

In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka. By SHARIKA THIRANAGAMA. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. xvi, 296 pp. \$59.95 (cloth).

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Most ethnographies, even those concerning Sri Lanka's long-running civil war, do not begin with a murder. Even fewer start with an account of the murder of the author's mother. Sharika Thiranagama's monograph does, and its exceptional beginning leads to an exceptional book. Thiranagama's mother, Ranjini Thiranagama, was a pioneering human rights activist in Jaffna who dared to criticize the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for which she paid with her life. Thiranagama actually portrayed her mother in reenactments in the 2005 documentary film, *No More Tears Sister*, and *In My Mother's House* expertly builds upon her mother's legacy. This ethnography is not only one of the finest recent books on Sri Lanka, but will likely become a foundational text for future scholarly understandings of the island's civil war, alongside books by Stanley Tambiah, E. Valentine Daniel, and Jonathan Spencer. Unlike these works, this book is not centrally concerned with state violence and the ethnic nationalist ideologies that fueled the war, but analyzes the "transformed physical, emotional, and social landscapes of civilians attempting to live through" the war (p. 4).

Thiranagama's study of Tamil speakers in or from war-torn Jaffna complicates the dominant narrative of the island's war as one between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE. While the Tigers claimed to speak for all Tamils on the island, Thiranagama repeatedly shows how Tamils suffered under the Tigers. She notes that "the most common experience of war related by all Tamils is movement" (p. 63). In this way, displacement has become a key aspect of being Tamil, whether in refugee camps, urban Colombo, or diasporic Toronto.

Thiranagama focuses on two critical events, which she refers to as the Eviction and the Exodus, in the book's first four chapters. The Eviction was the forced removal of Jaffna's Muslim population in October 1990. Thiranagama conducted research among this internally, but not eternally, displaced community, stressing how the experience of the Eviction sparked the rise of an identification as Northern Muslims, which was only available once their homes no longer were. She convincingly argues that Muslims do not reside at the political margins but are a key problem of Tamil nationalism, since it was only after the expulsion of Muslims that the North became the mono-ethnic state of Tiger dreams. The Exodus was the forced clearance of Jaffna's Tamil population before the Sri Lankan army occupied the city in October 1995. Thiranagama uses these events as starting points to analyze everyday life during wartime and the many changes in identity, gender, kinship, property, and belonging that war has wrought. For example, her analysis of changes in dowry practices and expectations smartly brings all of these concerns together through informants' aching stories of love and loss.

The fifth chapter examines the lives of former Tamil militants, stressing her emphasis that the LTTE does not represent the entire Tamil experience in Sri

Lanka. She examines how participation in militant groups engendered new collective identifications and kinship formations. This book offers the first full account of how the LTTE attained supremacy in Jaffna. By placing this chapter near the book's end, Thiranagama decenters the Tigers from the book's narrative, and from the narrative of the war as well. Similarly, she delves into colonial history only in chapter 6, placing her emphasis on Tamils' everyday experiences of war over the past two decades, not the social and political forces that precipitated the violence. This final chapter argues that the site for future negotiations of what it means to be Tamil in Sri Lanka will take place in Colombo, the post-war home, not in Jaffna, the war-torn ancestral homeland. Throughout the book, Thiranagama asks how home is made meaningful in a war fought for homeland that paradoxically led to a constant stream of Tamils leaving Jaffna in search of a new home (pp. 89–90).

With this book, Thiranagama offers an alternate history of Sri Lanka's civil war that critically examines how the Tigers became the dominant militant group in Jaffna and how the Eviction and the Exodus were as important to Jaffna residents' experiences of the war as the anti-Tamil violence that sparked the war in July 1983 or the turbulence that ended it in May 2009. This work is groundbreaking in many ways, and only someone with her life experiences, ethnographic skills, and courage to disobey the Tigers could accomplish this. Through a series of deeply moving narratives, Thiranagama analyzes the multiplicity of Tamil identifications in Jaffna and brings stories of Muslims back into academic understandings of the war. Thiranagama has written a fantastic and fascinating first book, and this reviewer hopes that she will write about post-war Sri Lanka as insightfully as she does about the island's recent war-torn past.

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