more neutral, this sample found that all media coverage, including news reports, were significantly more critical than favourable. Not surprisingly, opinion articles and letters from the public were especially denigrating. While the political position of each news outlet arguably influences its coverage of and attitude toward protest and minorities in general (Larson 2006; van Dijk 1988), this sample found a disturbing trend of reporting that demonized and disparaged the Tamil diaspora and protests. Differences among publications were small and differences in media representations across publications virtually disappeared following the Gardiner Expressway blockade. A few notable exceptions emerged in the *Toronto Star* where writers critiqued the dominant narratives framing the “strange encounter” to challenge the public’s production of threat and racial/spatial differentiation. However, while this small sample of articles provided an alternative representation by critiquing the dominant response to the protests, they all still acknowledged the highly racialized construction of this “strange encounter.” The media consistently recognized the racist undertone of reporting, whether it condoned it or not. The primary discursive moves in media representations that functioned to delegitimize the protests were (1) the strange encounter of the protester-terrorist; and (2) geographic scale and the construction of racialized/spatialized belonging.
Part One: The strange encounter with the protester-terrorist

The 2009 Tamil diaspora protest was a strange encounter that formed both cultural and spatial boundaries through the organizing logic of race thinking: the (mis)recognition of the Tamil diaspora as strangers and the Tamil diaspora protests as a strange encounter demarcated groups in public space, legitimizing certain bodies and delegitimizing others. One Globe and Mail editorial explicitly questioned the legitimacy of the Tamil community’s presence and the socio-spatial disruption triggered by this experience:

When, earlier this month, organizers were asking 100,000 Tamils to gather on Toronto to protest, I remember a friend asking with mild bewilderment, “Since when did we have 100,000 Tamils?” The truth is, no one really knows how many Tamil are in Toronto, or Canada. (Blatchford 2009:A13)

Research has indicated that imagining racialized bodies in protest within Canada, is in fact imagining them as “strangers.” Gidengil et al. (2004) have statistically demonstrated that participating in protest is largely a practice of those born in Canada, particularly those with European ancestry. In this sample, media representations created a clear distinction between the “Tamil community” from elsewhere and the “rest of Toronto.” The protesters were always referred to as “Tamil,” erasing non-Tamil protesters and allies in the movement; they were rarely “Canadian” or hyphenated in any way. Acknowledging tensions emerging from these constructions of difference, one writer said, “We want Tamil Canadians, and other minorities, to ‘be Canadian.’ Yet when they act Canadian and exercise their Charter right to peaceful protest, we call them ‘Tamils,’ the very identity we do not want them to revert to exclusively.” (Siddiqui 2009a:A25) Positioning the Tamil diaspora as the other amplified their constructed inferiority:
references depicted them as savages or animals needing to be declawed (Reinhart 2009) and caged (Winnipeg Free Press 2009).

Echoing racist constructions of others as animals in Western media (Santa Ana 1999), journalists reignited these claims through a convenient conflation of protesters of Tamil origin and the animal representation of the “tiger” from the separatist group, the Tamil Tigers. This conflation marked two distinctive moves: the first was the rhetorical transference of the tiger animal imagery onto protesters. References to the protesters as tigers erased cultural meanings attached to this imagery in the East—the tiger is entrenched in South Asian legends and religious symbols in Hinduism and Buddhism, often representing royalty and strength. As such, the Eelam movement’s tiger imagery symbolizes its martial history and resistance, and is in direct contrast to Sinhala nationalist imagery and identity as “people of the lion” (Gunawardana 1990). However, rhetorical animal representations disregarded these complex meanings, dehumanized the protesters, and reduced the animal imagery to a synonym of terrorism in the West.

The second discursive move was the media’s problematic conflation between the racialized construction of the protester and the terrorist. Undeniably, the legitimacy of events in Sri Lanka and the worldwide activism it triggered were shrouded by the Conservative government’s controversial 2006 decision to ban the LTTE as a terrorist organization. Articles estimated 99.9% of the community as supporters of the LTTE without survey or evidence (Reinhart 2009), or acknowledged that “in the minds of most of the public, Tamils are all Tigers” (Mraz 2009). One article by the Ottawa Citizen suggested, “The long Sri Lankan conflict is not well understood here. When the word ‘Tamil’ is mentioned at all, it is generally followed by ‘Tiger’” (Ottawa Citizen 2009:A14). And tiger here means terrorist. According to Goldberg (2009), the charge of terrorism has a double effect: while it manifests the figure of the outlaw, it
also insists on an implicit transcendence of social distinctions and spaces. Portraying the diaspora as terrorist outlaws literally forces them outside the law and outside the nation. This transcendence allows the dominant group to generalize “national character and state security while reconstituting the threat as invasion by the distinct, the different, the dangerous, the outside” (Goldberg 2009, 55). In this case, the deployment of the “terrorist” label provided a distinction between who has the right to protest and who does not. As one *National Post* (2009a) editorial asserted, “While staging non-violent protest marches is well within the Canadian political tradition, convening a mob to praise an illegal terrorist organization is not.”

Stereotypical accusations were regularly deployed in news reports to dismiss the group’s cause, as well as their process: “As for supply-side terrornomics: Where does the money for staging such protests come from? The same place you go to finance suicide vests?” (Harris 2009:A15).

For the Tamil diaspora in Canada, this conflation of “Tamil” with “terrorist” is not new. In May 2000, numerous politicians including former Finance Minister Paul Martin attended an event by the Federation of Associations of Canadian Tamils (FACT) to celebrate the Tamil New Year. Members of the Canadian Alliance Party subsequently alleged in the House of Commons that Minister Martin had attended a fundraising event for a terrorist organization. In response to outrage from the Tamil community, Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien agreed that such a label should never be applied to an entire community (as cited in Wayland 2003). Yet according to Henry and Tator (2002), media representations of the diaspora are often controversial. Their research demonstrates that between 6 May-20 July and 25 August-31 October 2000, the *Post* alone published 34 articles linking Tamil organizations to terrorism. They argue that the *Post* seized on any event to report on the community’s organization in a negative light, even when events took place in a foreign country. This conceptualization of the diaspora as a controversial
unitary actor ignores the internal heterogeneity and competing class, religious, and political ideologies existing within any community. Regardless of this conflation’s intention, the “terrorism” label on an entire community is undeniably problematic. The conflation of all Tamils as LTTE supporters erases factions of the population who do not support the LTTE, discursively reframes the politics of a liberation movement to politics of terrorism, and in the 2009 context of the movement, shifted emphasis away from the humanitarian crisis that was unfolding in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, not one article in this sample acknowledged Canada’s own complex history of separatist movements—separatism was presented completely as an issue that concerns others, and takes place beyond our nation.

To dramatize the symbolic threat protesters represent within the white nation-space, spatial military imagery was also deployed. They are described as “occupying the road,” (Campion-Smith 2009:A8) and “taking over the downtown area” (Van Rijn 2009:A1). These narratives carried racialized undercurrents of difference:

Torontonians rightly celebrate the multicultural nature of their city. But such sentiments were tested this week, as an ongoing cycle of Tamil protests besieged tens of thousands of workers in the city's downtown core, adding idle time to core-bound commutes, and subjecting the country's most expensive labour to the constant angry thrum of folk drumming. There is a fine line between accommodating spontaneous political action on behalf of a legitimately concerned ethnic group seeking to express solidarity with brethren overseas—and letting one's city be taken over by a mob. (National Post 2009a)

Like many other articles, this National Post editorial made racialization spatial. The symbolic threat was amplified through words like besieged, subjecting the country, and the “angry thrum of folk drumming” by an ethnic group. The phrase “one’s city” points to implicit assumptions
about the exclusions of space experienced within the “multicultural nature” of Toronto: whose
city is it, and who has the right to occupy its public space? This passage also highlights some of
the contradictions of the socio-spatial organization of multiculturalism in Toronto, where
“culture” might be constructed as acceptable within particular geographical enclaves in the city,
or when limited to festivals like Caribana, but less acceptable when “subjecting the country’s
most expensive labour” to additional time on their commute, or the sounds of foreign music.

The events of 10 May 2009 amplified race thinking and spatiality. After four months of
protests at Queen’s Park, and triggered by a particularly gory day in Sri Lanka’s conflict, around
5,000 protesters in Toronto made their way onto the Gardiner Expressway and shut down traffic
in both directions for approximately six hours on a Mother’s Day Sunday. The media
condemned the act as “dangerous” and “unlawful”; (Hanes 2009:A13) “worse, they generate an
air of chaos and menace” (Fulford 2009:A19); and the outrage over the inconvenience caused to
commuters was heightened (Wente 2009:A19). One Toronto Star opinion article succinctly
addressed the dominant narratives:

Tamils, go home! You're beginning to mess up our schedules, get on our nerves, cause us
to be late for Mother's Day dinner, for crying out loud. Yes, another thousand of your
relatives were slaughtered on the weekend in your homeland, but what's that got to do
with us in Toronto? Look, we were kind enough to let you into our peaceful country, so
please don't mess it up. Settle your foreign grievances among yourselves without
bothering us. And if you must adopt our democratic tradition of public protest, then do it
quietly, off in a corner. That attitude is at the core of many comments being offered on
the controversial series of Tamil protests.” (Royson 2009:GT5, emphasis added)
This writer critiques the multiple contradictions of claims to humanitarianism, immigration, democracy, and access to public space framing these protests. It marks some of the limitations of framing “our democratic tradition of public protest” as part of the practice of citizenship and points to the ways that transnationalism exacerbates difference and disconnect. Haroon Siddiqui from the Toronto Star wrote one of the few criticisms of dominant media representations following the Gardiner blockade and noted the public’s recurring message: “We do understand the bloodbath going on in Sri Lanka but, please, don't clog our roads and disrupt our commute; that's been the public response, spat out on hotline radio and expressed politely elsewhere.” He challenged the politics of other countries that have been included or excluded within Canada: In the last few days we've heard, over and over again, an old Canadian myth: Let the immigrants not import their old country troubles to Canada. Except that they always have the British and the French, to start with, and the Irish, the Ukrainians, the Serbs, the Sikhs, etc. etc. Canadian politics and the Canadian character have been shaped, in some ways, by "old country" politics. (Siddiqui 2009b:A1)

While the act of protest is contentious, and any group’s blocking a highway may have garnered negative responses, the representations of the Tamil diaspora protest challenge us to consider the racialized undercurrents of how some protests and some protesters have a more legitimate claim to space and the right to protest than others.

**Part Two: Geographic scale and the construction of racialized/spatialized belonging**

In transnational protests, geographic scale is implicated in the composition of identity, representation and claims to space (Staeheli and Thompson 1997; Nagel and Staeheli 2004;
Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008). The transnational dimension of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests fundamentally challenge how media representations are framed to extend beyond sovereign national borders, while simultaneously pursuing national interests. In this case, the protests’ transnationalism became a site of contest that produced the encounter as even stranger. This letter from a reader reiterates a common perspective that the events in Sri Lanka were too far away for Canadians to care about: “they should not expect any of us to support protests of what is happening thousands of kilometres away in Sri Lanka… New Canadians have the same freedoms we all enjoy. But they also have a responsibility not to abuse our right to go freely and to not be obstructed by these protests” (Hummell 2009:A19). Another opinion article reminded us, “The truth is, most of us couldn’t give a rat’s tail about most of what happens around the globe – until it directly affects us.” (Royson 2009) This attitude was reflected in most articles on the violence in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka itself was positioned as somewhere far away, beyond our national concern or interest.

Through media representations, scale was continually deployed to delegitimize the protests: they were scaled-up to the transnational to be made irrelevant and scaled down to the local level to be made inconvenient. Media debates continually positioned the crisis in Sri Lanka against the convenience of commuters. In an opinion article in the National Post, Robert Fulford took on the Toronto Star for one of the few articles calling for understanding:

On the Tamil question, Joe Fiorito wrote in his Toronto Star column, "What's the point of a democracy if you cannot take your beef to the streets?" He might as well ask, "What's the point of democracy if you cannot interfere with the lives of your fellow citizens whenever you think you have a good reason?"
Responding to Fiorito’s comparisons to famous activists, he argued that “invoking these historic figures might make some sense if Gandhi had taken his protests to, say, Stockholm, or if King had marched defiantly down the roads of Melbourne. But they didn't. They directed their protests against their oppressors, not (as the Tamils do) against innocent citizens on the other side of the world who might have trouble finding Sri Lanka on a map.” (Fulford 2009) This recurring argument provides two important insights: the transnational dimension of the protests were depicted as “against” the wrong population, and “innocent citizens” in Canada did not know or care about issues taking place in Sri Lanka. Through these opinions we can see how places and spaces are intimately interwoven through scale, and how scale and space are relational and mutually constituted through the protests of the Tamil diaspora. The media production of the transnational protest was simultaneously focused at the national level in Canada, and the crisis in Sri Lanka was formed in relation to media representations of the diaspora’s protest in Canada. This international but also highly nationalized context complicated the representations of the conflict and the bodies protesting it. It problematized the protest through the transnationalism of the migrant other who comes from and belongs to Sri Lanka, the construction of the outlaw who is threatening to the Canadian nation state, but also differentiated the conditions of belonging that these categories imply.

The encounter of the Tamil diaspora protest allowed the “we” or the “us” to differentiate itself against other bodies through an assumption of who outsiders are and who belongs in a given space: “Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, already recognised as not belonging, as being out of place. Such recognition of those who are out of place allows both the demarcation and enforcement of the boundaries of ‘this place’, as where ‘we’ dwell” (Ahmed 2000, 21-22). Much of the dialogue
around the protests focused on the issue of who is legitimately Canadian, argued statistics on immigrants and refugees, and questioned politics of belonging, but avoided the protests’ actual issue (Cohn 2009; Wente 2009).

This media debate made it clear that the diaspora’s belonging is conditional and “passive” (Hage 2000), the plight of the crisis in Sri Lanka was secondary to commuters’ plights, and protesters’ interests should be contained within the boundaries of the nation:

Why did these people come to Canada if they are still so involved in politics in their home country? I would think they would be more than busy making a living here for themselves and their families. It is appropriate for Canada to offer people from war-torn countries a safe haven. But in return, I think it is also appropriate for Canada to ask these immigrants to leave their political problems back in their homeland. (Ansell 2009:A31)

The protesters’ precarious belonging was further amplified through examples of community members pleading with the general public, and despite their right to protest, apologizing for the inconvenience they were causing (Selva 2009:A22). Protesters even handed out flyers saying “Sorry for the trouble, understand our struggle” and collected canned foods for the food bank as a token offering (Bonoguore 2009:A10).

The strange bodies of the Tamil diaspora not only made the designation of the body-at-home possible, but they simultaneously confirmed the impossibility of such a body being at home in the face of the outsider. Echoing the opinion of numerous others, one writer from the Ottawa Citizen recommended: “if the Tamil community in this country really wants to further the cause of peace in Sri Lanka, it must begin by getting ordinary Canadians on its side” (2009:A14, emphasis added). The representation of the “ordinary Canadian” is normalized and unmarked: it suggests somatic conditions of difference, but also illustrates implicit forms of
belonging. In general, “ordinary Canadians” were depicted as continually challenged by the
protests: “I wonder why Tamil protesters are allowed to block off a major street in downtown
Toronto. What makes their right to protest superior to my right to be able to freely use a major
roadway for its intended purpose?” (Bertrand 2009:A17) Arguably, to inhabit the nation this way
is to perceive oneself as a spatial manager and agent of its will, determining what issues are
important or relevant enough: “I feel with the people in terms of humanitarianism, but you've
raised your issue, it's time to go home” (Drudi 2009:A5). These representations of
“governmental” belonging (Hage 2000) were constructed as necessary as the symbolic spatial
threat was portrayed as growing through predictions of violent outbreaks during the protests (Di-
Manno 2009:A2), the taking over of different highways (Hanes 2009), and questions on political
implications deemed “soft on terrorism” (Jimenez 2009:L1). One National Post (2009b:A12)
editorial advised: “In the meantime, we must remember that our behaviour in such matters is
studied carefully by Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda and other extremist groups that target Canada
and the West. They take a professional interest in knowing which cities conduct themselves like
soft targets.” In every way, these protests were a matter of national security —now and in the
future.

Conclusion

The case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests deepens our understanding of the social
conditions of proximity, and the ways in which contemporary discourses on racial bodies in
protest involve the figure of the stranger and an enforcement of a precarious system of
belonging. These discursive moves have important moral and political implications. Dominant
discourses marked protesters as a symbolic threat within the racial and spatial imaginary of the
nation, and as a result, diminished the complexity of the historical legacy of anticolonial resistance, the role of global players and politics in the conflict, the contextual factors leading up to the 2009 genocide, and ultimately, convoluted the call for humanitarian action in Sri Lanka. As part of the bigger picture of the Tamil liberation struggle, this discourse also decontextualized the historical and ongoing state-sanctioned dispossession, displacements and discrimination against a people. Undeniably, the national activist landscape has since been influenced through social movements such as protests against the 2010 G20 Summit in Toronto, the Occupy Movement, and the Idle No More Movement that gained prominence globally, yet the study of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests provides a valuable framework in conceptualizing how representations of racialized bodies in protest within the nation continue to be framed in problematic ways.

Despite Canada’s participation in the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Geneva Conventions and their subsequent protocols, national constructions of racialized protesters calling for humanitarian action in other parts of the world are still framed as an encounter that is overdetermined through race thinking. While we may endorse the right to protest and oppose violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws, the case of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests problematizes the conditions these principles exist within. In this case, principles of human rights were secondary to dominant concerns over constructed threat and national priorities where, in most cases, the interests of the nation appeared to be reduced to the interests of traffic flow. While Canada has a complex relationship with Sri Lanka in terms of aid, trade, migration, and conflict (Hyndman 2003), the construction of the threatening stranger differentiates in advance who will count as a protesters and who will not – who will count as a life worth saving and who will not. Representing bodies marking a
particular space within a hierarchy of nations, both nationally and globally, came at a significant cost for the Tamil people’s lives and loss. As Judith Butler (2009) eloquently reminds us: “Ungrievable lives are those that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone; they are, ontologically, and from the start, already lost and destroyed, which means that when they are destroyed in war, nothing is destroyed” (xix). Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country informs our awareness of others, in particular, of others elsewhere. These experiences serve a dual purpose: on the one hand, they show suffering that is atrocious and unjust, but on the other hand they confirm that these are the sorts of things that happen in those sorts of places — and more importantly — to those sorts of people (Sontag 2004).

As the stranger is produced through discourse, so is the “ordinary Canadian” through the stranger’s proximity. The conceptualization of Canadian national identity requires an active process of interpretation to understand how subjectivities change historically and contextually during times of humanitarian crisis and protest, as well as how these subjectivities of belonging contribute to the construction of social space itself. This paper points to the radical forgetting of the histories of labour and production that produces the stranger in the present. It also points to the importance of uncovering national narratives and interests framing foreign policy and optics of humanitarian interventions. How does Canada identify its role as humanitarian within and beyond the nation in relation to racial bodies and places? How do these conditions of humanitarianism elicit histories of differentiation? How does geography frame how violations of human rights law are perceived, represented, and resisted? Addressing these tensions has much to offer current debates on the scales, layers, and enactments of rights, citizenship, and belonging among transmigrants in Canada.
I bring forth the complexity of racialization and spatiality within media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, with the hope of encouraging us to contemplate the efficacy of transnational protest against genocide by racial others. Because social movements are “a major vehicle for people's participation in public politics” (Tilly 2004, 3), this paper’s findings suggest we should consider implications for activism: what are the impacts of mainstream media discourses of protest on diaspora groups’ continued activism within the nation? What claims to space can be negotiated through racialized communities’ protest? In the shifting discourse of security and sovereignty, how is resistance through humanitarian and rights claims at the mercy of securitization? The construction of the protester within inherited modes of threat forces us to consider the challenge of resistance by racialized communities. Yet the mobilization of the diaspora also reminds us of the possibility for a new type of transnational activism making new claims to space that provide a strategic terrain for conflict, contradiction, and revolution. While space may not have causal power, “subjects achieve and resist their systems of identification in and through social space” (Natter and Jones 1997, 149). Therefore, an understanding of how social relations of dominance and otherness are projected into space enhances our understanding of how groups relate to each other through oppositional encounters of protest. By developing our understandings of the spatiality of race thinking in encounters of protest, we may begin to unravel some of the possibilities and problems framing transnational activism today.
Newspaper Articles


Harris, D.B. 2009. They should have been stopped. *The Ottawa Citizen*, 15 April, A.15 (News).


Toronto Star. 2009. Student became the voice of her people. *Toronto Star*, 22 December, GT.1


Chapter 5

Conclusion

This is an intervention. A message from that space in the margin that is a site of creativity and power, that inclusive space where we recover ourselves, where we move in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer. Marginality as site of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there. Enter that space. We greet you as liberators (hooks 1990, 152)

At the centre of this dissertation is my concern for social work’s wavering commitment to the social justice movements of racialized others. Radical and critical social workers have emphasized the importance of social activism for social justice, and have acknowledged that anti-war and global justice movements of the twenty-first century can inform the development of an evolving critical social work practice (Ferguson 2012). Yet, depending on the political climate of the time, social work’s scholarship on community practice and citizen participation has shown varying levels of attention to the interests and cultural context of diverse ethnic populations (Garvin and Cox 1987; Alvarez et al. 1996). This dissertation integrates and contributes to this discussion by examining how the transnational activism of the Tamil diaspora is constructed in Canada in the age of terrorism. As I extend hook’s (1990) invitation to “enter that space,” I call upon social workers to respond to transnational anti-colonial movements with a politics and ethics that engages with “marginality as a site of resistance” alongside a recognition that resistance itself can, in a white settler society, be marginalizing. Through the chapters of this work, I have responded to several questions pertaining to the potential inclusivity and exclusivity of social justice through the transnational practice of protest. In this chapter, I share the contributions and limitations of this study. I explore the current tensions Canadian social
worker’s face in practicing protest and resistance within non-profit organizations. I conclude with some considerations for future social work theory, practice and research on movements for social justice.

Discourses of race, resistance and citizenship: The major findings

I initiated this dissertation by seeking to respond to four questions: (1) What are the political ideologies underlying media representations of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests in Canada that situated the protests as a “terrorist movement,” a “separatist movement,” an “ethnic conflict,” or a movement against “genocide?” (2) How can we, as social work researchers, ethically represent the resistance movements of others? (3) Why and how does race frame the production of suffering and spectacle through protest? (4) How can we unpack representations of racialized local groups in Canada who protest an issue unfolding in another part of the world?

Beginning with a critical reflection of my own ethical struggles in studying and representing this movement, in Chapter 2, I grapple with the political ideologies underlying media representations that situate the protests as a “terrorist movement,” a “separatist movement,” an “ethnic conflict,” or a movement against “genocide.” Through this work, I conceptualize research representations of the Tamil diaspora’s activism as a “double-sided” political event (Agamben, 1988) that locates and historicizes activism as a site of agency but also inscribes and reinscribes social demarcations within state order. As such, rather than employing any one term to refer to a singular, specific narrative of transnational resistance, through this chapter, I argue that we foreground the power structures and global relations that fundamentally mark colonized identities and their activism across spaces and movements. Through this lens, I position the 2009 Tamil diaspora movement as a historic and ongoing decolonial struggle,
unfolding within Canada, a nation of many symbolic, discursive and material occupations. I call upon researchers to represent their resistance movements within the wider emancipatory project of decolonization, and engage with the potentials and tensions embedded within this challenge.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I engage with two separate but overlapping theorizations to unpack media response to the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests through the construction and dynamics of racialization and spatiality. In Chapter 3, I analyze how racial logic frames the production of suffering of the protesters and the resulting apathy of the Canadian public. I argue that it frames both the dominant public’s privilege of not “knowing” the others’ struggles and is enforced beyond the realm of an individual response when it comes to be enforced systemically. I demonstrate that the racial ignorance of not knowing and racial apathy of not caring, conflate to produce the performance of racial dominance. In Chapter 4, I engage with the transnational and spatial dynamics contributing to the racialized construction of apathy and belonging. I demonstrate how the “strange encounter” in the media’s production of the other produces the problematic conflation of the Tamil protester-terrorist through claims to space. I also develop a critique of how scale operates through underlying national values to conceptualize a precarious structure of belonging. Through these discursive moves, I argue that the Tamil protest(er) came into being as the “other,” the “outlaw,” and the “outsider.” Through these two chapters, I demonstrate how the formal status of citizenship was problematized by the Canadian public. I also posit that the conditions of the citizenship practice of protest by racialized groups was delegitimized in profound ways: Through this analysis, I point to the conditions of transnationalism in the age of terrorism that have recast old geographical divisions of nation-states into new hierarchies that are connected and are crystallized through “global cities;” here,
the meaning, practice and extent of citizenship is negotiated (Isin 2000) and “the work of globalization gets done” (Sassen 2003, 13).

This dissertation demonstrates how activism by racialized groups is distorted by the indirect and direct representational politics imposed by a hegemonic West. However, several observations can be made about this enduring controversy. First, the overwhelming response to the protests in the Canadian media provide a glimpse into a long-standing cultural politics of claims to citizenship, resistance, space and sovereignty that link racialized communities with the West. As I explore through the chapters of this dissertation, the media provides a powerful ideological display of power relations that interplay between texts, public response and state response. It is a medium that influences public opinion, and is influenced by public opinion. As such, I position it as a genre of discourse, but also as a representation of the Canadian public’s imagination of and in relation to each other. In this case, the media and the public displayed the pervasiveness of racism, the marginalization of resistance and the conditions of Canadian citizenship. Second, the tremendous mobilization by the Tamil diaspora is indicative of an overwhelming legacy of activism against racism, colonialism, violence and dispossession that transcends time and space. Despite a history of objectification and marginalization by mainstream media discourse, the community was, and continues to be visible and active in shaping activist discourses within the Canadian landscape, as well as in unison with a global diaspora. Finally, I stress that the representation of the Tamil diaspora’s resistance—within the media and within this research—must be differentiated and cannot be reduced to their ‘Tamil-ness’ but recognized as individually and collectively complex, and at times ambiguous—a representation that comes into being through a global movement for decolonization marked by competing embodiments of agency and subordination, security and insecurity, resistance and
subjugation. While this paper does not offer a grand theory or universal template for studying transnational social movements in Canada within social work, I hope that it highlights the importance of rigorously studying and unpacking the relationship between race, protest and the practice of citizenship in white settler societies.

What can social work learn from the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests?

At its core, the findings of this project unsettle Western social work’s dominant conceptualizations of social justice. It troubles how we imagine the work of social workers within Canada and beyond. According to Arturo Escobar (2004), “place-based” transnational social movements are our best hope in envisioning a world beyond the power and privilege of the hegemonic imperial, colonial, neoliberal West. Yet, as this research demonstrates, an inclusive vision of social justice requires that social workers engage with the tensions and controls inherent in the production of these social movements. In this age, social work’s reach continues to spread around the world into areas ravaged by apartheid, colonialism and post-colonial conflict (Ramon et al. 2006). As such, we require a deeper engagement with the conditions that create and sustain “conflict” and “peace” around the world, as well as produce lives that are “savable” from those who are not. As civil society and relief organizations continue to fill in the voids left by governments, humanitarian aid organizations and human rights institutions, social workers find themselves in unique positions and places to both provide services to those who require them, and problematize the conditions underlying the delivery of those services at this particular moment in history. What kind of social work do we engage in?

Debates in international social work offer important lessons for us to consider. The central dilemma international social work faces arises from the contradictory processes
surrounding indigenization, universalism and imperialism (Gray 2005); “put another way, indigenization raises challenges for universalisation and the challenges are compounded by international efforts which can quickly become imperialistic depending on what is proposed as ‘universal’ in social work” (p. 231). Faced with these debates, international social work recognizes that practice is not just about the spread of social work around the world, but simultaneously requires the development and implementation of practices that are locally and culturally relevant to communities (Dean 2001; Gray and Allegritti 2003). These local issues must always be interpreted within the wider social context that frames the causes and resolutions for human crisis (Hugman 2010). For this work, a study of activism provides unique lessons “from below” to allow us to consider communities’ own understandings of indigeneity, universalism and imperialism. Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and around the world continue to work to improvise new solutions, new institutions, and new resistances to cope and address with the mass scale of loss of lives and land in Sri Lanka. At the same time, activists appeal for international intervention through human rights principles that claim to be universal. As social workers, we must challenge our own specialist professional practices that place resistance as residual as it is often conceived of in the West. Non-violent protest, for many communities worldwide including the Tamil diaspora, is a core strategy for dissent. It is historically and intimately connected with their struggles for space, land and political participation within South Asia and abroad. As social workers, we must recognize these community-based practices and grapple with creating more integrated forms of our own practice if we are to respond effectively and appropriately within the decolonial struggles of communities worldwide.

Integrating culturally-relevant forms of practice to address structural issues requires critically engaging with the paradoxes inherent in our professional and ethical responsibilities.
The dominant construction of social work ethics espouses applying a code of ethics alongside good decision-making in a linear, prescriptive fashion. However, as Weinberg (2010) problematizes, social workers’ conflicts transcend their interpersonal relationships with their clients. Yet, broader social and political issues remain unchallenged as “the field is usually based on the premise that the current social arrangements are equitable and that the answers lie more in tinkering with societal structures than in wholesale change” (Weinberg 2010, 34). She highlights a fundamental paradox underlying this construction of ethics: while dominant discourses frame social work as a helping profession aimed at liberatory service, social workers are members of and participants within institutional spaces that require moral regulation. Supporting dominant discourses and enhancing their place in the social work profession, means at times, regulating practice behaviours to align “their personal choices with the ends of government” (Rose and Millers 1992, 188). The normalizing forces of these taken-for-granted tropes dominate social work practice today, and may lead to social worker’s lack of, or limited engagement with issues that may be conceptualized as “risky” in this particular moral order; it “can result in social worker’s cutting off ideas about other concerns before they even emerge” (Weinberg 2010, 37). The contradictions between the practice of social work and its values have never been more glaring.

Furthermore, questions of privilege—embedded in our social locations, world-views, and professionalism—should be a central concern of our practice. Weinberg (2010) urges us to recognize the ways that social worker’s own accountability in the development and maintenance of oppressive social structures is erased. In relation to participation in transnational protest, we can consider how our perceptions of our racialized clients, the socially constructed validity of their struggles, and the limitations of our practice reinforces who makes decisions about the
forms and practices of resistance that are legitimated by social work, and how these
determinations about activism are made.

Put simply, these concerns trouble our conceptualization of social work practice in
Canada. In a globalized world, the internationalization of social problems in one location become
problematic—often in new ways—in other nation spaces (Dominelli 2010). Now, injustices
experienced in Canadian communities can and do emanate from the forces of other nations and
the globalization of social issues. People’s struggles are experienced locally and globally. As
Mapp (2007) points out, no longer does embracing the logics of international social work require
that social workers leave the country. Social workers in mental health settings are working with
clients who are traumatized from death and tragedy in other countries. Social workers working in
schools are working with students addressing the poverty or wars of their homelands. Social
workers working in domestic violence shelters are working with women who face immigration
issues. How can we draw upon these insights to prepare social work for unfolding crises and
resistances around the world?

In this section, I point to implications for three areas of social work theory, practice, and
education to develop (1) a reconsideration of the boundaries of social justice; (2) a
conceptualization of transnational activism as citizenship for critical social work; and (3) lessons
on the politics of protests that we must learn and teach.

(i) Rethinking the boundaries of social justice

In the opening chapter of this dissertation I asked, as Solas (2008) does, “what kind of
social justice does social work seek?” (p. 813) After completing this study, I am forced to extend
that question to also ask, who does social work seek social justice for? This project highlights the ongoing tension of social work’s commitment to social justice that is limited by, if not at odds with, its conceptualization as bound within the nation-state. I argue that the boundaries of social work must expand as the boundaries of our worlds do. While it may be easier to prioritize the needs of those who are close to us instead of those living across borders, globalization blurs these distinctions. Communities are engaged across dual scales that connect them to the violence of decolonization and redistribution in the East, as well as the struggle for recognition in the West. Based on the tradition of postcolonial scholars, I assert that principles of social (in)justice emerge from these moments of resistance. As they protested on behalf of the Tamil population in Sri Lanka, the social and cultural rights of the Tamil diaspora in Canada was deeply threatened through exclusionary public discourse and practices. Their collective rights as a community and a people were eroded to highlight their “othered,” “outlawed,” and “outsider” status, despite their attempts to participate in the democratic tradition of non-violent protest. The Tamil diaspora is not the only racialized community to experience this particular kind of exclusion in Canada.

Critical social work requires a multifaceted approach to rethink the boundaries of this social injustice. For the most part, dominant Western social work literature and practice does not include an emancipatory politics, an understanding of transnationalism, or a consideration of decolonization for racialized communities within its framework for social justice, but approach them as separate and disconnected phenomena. Bridging an investment in anti-colonial resistance (Lundy 2004; Mullaly 2002; Carniol 2005), with an understanding of the struggles and transnational activisms of racialized, migrant communities, requires an awareness of social work and social work issues around the world. It necessitates engaging with countries’ complex struggles emerging from colonialism, like the Sri Lankan conflict, through multi-layer, multi-
scalar dynamics that construct and maintain apartheid, colonial and imperial systems of domination between the East and the West. For this engagement, social work must embark on a new relationship with activism and social justice. The effectiveness of our work for social change is inseparable from the resistance of transnational communities. We are also interconnected within and through state structures that sustain and enforce the conditions of our clients’ citizenship. In other words, we are in essence, part of the bureaucracy of social justice and injustice. Within this context, while we may be prepared to take on the work of mourning or loss, we must also ponder how we are equipped to take on the obligations of decolonization on Canadian soil and in faraway places, made closer through global citizenship practice.

(ii) Positioning transnational activism as citizenship for critical social work practice

A growing movement within social work has come to critique the exclusions rendered by formal citizenship status as unsuitable for interpreting the practice of citizenship (Lister 1998; George et al. 2004; Bhuyan 2012; Moosa-Mitha 2005; van Ewijk 2009). My study of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests offers important insights into citizenship for critical social work. First, it highlights the precarious conditions underlying racialized communities experience of their citizenship, where transnational activism can be viewed as a contradiction to national conditions of citizenship and political participation. Despite the promise of multiculturalism, formal citizenship is not a neutral category that supports public forms of resistance. As we see through this dissertation, protesters are racially and spatially marked through their activism. Their pain evokes a particular form of apathy by the public that is institutionally enforced. As social workers, working within spaces that enforce the surveillance of racialized communities—spaces
such as hospitals, schools, social services, and academia—our work directly and indirectly interacts with the social movements of others. The exclusions rendered through activism point to the critical engagements and knowledge we should be producing in our places of work, as well as point to the importance of being educated consumers of the media and knowledge already in circulation.

Secondly, by framing protest itself as a dimension of citizenship practice, social workers can consider strategies to enhance the citizenship of the communities they work with and within. Based on the findings of this project, I evoke Ehrkamp and Leitner’s (2003) position to argue that citizenship practice incorporates local, national and transnational scales simultaneously. While the nation state functions as a crucial mediator of citizenship rights, practices and acts, interrelated scales challenge the practice of citizenship and the struggles of marginalized groups. As a “multiscalar social practice,” the scales and spaces of citizenship are not hierarchical but are interrelated and overlapping (Grundy and Smith 2005). As this study demonstrates, representations of racialized communities, their activism, and their agency are produced simultaneously within the Canadian and the transnational context. Their claims for citizenship are tempered through public discourse, social structures and knowledge production that operates across scales and spaces. As I examine in Chapter 2, for the Tamil diaspora, multiple forces and structures of oppression influence the conditions of their citizenship. This community that faces persecution in Sri Lanka continues to be repressed in the West for its racial, ethnic, and social markers, as well as through the construction of “terrorists” during the age of this threat. The majority politics erasing the liberation struggle of Tamil people in Sri Lanka bind similar systems of knowledge production to marginalize the diaspora’s voices in the West. As such, when we consider the multi-scalar dimensions of citizenship, it is necessary to recognize the
imperial forces that historically led to people’s displacement, but also the continued subjugation they and their movements face in white settler society that discursively erase regimes of violence and revolution rooted in the legacy of colonialism.

Through an exploration of protest as citizenship practice—a relevant global and local category for social justice—this framework responds to the urgent call by George et al (2008) to address citizenship as a multifaceted, complex notion vital to social work’s community practice. As such, it offers important insights into professional, social and political practices defining and exercising citizenship practice through contemporary social movements. It allows us to engage with the recomposition of civil society transmitted through transnational networks in a global society. As social workers, it is paramount to establish the ways in which transnational social movements for decolonization and social justice are entwined with and should be deeply engrained within the work we do. Pondering this dimension is inherently connected to how we as social workers conceptualize the citizenship and agency of our clients, imagine the boundaries of our work and our communities, and contest the limitations of our profession. The lack of a coherent framework of citizenship practice across borders for social work not only inhibits and impairs our engagement within these movements, but limits our ability to evaluate our effectiveness in community practice.

(iii) Teaching and learning the politics of protest

Based on this study of the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests, I draw insights related to teaching and learning the politics of activism. Most notably, this project highlights the exclusionary processes and conditions of a white settler society that challenge racialized
communities’ resistance through protest. Through Fook’s (2002) framing of critical social work practice as one that “will focus both on how structures dominate, but also on how people construct and are constructed by changing social structures and relations” (p. 18), I encourage social work’s engagement with the social activism of others to problematize and address the conditions that foster and further discrimination through dissent, for racialized communities and for social workers.

Second, we must re-learn the politics of dissent by locating protest within a realm of possibilities and strategies to make claims to the state. Within social work practice, advocacy is key to achieving social justice (Hoefer 2006). Grounding advocacy within the infrastructure of social worker’s practice(s), resistance for social work must be conceptualized and taught as a range of resistance that is part of a multi-implementation strategy that includes coalition building, lobbying, participation in electoral politics, and political education. We must learn to be overtly engaged in political debates and consciousness-raising to address the structural and political causes of individuals and communities’ oppression and more fully address the inequities that underpin the lives of our clients (Mullaly 2002).

While limiting, arbitrary and conditional, social workers must consider new avenues and strategies to express and manage dissent. Bell (2007) identifies that social workers generally “straddle the fence between activism and some other role” (p. 47); yet, during a social movement wave, they are forced to re-examine their role in social action. She suggests that it is this space of uncertainty caused by shifting practices and values that allows the possibility to create openings for dissenting social workers to transform the boundaries of their community practice. As evidenced by the major social movements of the past century, activism contributes practical and technical solutions to social problems. Protestors also extend our moral languages by sometimes
generating new ways of understanding the complexities of social life. Even when we may disagree with protestor’s positions, they may still challenge us to re-think our institutions, allegiances, values and actions. As we do this, we must more cautiously and thoughtfully consider what our non-profit sector’s legacy will be in relation to social justice.

Finally, while we can educate the next generation of social workers to impart skills to be agents of change, this is not to require or suggest that social workers become the “expert.” We must instead consider strategic ways to not only bear witness to social movements, but also ally with community organizing groups who are already training community members to become activists, mobilizing community members to vote, and pressuring lawmakers and government administrators for reforms that will benefit their communities. For example, community groups within the Tamil diaspora have been tirelessly organizing through a range of political avenues since 2009, with various successes. Most recently, through the mobilization of numerous organizations serving the Tamil community in Canada, in March 2014, the Ontario legislature unanimously passed the Tamil Heritage Month Act with the support of all parties; this Act proclaimed January as Tamil Heritage Month. The passing of this Act also included a moment of silence by all Canadian MPPs and members of the Galleries for Tamil lives lost in Sri Lanka. These are historic and tremendous achievements that demonstrate a recognition of personhood, the strength of transnational activism through various avenues of citizenship practice and the mobilization of diaspora groups. However, to be clear, I share this anecdote to not simply embrace community group’s work towards political representation and recognition as a unique success, but to simultaneously encourage social workers to ally with these groups and problematize how some forms of activism are embraced in particular moments when others are
not; together, we can create a more nuanced understanding of the politics of resistance that are manifested simultaneously and incrementally in Canada.

We are also pushed to reconsider the forms and types of practice we consider to be social work activism. Tamil non-profit and civil society organizations are at the forefront of the communities’ activism in Canada. They continue to mobilize individually and collectively to pursue issues of social justice in Sri Lanka. For example, on April 13th 2014, over 70 organizations serving Canadian Tamils came together in the Council Chambers of Toronto’s City Hall to participate in a Tamil Community General Assembly. This event was the culmination of several months of community engagement to document a collective voice for the Tamil diaspora across Canada. The participating organizations included a wide spectrum of social, cultural and political agencies: arts organizations, social service organizations, human rights organizations, sports clubs, Tamil high school groups, and Canadian student associations, all representing a range of interests, geographical and social locations. The intention of this event was to build a common ground and unified front to communicate the collective voice of the Tamil diaspora by documenting clear demands for civil society and public office. In this public forum, representatives from these organizations debated and voted on numerous points for consensus. This included constructing a unified narrative of the history of colonization in Sri Lanka, the history of the democratic and armed struggle, the current ground realities in the Tamil homeland, the unique issues women and children face in this context and the parameters of the Sri Lankan constitution that limit activism and political participation of Tamil’s in Sri Lanka. This consensus document identified the responsibilities of the international community, as well as, the unique responsibilities for members of the Tamil diaspora. It also acknowledged the efforts made by the Canadian government towards accountability and social justice in Sri Lanka and
documented productive next steps for federal, provincial and municipal levels of government to pursue. It concluded with an acknowledgement of the effects of criminalizing the Tamil community’s activism, both within Sri Lanka, within Canada and internationally.

Do we consider the actions of these organizations for radical social engagement and social change as social work? Are these strategies for social justice any less significant without a professional degree in social work? How do we re-consider the forms of social work practice that are valued, recognized and constructed to frame social work discourse on social justice? As Lavalette (2011) reminds us, communities’ and civil society organizations continue to mobilize and respond to community needs in moments of crisis. These groups may or may not have professional qualifications in social work, but the work they do is social work. Recognizing the legitimacy and value of these emerging, community-based yet simultaneously transnational activist practices require us to expand the limitations of what we consider social work practice and community practice to be. This is a critical next step for our work towards social justice.

**Problematizing the tensions of social work practice through protest**

To be a social worker who is “neutral” is to be a social worker who blocks change (Freire 1985). As such, social workers must be trained to articulate the politics of social exclusion that frames their anti-oppressive practice; they must also be trained to challenge the representational and material conditions underlying a politics of resistance. However, as I grant primacy to protest activities through this project, I recognize that they are only one strategy within a range of techniques to make claims upon the state. Furthermore, in the current neoliberal Canadian climate, social workers face two urgent barriers to activism: the legislation and surveillance contributing to Canada’s “advocacy chill;” and the market logics of neoliberalism which
influence non-profit organizations’ ability to organize and limits the kinds of activism they can participate in.

The Canadian Government has created the conditions for a broad ranging, pervasive culture of an “advocacy chill.” This term refers to “the inhibitory effect that government laws and funding regimes have had on NPO advocacy behaviour over the past few decades—a phenomenon that is, in essence, a form of “civic participation chill” (DeSantis 2010, 26).

According to a study by the Canadian Press of the Canada Revenue Agency’s Charity Database (2012), less than one percent of registered charities utilize any of their resources for political activities: out of the 850,000 registered charities in this sample, 848,550 did not use any resources towards political activities.

In Canada, two significant legislations limit the activism of non-profit organizations. First, the Federal Lobbyist Act provides parameters and requirements on organizations to document and register their interactions with government officials and politicians (Phillips 2009). Second, the Income Tax Act through the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) (2003), specifies the nature of advocacy activities that are allowed and administers penalties for non-compliance. 32 Under the Income Tax Act, only 10% of registered charities’ resources (including non-financial resources such as volunteer time) can be spent towards non-partisan political activities that further their organizational mandate. The penalty for not abiding to this regulation

32 The Canadian Revenue Agency (2003) narrowly defines political activities as follows:
   1. explicitly communicates a call to political action (that is, encourages the public to contact an elected representative or public official and urges them to retain, oppose, or change the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country);
   2. explicitly communicates to the public that the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country should be retained (if the retention of the law, policy or decision is being reconsidered by a government), opposed, or changed; or
   3. explicitly indicates in its materials (whether internal or external) that the intention of the activity is to incite, or organize to put pressure on, an elected representative or public official to retain, oppose, or change the law, policy, or decision of any level of government in Canada or a foreign country.
is having the charity’s ability to issue income tax receipts to its donors revoked for a year by the Canadian Revenue Agency. Political constraint rules function to suppress issues that may be in the public interest, and contribute to a general muting of resistance in the nonprofit sector (O’Halloran and McGregor-Lowndes 2011). Furthermore, in the implementation of this legislation, there is evidence that organizations are scrutinized differently: studies suggest that the CRA and the courts appear to treat research institutes more leniently than grassroots organizations (Broder 2002; Phillips 2001).

The limit on political activity and the fear of losing charitable status was further compounded in 2012, when the Federal Budget allocated $8 million dollars to police Canadian charities’ advocacy restrictions (The Canadian Press 2012). This has a significant impact on a sector already experiencing an “advocacy chill,” where many charities likely avoid all political activities, even those that are allowed and would help their client’s and their organizational mandate, because they are unclear about the conditions underlying the legislation distinction between sharing views and advocating a change of law and are afraid of the consequences. This lack of clarity for organizations regarding what and what does not constitute political activity, leads to confusion about the interpretation of laws, and results in organizations’ stifling advocacy action for fear of government reprisals (DeSantis 2008). The impacts of these conditions cannot be minimized.

Shifts in government funding regimes also contribute to Canada’s advocacy chill. Neoliberalism and privatization, with its logic of market fundamentalism, transforms worker advocacy and client participation through new funding arrangements. Specifically, non-profit organizations with government contracts have reported pressure to deliver services and de-emphasize community outreach and advocacy (Scott 2003, as cited in DeSantis 2010). This is a
disturbing reality in a context where successive federal governments since the early 1990’s have cut millions of dollars of funding from agencies, many of which were known for their advocacy work (Phillips 2009). These regimes create a competitive environment that has proliferated professional advocacy (Hasenfeld and Garrow 2012), where instead non-profit organizations are forced to compete against each other for funding, and tend not to readily cooperate on advocacy campaigns (Browne 1996; Luther and Prempeh 2003).

Simultaneously, the neoliberalization of the social service sector transforms “the rights and obligations of citizenship from an ethic (if not always the reality) of non-contractual reciprocities based on the rights and responsibilities of equal inclusion, into one in which the right of social inclusion is conditional on being party to a market exchange of equivalent value” (Somers 2008, 72). As such, the failure to obtain needed services is framed as a failure of the individual to navigate the market effectively, and clients are expected to express their dissent through exit rather than voice (Hirschman 1970). Together, fears of reprisal, and fears of attracting negative attention by donors, the media or elected officials, implies that the participation of clients in protest activities may be more client-initiated than organized through social service agencies (Bass et al. 2007).

This is not to say that non-profit organizations do not have a key role to play in bringing about direct change for their clients and in bringing about broader social change, as evidenced by the work of Canadian Tamil civil society organizations. There are two paths we can consider. The first and most straightforward step towards social action is familiarizing ourselves with, and engaging with the resistance practices that are “allowed” within and through our organizations. Alternatively, we can place advocacy at the centre of our work, regardless of the risks. Whichever path we choose, rather that step away from all forms of political activism, we must
more fully understand the range and extent of dissent we can meaningfully engage in, support our clients engagement with, and the conditions of legislation that themselves require resistance.

*Limitations of this work*

There are two major analytical limitations to this study. Analytically considering the ways that oppression is articulated and intermeshed with multiple forms of social oppression, ontological bases, discourses and division, allows us to conceptualize the complex, fluctuating and changing assemblage of the racialized activist. In her radical writings on *Terrorist Assemblages*, Jasbir Puar (2007) discusses the relationship of Muslim, Arab, Sikh and South Asian bodies through a series of dispersed but mutually implicated formations of securitization, terrorism, torture, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality and “homonationalism;” she points to the importance of contextualizing the assemblage through negotiations of the nation. While this dissertation explores the assemblage through a focus on race, space and transnationality, it is notably lacking in its engagement with other relevant components, such as gender, class, sexuality, age and Canadian constructions of humanitarianism that were also apparent in the data corpus. Of these categories, two areas are particularly poignant and would have enhanced the theoretical framework of this project. First, the construction of gender was strikingly apparent in media discourses, both when it was inherently unmarked to construct the “terrorist” as male, as well as in the particularly gendered ways it was marked when it was made present. As signifiers of a culture, women were a critical part of the discursive construction of difference: they provided the boundary markers between “them” and “us” (Jiwani 2005; Fanon 1965; Yegenoglu 1998). An exploration of gendered discourses underlying racialized communities activism is part of my ongoing work.
In addition, this dissertation does not engage with the complex discourses that construct Canadian mythologies of humanitarianism that can also provide important insights into responses to transnational activism in Canada. Critiques remind us that the racial logic underlying Canadian narratives of humanitarianism abroad transforms public memory into a “new story… about the heroism of the peacekeepers of Northern countries and the traumas they have had to endure as they go about the business of assisting Third World nations into modernity” (Razack 2004, 7). I am interested in the formation of this mythology during the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests because discourses of Canada’s role as peacekeeper were evoked in unique and contradictory ways. Media discourses primarily conjured narratives of Canada’s humanitarianism to highlight its generosity in “welcoming” Tamil migrants in the first place. News accounts repeatedly portrayed Canada as a multicultural haven that “offered peace and pluralism over the bombings and bloodshed of their homeland” (Reinhart 2009, A13). While discourses construct a place of civilized rescue—a “welcoming nation” that “saved” the Tamil diaspora—the boundaries of its humanitarianism were redrawn by identifying its limits. By redefining the parameters of Canada’s humanitarianism through this process, media discourses maintained national identity while simultaneously lessening the urgency for intervention. Through this process, Canadian national identity remains intact and readily resurrectable at some other time. Understanding how dimensions of national identity are evoked and reframed in relation to resistance is critical for both Canadian scholars and activists. I explore contestations of media discourses on this topic in a forthcoming paper titled, “Transnational activism and evolving media discourses of Canadian humanitarianism,” to be published in Transnational Social Review – A Social Work Journal (TSR) – Mapping Transnationalism (Jeyapal 2014).
The second limitation is the lack of policy analysis. While media discourses and interviews with journalists, media representations, activists and community members provide insight into the representational politics underlying the protests, an inclusion of international policy analysis would have enhanced this work. It would have made it possible to ask different questions, grounded in different realities and shed additional light on the material consequences of responses to protest.

There were also methodological limitations to this project relating to data collection. First, my focus on mainstream media in English excluded a vast body of media in Tamil and Sinhala languages that may contribute to the topic. In addition, primarily focusing on the mainstream media excludes alternative or more marginal discourses that may have been circulating in local or virtual spaces. Second, as this research was conducted years after the movement’s peak in 2009, some contextual aspects of the movement are historically removed. The key informant interviews shed light into some of these areas: some participants suggested that the temporal distance between the actual protests and the current moment incited more questioning around the heterogeneity of experiences and politics around issues of the protest.

Finally, I point to the limitations related to my own writing of this dissertation. While the 3-paper dissertation format I employed for this study allowed me to create scholarship that targets multiple audiences and is accessible—goals I most valued for this project—it does not contain the space for the level of detail traditionally afforded to a dissertation. As such, I have condensed the presentation of my arguments and the data supporting the claims that I make, at the expense of the richness of “thick description” (Geertz 1973). Furthermore, in writing this dissertation, I turn to the limitations of my own “voice” (Jackson and Mazzei 2009). In parts of this dissertation, I speak from the first person making this work appear very subjective. In other
parts, it is narrated in the third person, giving the illusion of objectivity and espousing a more traditional style of academic writing. Similarly, I have not thoroughly engaged with or answered often-asked questions around my own identity politics as a woman of Sinhalese and Tamil origin in relation to the Sinhalese-Tamil conflict, shared the journey of my own activism, nor narrated the pain, suffering or loss I have experienced, or continue to experience from this struggle. This was a decision that has been deeply personal and political. While I am committed to reflexivity and believe that no “neutral” writing exists, I do not believe that my story has a place within the text of this particular critique of resistance, race and citizenship. Furthermore, I intend to use my own omission to draw attention to the practice insisted upon racialized, marginalized scholars in the academy; a process that requires that they, as native informants, share their own experiences of pain, inciting a process that is not exempt from the commodification I discuss in Chapter 3 where institutional whiteness allows and encourages “stealing the pain of others” (Razack 2007).
Pathways forward

In a powerful address to the British Association of Social Workers nearly four decades ago, Bill Jordan (1975) posed a critical question asking that while social workers recognize clients as fellow human beings,

Did we also consider them as fellow citizens—as members of the same community as ourselves, respecting similar obligations, contributing to similar social ends. Do we see them as moral equals, as equals before the law? Do we consider their freedoms, their rights in the same light as our own? . . . or do we make decisions as if their citizenship was different and limited? (Jordan 1975, as cited in Lister 1998, 13).

This question offers an insightful challenge to the role of social work within and for migrant communities, through a radical conceptualization of the dimensions of citizenship in relation to our own. Yet, as I ponder these points at the close of this dissertation, I am left with as many new questions as I started with. As I demonstrate in the introduction of this dissertation, social workers have a contentious relationship with racialized communities in Canada; as a profession, we have been largely silent in recognizing or engaging with the social movements for social justice. How can we interrogate and interrupt social work’s historical and contemporary apathy towards the social movements of racialized others? Yet, as I urge the incorporation of transnational activism as critical social work practice, I cannot remove this urgency from the reality of social work practice on the ground. While social workers have unique positions within social structures, spaces and policy, there are also limitations to this role. What are the limitations to social worker’s “discretionary power” (Lipsky 1980) in navigating systems and structures that resist activism or reinforce a racial hegemonic status quo? How do our visions for
social justice and the limitations of our own power mutually support and/or contradict each
other? What are the logistical challenges of embracing an emancipatory politics?

Facing my own critique of the overwhelmingly negative response to the 2009 Tamil
diaspora protests, I have to ask the dreaded, “now what?” How can racialized communities
continue to negotiate claims to space, citizenship and social justice despite the racial logic
underlying their reception and response? What are the practices, policies and supports necessary
to challenge hegemonic discourses of race, space and citizenship? And finally, I turn to the
contradictions of anti-colonial movements in colonial spaces. How can and do racialized groups
negotiate their roles as settlers and colonials, as colonizer and colonized? How can and do
communities engaged in anti-colonial resistance for space, sovereignty, and social justice engage
with practices and politics of their own decolonization while being respectful of and in solidarity
with indigenous peoples whose lands they occupy?

The powerful words of Arundhati Roy (2003, 75) remind us that the road ahead is
daunting and convoluted but not impossible:

Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of
oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our
stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness—and our ability to tell our
own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re brainwashed to believe. The
corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling—their ideas,
their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability. Remember
this: we be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them. Another world
is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.
While the 2009 Tamil diaspora protests highlighted the pervasiveness of empire, it also made visible the desire for and possibility of “another world” through resistance and mobilization across borders. It brought the transnational struggles of others through mass mobilization to the forefront of Canadian discourse in a way it never had before, in a scale and a manner that was unprecedented. Marked by competing conditions of agency and subordination, this transnational movement points to the power and privileges that must be disrupted in order to pave the way. The protests cast a long shadow on who we are as Canadians, and how we, as social workers, come to define our work. As the pages of this dissertation indicate, the journey awaiting social workers striving towards radical social justice is a deeply political one.
Appendices
Appendix A

Recruitment Script for Key Informant Interviews

Dear ____,

My name is Daphne Jeyapal and I am a PhD Candidate conducting student research from the Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto about media representations of the 2009 Tamil Diaspora Demonstrations in Toronto. I am interested in how the protests and the Tamil community were represented in national and local media. In addition, I would like to know how you think these portrayals may impact public responses to the protests as they unfolded, and over time.

If you are interested, I would like to invite you to discuss these perspectives further. If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will have a choice to participate in a one-on-one interview or a phone interview at a place/time that is convenient for you.

I have attached an information sheet that provides additional information on the research process. I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto. However, please note that the choice to participate in this interview is completely up to you.

If you have any questions or are interested in participating, please email me at daphne.jeyapal@utoronto.ca.

Your involvement will be very valuable in developing a better understanding of media representations of protest in Canada and public responses to racialized communities’ activisms.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Daphne Jeyapal, PhD Candidate
FSW, University of Toronto
Appendix B:

Information Sheet for Key Informant Interviews

Doctoral Research:

The 2009 Tamil Diaspora Demonstrations: An intertextual critical discourse analysis of national and local media

I am inviting you to take part in a research study. Below you can find further information on the study. Please read this information and discuss it with others if you wish. If you have any questions, or need any clarification, please feel free to ask.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research study focuses on media representations of the Tamil Diaspora protests that took place in Toronto in 2009. I would like to explore the perspectives of activists, media representatives, scholars, service providers and advocates about the public portrayals of the protests. I am interested in what you think about how national and local media represented the protests at the time; how you think it has contributed to current conversations on activism and diaspora politics in Canada, and what impact this may have to your own work. Your involvement in this study will be very valuable in developing a better understanding of the roles and responses to protest, activism by the Tamil diaspora and the public perception of social movements that have followed.

Do I have to take part?

No, this study is entirely voluntary, and it is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, please keep this information sheet and review it closely. If you agree to participate in this study, you are still free to withdraw at any time. A decision not to take part or a decision to withdraw, will not affect your association with the researcher, any members of the research committee, or with your work place. It is also important to note that the study is not about you as an individual nor, in the case of service providers, is the study an evaluation of how well you do your job.

What will happen if I do take part?

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will have a choice to participate in a one-on-one interview or phone interview, which will be 1 to 2 hours long. Interview times and location will be scheduled depending on your availability and preference.

The choice to participate in this study is completely up to you. In either case, please note that you can refuse to answer any question you don’t want to and stop the interview at any time. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time during or after the interview. If you choose
to withdraw from the study, all audio or notes taken during the course of the interview will be destroyed.

**Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All information that is collected about you for the study will be kept strictly confidential. I will not include your name or any other information that might identify you in the written record of the interview or materials that follow. In addition, you have the option to view my transcribed notes on the interview - with all identifiers removed - if you so choose.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I do not foresee any risks from your participation in the research. However, if participating in this project causes you any emotional discomfort, please know that I have been trained to direct you to immediate support should this be required. Also, be reminded that you can withdraw your response to any question or terminate participation at any point of this study if you choose.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There may not be any direct benefits for you; however, I hope that you might enjoy sharing your perspectives and experiences with me. The results of the study will make a contribution to the field of social movements by uncovering the underlying context of national and local media representations. This, in turn, will help re-examine activist strategies and service delivery systems for racialized communities.

**What will happen to the results of the research?**

The findings from this research will be disseminated through the researcher’s PhD dissertation. Lessons from the research will be used to inform the development of similar projects in the future. Please note that I will not use your name or any other information that might identify you in any report(s). The dissertation will be available by December 2014. I will also disseminate study findings through international conferences, publication in scholarly journals, and public education materials. I am very open to hearing about any additional ideas you may have about the dissemination process during our interview.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto. The University’s Research Ethics Committee has also reviewed and approved the research. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Ethics ([ethics.review@utoronto.ca](mailto:ethics.review@utoronto.ca), 416-946-3273), if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information!

For further information please feel free to contact:
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form for Key Informant Interviews

Doctoral Research:

The 2009 Tamil Diaspora Demonstrations: An intertextual critical discourse analysis of national and local media

Date: Insert, 2012

Purpose of the Research

This research study focuses on media representations of the Tamil Diaspora protests that took place in Toronto in 2009. I am interested in what you think about how national and local media represented the protests at the time; how you think it has contributed to current conversations on activism and diaspora politics in Canada, and what impact this may have to your own work.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research: If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will have a choice to participate in a one-on-one interview or phone interview, which will be 1 to 2 hours long, at a time and place of your convenience. The choice to participate in this interview is completely up to you.

Risks and Discomforts: I do not foresee any risks from your participation in the research. However, if participating in this project causes you any emotional discomfort, please know that I been trained to direct you to immediate support should this be required. Also, be reminded that you can refuse to answer any question you don’t want to, and stop the interview at any time.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: There may not be any direct benefits for participants. However, it is possible that you might enjoy sharing your experiences. The results of the study will make a contribution to the field of transnational social movements by exploring the underlying context of national and local media representations. This, in turn, will help re-examine activist strategies and service delivery systems for racialized communities.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time.

Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the study at any time. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the University of Toronto, or any other group associated with this project or topic.

Confidentiality: If you approve, the interview will be audio-recorded. The audio-recording will be typed out and I will use the interview for data analysis in the future. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will not record the interview and hand-written notes will be taken instead. All
information you supply during the research will be held in confidence; your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. All identifiers will be removed. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only I will have access to this information. Your consent forms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet. Once all identifiers are removed, the transcribed interview or hand-written notes on the interview may be retained for use in future projects. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research?  If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact Daphne Jeyapal at daphne.jeyapal@utoronto.ca. Alternative, feel free to contact XXX. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, please contact Rachel Zand, Director, Office of Research Ethics, University of Toronto, at (416) 946-3389. This research has been reviewed by the Human Participants in Research Committee, University of Toronto’s Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines.

Legal Rights and Signatures

I, __________________________, consent to participate in The 2009 Tamil Diaspora Protest Media Project. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Participant

Signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Researcher
Appendix D

Key Informant Interview Guide

The following is a general semi-structured interview guide that I will use to lead the individual key informant interviews about the media representations of the 2009 Tamil Diaspora Protests. I will field test the interview guide and may modify it as needed, as preceding interviews may inform subsequent interviews. Before starting, I will conduct the informed consent process.

I. Introduction

The interviewer will:

- Welcome the participant and introduce herself
- Explain the general purpose of the interview discussion and what the study is about
- Explain the presence and purpose of recording equipment
- Address the issue of confidentiality; explain that all information shared will be kept anonymous unless they request otherwise
- Inform of length and format of interview
- Invite the participant to introduce her/himself

II. Interview

(A) General survey:
- Can you tell me what you know about the Tamil protests that took place in 2009?
- Did you take part in the protests?
- How did you get information about the protests?

(B) What media do you access / did you access at the time of the protest

- What media sources do you read or listen to regularly? Which media sources did you access at the time of the protests in 2009? Which media sources inform your knowledge about activism by the Tamil Diaspora and the community in general?
  - Newspapers
  - Magazines
  - Radio/TV
  - Websites
- Do you read/listen to the media on/about immigration in language other than English? If so, which language? Which source?

Depending on participant’s exposure to media, the following section(s) will be reviewed:

(C) Understanding the national media

- What are your general thoughts on the work of this form of media?
What functions do they serve for the Tamil community, as well as the rest of Canadian society?

How would you describe the way they represented the Tamil diaspora protests and the continued activism of the community?

How would you describe the similarities/differences between this media form (compared to the others) and their coverage of the protest? Why do you think this is the case?

Have you noticed any mention of the protests in news coverage after the protests ended?

Do you think the 2009 protests impacted the content of media conversations on protest in general, or the Tamil diaspora more specifically? If so, how? What was captured? What did you think about it?

Based on your interactions within/with the Tamil community prior to/during the time of the protests/after how do you interpret media representations of the events of the protests?

(D) Understanding local media

What are your general thoughts on the work of this form of media?

What functions do they serve for the Tamil community, as well as the rest of Canadian society?

How would you describe the way they represented the Tamil diaspora protests and the continued activism of the community?

How would you describe the similarities/differences between this media form (compared to the others) and their coverage of the protest? Why do you think this is the case?

Have you noticed any mention of the protests in news coverage after the protests ended?

Do you think the 2009 protests impacted the content of media conversations on protest in general, or the Tamil diaspora more specifically? If so, how? What was captured? What did you think about it?

Based on your interactions within/with the Tamil community prior to/during the time of the protests/after how do you interpret media representations of the events of the protests?

(E) Is there a link between media coverage on the protests and how you do your work/activism?

Looking back, what coverage in the media on the protests made the most impression on you?

- What was the news report about?
- Why did it make an impression on you?

Has there been a particular coverage/issue that required you to change how your work (if applicable)?

- Devoting more time responding to calls/inquiries from community members
- Using an article for your work
- Raising concerns for you about the service you provide so that you have to consult with colleagues in the sector?
- Makes you think about a service gap?
(F) Suggestions

- Do you have any other suggestions of media that provided coverage on the 2009 Tamil Diaspora protests or continued coverage on the activist by the community that I should be examining in addition to these sources?
- Finally, do you have any final thoughts you would like to share? Things you think are important for us to consider as we move forward with the project?
- Do you have any thoughts on how the project was delivered? Recommendations or suggestions?

III. Closing

The key informants will be thanked for their participation.
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