

10 Rivalry in cyberspace and virtual contours of a new conflict zone

The Sri Lankan case

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When the computer screen becomes the surface of contact between two machinic species, people and computers, it also became a potential trap for individuals: software hacking, as was discovered early on, is powerfully addictive. Computer screens can become 'narcotic mirrors', trapping users by feeding them amplified images of their narcissistic selves. The same interface that allows users to control the machine, can give them a false and intoxicating sense of their power.

(Manuel De Landa 1991: 230)

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side by side, of the dispersed.

(Michel Foucault 1986: 23)

This chapter traces the emergence of a new conflict zone, concurrent to one of the world's bloodiest secessionist conflicts, through the Sri Lankan Tamil diasporic political engagements in cyberspace. The battle is waged between the Sri Lankan state and the ethnic Tamil separatist rebel organization the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), more commonly known as the Tamil Tigers. The objective of this chapter is to look at the diasporic political engagement in cyberspace and the new spatial dimension of the Sri Lankan conflict waged in cyberspace. This political conflict zone emerged with cyberspace providing the spatial attributes required for the becoming of a political space, especially for the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict. This has significantly shifted the ideological foundations of the ongoing conflict and remains an alternative but critical space for the actors of the conflict.

The comprehension of the importance of this space by both key actors in the conflict saw the Sri Lankan state attempting to striate and dominate it and the LTTE following suit. This reflects the classical attempts of waging war for the domination of spaces from antiquity to the modern age. The classic example is the ocean, identified as a smooth space, constantly viewed as needing to be subjected to state control or domination by vast fleets assembled by colonial pioneers. As Deleuze and Guattari note, 'one of the reasons for the hegemony of the west was the power in its state apparatus to striate by combining the technolo-

gies of the North and the Mediterranean and by annexing the Atlantic' (2004: 427).

Cyberspace has provided a smooth space to nomadic political forces leading to a radical alteration of the balance of power in this domain. This is an interesting observation, that in the evolution of this conflict, while simultaneously creating a conflict zone, the spatial conditions of cyberspace have radically altered the dynamics of the conflicts and strategies of the parties. It symbolizes the transformation of the war machine, as it organizes space in subtle ways, not just fortifications or battlefields. It often links together structures and places, which seem to us to belong to different orders.

The chapter traces the radical rupture in the development of political engagements in cyberspace in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict as the pattern of the cyberconflict has undergone significant transformation. This is introduced in two phases throughout this chapter. Where in the early phase the spatiality of land or state-based discourse dictated the cyber-political engagements and strategies, as illuminated above, the unique spatiality of cyberspace has dislocated this centrality and developed a radically new conflict zone, where the state-based strategic manoeuvres are constantly challenged, and where rethinking of such strategies has become a necessity. The analysis will run through the beginning of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, the formation of the ethnic Tamil diaspora, the theoretical framework which locates political spaces and relations of power and the actual cyberconflict which is taking place.

The ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka: contesting space

Multitudes of scholars, journalists and military analysts have provided interpretations and historical analyses of the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka. In the light of the core context of the chapter, I will provide a spatial analysis to the conflict and the importance of certain hegemonic spatial attributes mutually perceived as vital for the conflicting parties to dominate each other.

The Sri Lankan conflict is also essentially a spatial one. In general, a conflict, as a struggle to ascertain political identity and acquire political landscapes to control, both internally and externally or intra or inter-state, is basically a struggle for the control of space. The spatial analysis of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict is to develop the pattern of the conflict and to understand the emergence or transmutation of the conflict dynamic in cyberspace.

The conflict grew out of the demands to the state made by Tamils to alleviate their grievances and the consequent Sinhala-dominated central government's failure to remedy the discontents of the Tamil people. These demands turned radical with the declaration of Tamil homeland comprising of the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka and the emergence of militant Tamil groups challenging the state authority in these provinces. These provinces, especially the northern, are mostly inhabited by Tamils and this made it a natural heartland of resistance. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE/Tigers) emerged as the most dominant rebel outfit after a bloody campaign to wipe out opposition

among other Tamil militant groups (Hoole *et al.* 1992) and ever since have resorted to battle the Sri Lankan state for the formation of a separate Tamil homeland.

The history of the militancy can be traced to its origins in the late 1970s. The militancy gained momentum in the aftermath of the pogrom unleashed against the minority ethnic Tamils by majority Sinhalese in 1983. That year has always been a significant historical conjuncture in the context of the conflict or a temporal marker. In a spatial analysis, the riots signified the final phase in the delinking of ethnic Tamil people from the political place of the Sri Lankan state, or severing of the umbilical cord of citizenship and the liberal rights of a citizen from the state. This was the climax to a process of making majority Sinhala state policies that led to the uprooting of Tamils and their claim for their rights of a political space or the space of the nation-state. The riots demonstrated that there was no safe space for the Tamils and created the conditions for an unprecedented shift into a massive militarism of the Tamil people's struggle.

The final political uprooting of the Tamil claims was the sixth amendment to the constitution (introduced in the aftermath of the riots), which basically demanded an oath of allegiance to a unitary state from all members of parliament if they were to continue with their elected post as MPs. This successfully ejected the largest Tamil composition of MPs in the history of Sri Lankan democracy from the legislature. This eviction dislocated the Sri Lankan Tamils' political ambitions of self-determination, self-rule and Tamil voice from the pivotal political power structure, which governed spatial relations of the Sri Lankan state.

The riots and the sixth amendment had a synergistic effect on the plight of Tamil people in Sri Lanka. Their right to inherit a political space was taken away, both through social violence and the sheer brute force upheld through a constitutional sanction. This led to the radical departure from democratic politics by certain Tamil organizations to claim their own state within Sri Lanka. Although the notion of self-rule and homeland was accepted by Tamil politicians in the early 1970s, military struggle was not on the cards. These two incidents sealed the need for a military struggle and establishment of a Tamil nation-state independent from Sri Lanka, which was termed as 'Tamil Eelam' or 'Tamil homeland'.

The military component of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka is analysed in certain stages or phases, defined in military terms as a series of military campaigns fought between the Sri Lankan government forces and the LTTE. The phases of these conflicts are named as Eelam wars. Eelam will give nearly a million hits on Google and this demonstrates the global spatial pollination of the term. Throughout the four phases of the conflict, the objective was clear from both the LTTE and the state, the LTTE wanted to become the sole powerbroker in Tamil politics and the key military might and they wanted the Sri Lankan state to realize from 1983 onwards.

The LTTE was one such outfit where its leadership understood the importance of spatial dominance in militarism and sustenance of military hegemony,

and soon began taking on the Sinhala state with low-scale assassinations to ambushing and killing thirteen soldiers. This ambush signified the first virtual attack on the Sri Lankan state space and announced the beginning of the end of the traditional Sri Lankan space and the affirmation of a struggle to create a new political space independent of the political space of Sri Lanka. Ever since this incident, during the four phases, the struggle has been to hegemonize and control space. Each stage symbolized a certain political space from ideological, land, sea and air. In this struggle of hegemonizing of the political spaces and maintaining state control over them, the existence of a massive diaspora population has transferred to cyberspace. This has become the next space which the LTTE and the state later on realized to be an important political space for the continuation of the struggle.

Summed up above, the conflict has been the struggle between the Tamil Tiger rebels who have always challenged the striated, marked, territorialized Sri Lankan space and have successfully remapped certain territories of the state as under the control of the rebels. The rebels have engaged the Sri Lankan state simultaneously as a conventional army and in the form of a nomadic war machine, which has always challenged the state apparatus militarily. As De Landa (1991: 11) identifies, the tactics of the nomads were based on a combination of psychological shock and physical speed. The LTTE military strategies were mainly based on creating the above effect similar to that of the nomadic war strategies, while the Tigers integrated highly mobile guerrilla units and extensive mobile firepower to advance and take over Sri Lankan state territory. Most of their major military campaigns have been codenamed 'Unceasing Waves', adopted mainly from Vietcong type attack patterns. This also is similar to Deleuze's view of the nomadic war machine:

If nomads formed the war machine, it was by inventing absolute speed, by being synonymous with speed, and each time there is an operation against the state – insubordination, rioting, guerrilla warfare or revolution as act – it can be said that the war machine has revived.

(Deleuze 2004: 426)

To respond to these movements of nomadic warriors, the state has responded with intense striations of space with the objective of appropriating the war machine, its speed and movement by establishing garrisons, checkpoints and High Security Zones. The LTTE in its operational tactics did use the power of shock and awe and the speed tactics to start hegemonizing the political space that was emerging with the political participation of the diaspora. They started proliferation of websites, and LTTE maintained a shock and awe tactic of military tactics in cyberspace. By 1997, they successfully used email bombing tactics on Sri Lankan embassies in Washington and Toronto.

The phases of war included long and bloody wars of attrition with both the state and the LTTE making no clear gains and political peace processes mediated by India and Norway in 1987 and 2002. Currently, it is said that Sri Lanka

is experiencing an undeclared war of attrition, the fourth in its timeline. The state gained military victories in the eastern province, while the rebels responded with air strikes demonstrating their newly acquired military might. The LTTE has become the world's first terrorist organization to use air attacks without the support of any international state-entity. The organization's main sources of funding comes from a well established black market, operating shipping lines, providing logistics and smuggling support to the drug networks. A significant chunk of the funding comes from the internationally dispersed Tamil diaspora networks which the Tigers (LTTE) had absolute control of until recently. They are listed as the world's first terror outfit to use cyberterrorism techniques against the Sri Lankan state (Denning 1999; Vatis 2001).

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

The Sri Lankan diaspora, more than being a product of the conflict, originated under the conditions of which the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka was militarily triggered. Moreover, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora was the result of the historical uprooting of Tamil citizens from legitimate spaces of occupation. As the same conditions of the conflict created the Tamil diaspora, it has become an integral stakeholder in the conflict itself, since out of the nearly two million Tamils of Sri Lankan origin, nearly one-third come from the diaspora. The statistics and figures are mostly estimates, as no host country possesses exact number of Sri Lankan Tamils living in them.

Cyberspace enabled the diasporas to reterritorialize their inherently deterritorialized community action. As Deleuze and Guattari point out

reterritorialization must not be confused with a return to a primitive or older territoriality; it necessarily serves as a new territoriality by which one element, itself deterritorialized serves as a new territoriality for another, which has lost its territoriality as well.

(Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 174)

This spatial folding enabled this diasporic space to facilitate an aggregated multitude.¹ This is alluding to the concept introduced by Hardt and Negri in their seminal *Empire* (2000). Thus, such websites facilitating unique political formations are not just providing information or issues of news values, they are holding them within a unique space that has been created in cyberspace.

Theoretical impetus

The theoretical analysis of this chapter is based on the notion of the formation of political spaces and the role of power in such contested spaces. Consequently, there is a strong allusion to post-structural and post-modern viewpoints of space in the theoretical basis of this chapter, as space is projected as being a product of a set of relations. The post-structural perspective is a clear shift from the seden-

tary thinking of space, which normally theorizes space as held in a container with the nation-state considered the primary container, and the notion of fixity or geographic congruence affiliated to such thinking. Cyberspace in the post-structural context is seen as an ideal site where open relations are possible and new spaces are created. As Foucault points out about these new relations 'we do not live inside a void that could be coloured with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineate sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposed on one another' (1986: 23).

I have selected Massey and Deleuze as both theorists introduce space as the site of political engagement and power. The Deleuzian notion of space is linked to the notion of nomad. Massey's work has been central to transforming human geography into a disciplinary domain dedicated to the social theory project, while encouraging social sciences to take on complexities of space within their formulations. The significance of Massey's work arises from her insistence on conceptualizing space and place. For Massey, space is a social production, a sphere of possibility of multiplicity, space is always under construction. This type of theorizing really helps to critically understand the spatial formations in the form of cyberspace, as relations are seen as not just spatial, but also as political. In effect we are thinking of the spatial in a political way (Massey 2005: 9).

The concept of space is critical to the study of diaspora (Karim 2003: 6) and it is quintessential in understanding diasporan politics online. This is vital at the point of the diasporans' departure from physical political arenas to virtual sites of engagement and the forms that the engagements take, once they have been established in cyberspace. Doreen Massey views space as 'the simultaneous co-existence of social interrelations at all geographical scales, from the intimacy of the household to the wide spaces of transglobal connections' (Massey 1994).

In her recent studies Massey points out that her hope is to contribute to a process of liberating space from its odd chains of meaning and associating it with different ones which might have, in particular, a political potential. She criticizes the studies of space as immobile and closed instead of understanding it as dynamic with an ongoing process. Time and space are reducible to each other but they are both co-implicated (Massey 2005: 59). This is crucial for examining the emergence of distinct spatial properties in cyberspace, which induces political participation. As Hirst (2005: 3) points out, space is a resource for power, and the spaces of power are complex and qualitatively distinct. In this context, spaces do develop characteristics that affect the conditions in which power can be exercised, conflicts pursued and social control attempted. Thus, it is a space in which power projects take shape and hegemonic interests are unleashed.

Cyberspace is transformed through constant human engagement in it, thus these interactions continuously transform and shape properties in it. This shaping of cyberspace provides the space to be facilitating political practices. In the context of Tamil nationalist struggle, the differential placing of local struggles within the complex power geometry of spatial relations is a key element in the formation of their political identities and politics. In turn, political activity reshapes both identities and spatial relations. Thus, the notion of multiplicity,

which both Massey and Deleuze elucidate, is a critical factor for theorizing cyberspace and its political formations. In the case of Tamil nationalist politics, the recent past witnessed the emergence of a dissident movement from the LTTE, which began its own political activation among the diasporans. These political activities have shaped their movement and emerged as an alternative political force, with major emphasis on cyberspace as a political place or location of operation for the dissidents. This represents complex power geometry of space/cyberspace as relational and as the sphere of multiplicity. This is an essential part of the character in constant power reconfiguration through political engagement.

Finally, in theorizing space Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004) introduce the notion of a nomad space and its power, which can challenge the state structure. This theorization can be further explored in the case of virtual diasporans and the way they utilize cyberspace and how they evolve during the whole process. Their political engagement has made them some sort of nomads of cyberspace, challenging the Sri Lankan state. Deleuze and Guattari see this space as, 'not as a space with intrinsic properties that then determine relations, but as a space with extrinsic properties; the space is produced from the movements that then give that space its peculiar quality' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 401). Deleuze and Guattari's notion of nomadology and space is a classic analysis of the power of the nomad and the challenges faced by a state.

In the complex theoretical analyses of both Massey and Deleuze (Massey 1994a 2005; Deleuze and Guattari 2004) the notion of space for political engagement and the engagements reproducing the properties of the space are critical factors to be explored. In my research project, the notion of cyberspace as a site of political engagement and the interaction of diasporan agents within cyberspace are a major focus. This again can be linked to the manner in which the agency is reproduced in cyberspace, as well as spatial properties, when diasporan agents integrate with technology for political activities, which recursively reproduce new spatial properties.

Virtual conflict zone

Research into the shifting of political engagement into cyberspace, in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict, had very similar parallels to the ongoing conflict. But the shifting of the political engagements to cyberspace was mainly because of the significant diaspora population. The cyber engagements started off in the mid-1990s and the most significant point was the launch of pro-LTTE or pro-Tamil nationalist website, www.tamilnet.com, in 1997.

The entrance into cyber engagements, through political activists from the diaspora, was limited mostly to the pro-LTTE operations network, which was established prior to the cyber networks. The cyber engagements started parallel to the third stage of the Eelam war, which also was significant in the technological advancement of the warfare as the third Eelam war phase was the most technologically advanced campaign from both the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE.

The LTTE unveiled two military tactics heralding the use of advanced technology in warfare. To begin with, they used Soviet-made, shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles to down aircrafts belonging to the Sri Lankan Air Force. Second, Tigers used modified speedboats, designed parallel to the F 117 stealth fighter in body architecture, to ram naval gunboats and approach them evading radar (because of its unique design the boat was able to achieve speed similar to a wave piercer and stealth) (Davies 2001).

The mid-1990s saw the Sri Lankan government spend millions of dollars on obtaining heavy weapons, main battle tanks, APCs, UAVs, supersonic fighter aircrafts, advanced helicopter gunships, Super Dvora gunboats and electronic surveillance equipment. All these signified a technological leap in the context of the war. These developments were coinciding with the emergence of political engagements in cyberspace parallel to the escalating conflict in Sri Lanka.

During research, an interesting pattern emerged regarding the cyber-political engagements of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora. It revealed that the developments in the cyberconflict of the Sri Lankan case could be understood temporally in two phases. It became evident that in order to understand the distinct rupture in the paradigm of political engagements in cyberspace from 1994–2006, one should analyse the spatial context of the engagements.

Phase I 1994–2001

This phase is significantly parallel to the sedentary attempts of striation of geographic spaces for political and military engagement in Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan state became involved in massive militarization of places where the LTTE threat was large, while the LTTE, using nomadic warfare to challenge the striation, simultaneously attempted to striate the geographic spaces, which were under their control, in order to establish the claim for a Tamil state. The same conflict and political engagements parallel to the ground condition transferred to cyberspace. In this context, the key feature from 1994–2001 in cyber engagements was that both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state were competing for control of the web sphere being formed. One can see the coordinated and controlled websites, of both the LTTE and the state, emerging and creating a political space in cyber realms. Nevertheless, this smooth space underwent rapid attempts of territorialization and the same time hegemonizing and challenging rival ideology and political actions. Domination, hegemony and resistance are the key power dimensions that were created in this space. The LTTE wanted to maintain its fundamental ideology that it had as an organization. Their simple theory was to dominate and control any structure, institution or ideology. They used the same strategy of speed and shock and awe effects on taking over political spaces in cyberspace as well. In response, the state had one primary objective to maintain its presence, championing its discourse of a unitary, undivided Sri Lanka forced to eradicate terrorism.

The LTTE cyberattacks are mostly carried out from international locations. Mainly, groups from the mainstream Tamil diaspora are directly involved and

others who are sympathetic to the cause. The actions of the sympathy groups will be analysed under the propaganda warfare. The attacks were mainly directed against government sites, which were of strategic importance to the LTTE and were a psychological advantage, especially hacking into the heart of Colombo-based government institutions and military installations. One incident is the launch of the Sri Lanka army website on 1 January 2001 followed by a pro-LTTE website, www.eelamnation.com, which on the very next day launched a homepage text,

In an attempt to vie with Tamil websites all over the world depicting the local warring scene, Sri Lankan Army personnel are in the process of launching an army website to provide updated news from the battlefield, but not with much success though, admitted their commander-in-chief.

On the same day the army website suffered several blackouts, which officials said was a server initiation error, but research revealed officials knew that it was a greeting from the Internet Tigers, welcoming the army to a new battlefield. In 2002 the army website homepage was hacked into and a skull replaced the normal interface.

More than the official army website (www.slarmy.org, later www.army.lk), the cyberattacks were and are still being directed at the www.realityinsrilanka.com site which was manned by the Psyops (Psychological Operations Unit) division of the Sri Lanka army.² The army never admits the website is hosted by them, nor claims any responsibility for its content. From the year of hosting in 1997, simultaneous to the launch of www.tamilnet.com, the website has been targeted several times by hack attacks, mail bombs and sometimes virtual shut-down of the server. Nevertheless, the website still survives and is made an important link in many other websites hosted by Sinhala diaspora globally.

PRIU, the Policy Research and Information Unit website, the official website of the Sri Lankan government, which was hosted purely for government information services was also been targeted in 2004. The hack attack was considered to be of non lethal effect, however the point of concern for the government was the ability of the attackers to penetrate state-of-the-art counter-measures that were online.³ PRIU is one of the few websites in Sri Lanka which is very concerned about security and constantly upgrades, using the services of professionals. The site also has experienced constant mail bombings in the form of hate mails directed towards the President of Sri Lanka. The PRIU officials said that they are now not taking chances and gearing up to face cyber-terrorist threats by installing state-of-the-art security measures.

Moreover, the Sri Lankan government has waged an underground cyber warfare campaign against prominent LTTE front office websites and on sympathy sites. The Sinhala diaspora also waged a similar campaign. The Sri Lankan policy makers on military and defence affairs saw, in the late 1990s, www.Tamilnet.com as a hostile site which had global reach and was a mouth-piece of the LTTE. This website, which started with a budget of US\$400 with

four people in the United States and one front office in Norway, became a priority target on the Sri Lankan government hitlist. Because the government lacked expertise to carry out a hack attack on the site, it sent a covert team to United States to hire hackers to attack the Tamilnet. Though initially this was a success, the Tamilnet recovered and through the advanced security measures provided by the web host Tamilnet was secured. The late Sivaram Darmeratnam, alias Taraki, who was the chief editor of the Tamilnet revealed this information (interview with the author). He traced the two-pronged strategy of the state to containing the operations of Tamilnet and using technological expertise to wage cyber warfare. The first strategy was the physical intimidation of the staff operating in Sri Lanka. The military made several raids on the house of Taraki. They began monitoring his telephone calls and blocking his dial-up connection making it impossible for Taraki to work. Second, Taraki revealed an interesting plot where the military was advising the government security officials on hiring hackers from USA to attack the website. Taraki claimed that his email accounts were hijacked and through phone-line tapping, email intercepts were carried out by DMI (Directorate of Military Intelligence) Sri Lanka.⁴

In early June 2007, the Tamilnet became totally inaccessible in Sri Lanka, with speculation rife that the military intelligence was behind the blocking of the servers. On 20 June 2007, in a weekly government press conference, government defence spokesperson Minister Keheliya Rambukwella was questioned by a journalist on the alleged state involvement in denying access to Tamilnet. The minister refuted the allegation, but went on to say on record 'I would love to hire hackers to disable TamilNet'. What the minister didn't know was that what he wished for was actually put into practice by previous governments with foresight on the future threat from Tamilnet to the Sri Lankan state. It appears, as revealed to this researcher, that the minister was not aware of earlier attempts to take out Tamilnet. Two years ago the chief editor of the website, Sivaram Darmeratnam, was abducted and killed and his murder trial has never been concluded.

Tamilnet itself has been the focus of many researches. Whitaker subtly brings out the intentions of the creators of Tamilnet. According to Whitaker,

Their cyber-insurgency worked by sneaking their own perspective – through what stories they chose to report – into considerations of geopolitical and Sri Lankan elite, and thus shifting how the war was reported in the western press and debated by the various governments involved in the struggle between Sri Lankans dueling nationalist hegemonies.

(2006: 266)

This certainly goes beyond the role of information provider to the Tamil world. It is the first site which came up in cyberspace with the Tamil diasporic political engagements, it is not just the pioneer of a Sri Lankan Tamil news service provider, but it also triggered the process of Tamil diasporic space being mapped in cyberspace.

Phase II 2001–6

Phase two traces the radical rupture in the strategy of holding and controlling cyber-political spaces, both by the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE as practiced and contested in mid-1990s. This paradigm change demonstrated the dislocation of the central axis of the political space, which was well connected to the conflict zone in Sri Lanka. It also took away the notion that this space can be striated or structured. These enclosure efforts were mainly the superimposing of intrinsic properties of state-centric discourse in cyber political space, such as the LTTE-dominated Eelamist web sphere or the Sri Lankan state-dominated web sphere. Cyberspace, in the context of the Sri Lankan political space, has been created more by movements, which then condition the spatial attributes that define the political space. This constant reshaping of the political space, both by involvement of traditional Tamil activists, and also attracting new political agents seeking an enabling political space, has resulted in significant constant transformations in this diasporic political space. This space is now evolving with an assemblage of a multiplicity of political actors. The ground conditions are still playing a major role, but the political spaces, which have opened up in cyberspace, are in the process of creating conditions which affect changes on the ground, or in a more geographic and place-based context. This is the reverse of what has been dominating cyberspace in the mid-1990s in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict. The conflict zone was a mirror image of the ground and centred on terms dictated by ground conditions that makes a unique contribution to the analysis of a new virtual conflict zone independent and yet more political. These findings do question and do reiterate the need to rethink previous literature and notions of network power in cyberspace, online political mobilization and cyber-terrorism.

The end of the millennium saw the phase one cyberwar reaching its peak and it was the beginning of the end, with this phase coinciding with certain key developments in the political realm. These included the rifts emerging within the organization, which culminated in a split in the LTTE in 2004, and the emerging of a powerful dissident Tamil political activism among the diaspora. These new political activists identify themselves as the dissidents or dissenting voice of the Tamil people, purely because they oppose the LTTE as the sole representative of the Tamil people. The LTTE never compromised on its role of being the single representative of the Tamil people and it used any means possible to maintain this, even resorting to extreme violence by eliminating its own people or any other party that challenged it. There would be no compromise of this core spatial attribute of the Tamil political space for the LTTE. The dissidents have managed to break through this well fortified political space and challenge the core hegemonic spatial principle of the LTTE.

This implosion in the Tamil political space, which emerged from the Tamil diasporic political space, has taken the cyberconflict away from the traditional Sri Lankan state versus LTTE struggle, adding a whole new dimension to it and radically altering the spatial configuration of political engagements in cyber-

space. The dissident dimension in cyberspace heralded the rise of a nomadic type of resistance to sedentary hegemonies of both the Sri Lankan state and the LTTE. In an interview, Nallu, a leader of the dissident movement, proclaimed 'we rose through the Internet, if cyberspace was not there we could not be in politics'.⁵ Whilst the dissidents are numerically still a minority, the effect they have had on altering the political landscape on the Internet is very significant and radical.

A key dissident political activist, Jeya, explained how he felt about being deprived of a political space (interview with the author). Jeya was a journalist by profession, but could not publish in any newspaper, unless it was supportive of the LTTE. He said the political space he needed to do his work was found through cyberspace and currently he publishes two newspapers and a monthly magazine, which is circulated throughout European Tamil diaspora communities.

The research revealed that the notion of online networks and the power of political mobilization using cyber-networks are not always straightforward, as cyberspace does provide political actors access to massive mobilization that can be affected by minimalist groups or individuals. The LTTE belief of holding its international network was to take over every Tamil organization, such as welfare, charities, media centres, local business societies and control. For this purpose, they established an extensive network of international cadres and sympathizers. The LTTE dominance is quite apparent if one visits East Ham high street or Wembley high street in London, as they are dominated by Sri Lankan Tamil businesses and every business has a significant poster of the LTTE leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran. This does not signify total allegiance of the community to the LTTE, but it does signify the control the LTTE extracted over them. The LTTE also organized massive demonstrations in London, Paris, Geneva and Toronto using their extensive organizational networks.

Thus, in the recent years with the rise of the dissidents many of these political mobilization tactics of the LTTE seems to be under threat. The dissidents, unlike the LTTE, are not all in one political organization, they do have different political ideologies and their versions of Tamil nationalism are not coherent. They do not operate as a single unit; they mainly operate in very small units. The dissidents have been able to use cyber-political engagements including cyber campaigns, e-lobbying and academic arguments. These efforts have had an immense effect on the LTTE front organizations and their mobilization strategies. These targeted campaigns have deterred the LTTE, while exposing most of its international operations and breaking the secrecy, and it has resulted drastic international condemnation and pressure exerted on the LTTE. The dissidents have taken on the Sri Lankan state as well, exposing human rights violations. These factors demonstrate that the politics of cyberspace do not just facilitate networks of power built on globalized forces, but also challenge them severely. The nomadic strategies of warfare demonstrate a resurgent potential in this new space, which is significantly harder to striate or dominate for any state-based entity.

The LTTE has resorted to using new web strategies to counter this emerging political threat on their domination. The LTTE counter-strategy was spearheaded

by their unofficial website, www.Nitharsanam.com, which radically altered the way the web affects political activists and their day-to-day lives. Nitharsanam, run by an LTTE sympathizer on their payroll, started a campaign of using direct threats against dissident politicians and their families using photographs of dissident politicians, their residences and children.

This use of graphic images was an insidious way of threatening dissenting political activists. This tactic was identified as cyber-terrorism by many political activists (interviews with the author). Nallu, the dissident political activist, went on to say, 'If my name was Nitharsanam, I would be watching my back for three months, and would be extra careful about my security' and 'I know people who have changed door locks, installed alarm systems because of Nitharsanam'. CB, a Tamil journalist attached to a London-based international news agency, said 'Nitharsanam is carrying out acts of cyber terrorism and it has targeted us as well and it is scary'.

In response to this growing threat, dissident websites have resorted to similar counter-measures. They have identified key pro-LTTE political figures within the diaspora and have maintained a sustained personal attack on them. They were even successful in making the London police arrests these leaders, under the new anti-terror regulations. A dissident political activist, Raja, said in an interview, 'They attacked me, my family, they made pornography doctoring my photos, but now we have attacked them in return and now some of them even can't come out in the open'. The dissident website, www.tamilaffairs.com, has maintained this counter-attack. Their strategy was to isolate LTTE leadership from the Tamil community and project them as terrorists in Britain and this has successfully made some of them drop their political activities in fear of being arrested.

Pro-LTTE, dissidents and moderate political activists, respondents from different political ideologies, spoke about this new dimension in web-based politics. It was an interesting revelation. These individuals are not well read on cyber-theory or theories pertaining to cyber-security and cyber-terrorism, but the impact it has had on their lives has made them understand this phenomenon as terrorism. Dorothy Denning (2006), a leading academic and researcher in the field, has defined cyber-terrorism as

generally understood to refer to highly damaging computer-based attacks or threats of attack by non-state actors against information systems when conducted to intimidate or coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are political or social. It is the convergence of terrorism with cyberspace, where cyberspace becomes the means of conducting the terrorist act. Rather than committing acts of violence against persons or physical property, the cyber-terrorist commits acts of destruction and disruption against digital property.

This definition is more technologically based and is still aligned with the macro thinking of protecting critical infrastructure, which is the main focus of all

cyber-terrorism studies. The notion of cyber-terrorism in the current context is mostly on identifying potential threats to a set of identified targets, which are linked to massive information systems hardware.

Denning further goes on to identify the qualities of such a terrorist act, 'To fall in the domain of cyber-terror, a cyber attack should be sufficiently destructive or disruptive to generate fear comparable to that from physical acts of terrorism, and it must be conducted for political and social reasons' (Denning 2006). In this context of the qualification of a cyber terror attack, the ongoing engagements on cyberspace in this second phase can be understood as acts of cyber-terrorism, thus there is definitely a need to rethink and recast the definition of cyber-terrorism and its application to micro political engagements.

The Sri Lankan cyberconflict did have its fair share of website defacements, Denial of Service attacks (DOS) on websites and servers. The other trend is the duplication of websites from all sides. The LTTE would immediately duplicate a rival website with a slight change only in the domain identity. The duplicate website would have the same template as the rival website. The duplicated website content would be used to attack the main website and the political activists who are operating the site. This has also been a successful tactic as visitors can be deceived into reading the duplicate site. The lobbying and political action methods also have drastically changed from street-based activism to mass mailing campaigns. Today, the rational space of the street has no political effect and both the LTTE and the dissidents have realized it. VK, a pro-Tamil nationalist activist who runs a major lobbying network sympathetic to the LTTE, said 'our emails reach each and everyone in the international community who has an interest and is capable of influencing in the Sri Lankan conflict, and this has proved more influential in pressurizing the state'.

Cyberconflict and cyber-terrorism have always been an aspect of the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict. Since the 1997 cyber-terrorist attacks by the Tigers, various aspects of online engagements have been discussed. In my interviews with political activists what emerged was a radical new dimension to the understanding of cyberconflict and cyber-terrorism. Existing literature has analysed the cyberconflict and terrorism dimension according to definitions of cyber-terrorism mainly developed on the levels of threats and mostly based around aspects of global scale terrorism and mobilization of terrorist organizations. These also depended on websites as the objects of studies, but what emerged in this research is that we need to look at cyberspace as a political space, and when political actors occupy such spaces, new forms of terrorism and conflict take place. The current definitions of cyberspace are still based on the notion of the 'Internet as communication medium, or conduit'. Spatial relationships or spaces in cyberspace should be theorized beyond hack attacks, web defacements or propaganda warfare. The political space itself has become the battleground. In the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict, this is quite a new phenomenon, therefore, it is a significant different type of cyberconflict or cyber-terrorism as it has moved beyond the state-centric struggle.

The Sri Lankan case demonstrates the shifting political landscapes in

cyberspace, which facilitates a multitude of political engagements. Cyberspace is theoretically providing significant evidence of looking at the way new political spaces are being formed and the role of power in such conditions. These political spaces also question our understanding of politics, political space and the state-centric viewpoint of political spaces. The interesting emerging factor is how a political engagement online, which was more captured in the state-centric discourse and the spaces it created in the nexus of the state, has evolved into a unique political space. This chapter traces the political conflict which has emerged within this space. These alternative political spaces also have significant power relationships and power struggles that become their inherent dynamics, thus the geographic fixity or place dependence does not count in these unique conditions. Thus, these changes also make us question theories which looked at macro changes in the global changes, similar to Castells's spaces of flows, network theory analysis and superimposition of such models on developments in cyberspace. Activism and hacktivism is not just similar to that of the ground anymore. The power of so-called networks is challenged by individual agents and people organized in very loose formations and cyberspace has been a force multiplier in this context. Cyberspace is not a complete smooth space in Deleuzian context, it is always subject to territorialization by state-based entities or state structures itself. However, its inherent dynamic provides for the opening up of spaces and nomadic forces that can dominate and challenge spaces striated and hegemonized by state power and discourse and reshape political thinking of states in response to new political spaces and their assemblage.

Notes

- 1 Hardt and Negri introduced the concept in the context of rapid globalization and the new phases of capitalism as antidote or counteractive to this trend, which they termed 'rule of everyone by everyone, a democracy without qualifiers'. What are relevant from the point of the concept to this chapter are the new global cycle of struggles, and the mobilization of people which takes the form of an open, distributed network, in which no central control is possible.
- 2 The psychological operation was uncovered through series of discussions with senior army officials of the Sri Lanka Army. In military terms
Psychological Operations are: Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behaviour of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals. The purpose of psychological operations is to induce or reinforce foreign attitudes and behaviour favorable to the originator's objectives.
(<http://www.iwar.org.uk/psyops/>)
- 3 The attacks on the PRIU were revealed through intensive research on the operations of the PRIU and in-depth interviews with PRIU web masters and senior officials in a series of interviews conducted in June 2003.
- 4 Tamil web operators provided these data and information in an interview on the potential attacks on their sites launched by the Sri Lankan government and Sinhala diaspora. The most important were the remarks made by the late Dharmaratna Sivaram, alias Taraki, who was the chief editor of www.Tamilnet.com.

- 5 All these names are pseudo names as the real identities of the respondents in my field-work have not been revealed as most of these activists are under threat from various stakeholders in the conflict. Most of them are ex-militants who have fled Sri Lanka and some are still operating as underground political activists while forming the leadership of different political organizations among the Tamil diaspora.

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