

## **Becoming Militant: Narrative of (Dis?) embodiment in Visakesa Chandrasekaram's *Tigers Don't Confess***

**Shamara Ransirini**

In the war front we never think that we are women and we are soft by nature. These disappear from our minds. In the war front we have only our aim in our mind, our aim to get an independent nation (in Alison 2011, 141).

The above words from a Sri Lankan woman combatant in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Miranda Alison points out, illustrate how equality between men and women in the militant organization was understood in relation to women adopting a more "masculine" role (2011, 141). Alison's position echoes feminist engagements with LTTE women combatants that have maintained that women's assimilation into the militant Tamil organization involved a process of either "abandoning" or "suspending" their femininity (Coomaraswamy 1996, 9; Eager 2008, 138). As women militants were required to cut their hair short or pin it up, dress in "manly" military fatigues instead of the traditional colourful dresses which were markers of normative Tamil femininity (Coomaraswamy 1996, 9), they were also given intense military training similar to the male cadres, and expected to perform equally with men in the battle fronts, as well as execute suicide attacks. Indeed feminist analyses which explore women's involvement in political conflicts in Sri Lanka and elsewhere make significant observations and contribute to interventions in how women in violence are perceived. My focus in this paper, while acknowledging the importance of such contributions, seeks to engage with women's *bodily experiences of becoming* militant. I contend that we need to ask, particularly in the case of the LTTE but possibly in relation to other militant groups as well, whether becoming militant for women, is merely synonymous with adopting a more masculine or androgynous identity? What are the implications of becoming militant for women's material, bodily experiences? In this paper I explore the literary representations of LTTE's women suicide bombers and their gendered, bodily transformations, by

---

**Corresponding author:**

Shamara Ransirini

Email: [shamara.pitiyage@uq.net.au](mailto:shamara.pitiyage@uq.net.au)

engaging with a textual portrayal: Sri Lankan writer Visakesa Chandrasekaram's novel, *Tigers Don't Confess* (2011).

I argue that on the one hand, the process leading up becoming a suicide bomber is an intensely embodied experience: as Lauren Wilcox points out, suicide bombers defy notions of a fixed body, they are "bodies in transformation, or *becoming* bodies" (2014, 73). Drawing from the Deleuzian position on becoming as a subversive and transformatory process associated with minority identities, Rosi Braidotti invests, even as she complicates, *becoming* with radical potential, and perceives it primarily in relation to women (2003, 54). In Braidotti's conceptualisation, *becoming* is not merely a climactic point in which subjectivity is achieved, but a continuous and constitutive process which involves, "approaching one's capacity for perception, one's empathy for and impact on others. The opposite of narcissistic self-glorification" (1997, 68). I contend that suicide bombing both exemplifies and complicates such an understanding of female emergence. Within militant Tamil nationalism in Sri Lanka, and its discourses of martyrdom, suicide bombing was primarily envisaged as a selfless bodily sacrifice for the nation: a post-body, trans-human nationalist expression, in which the relevance of the body has ceased, and is replaced by a form of dis-embodied nationalist agency. But at the same time, suicide bombing as practised by the LTTE, glorified the embodied self: in the LTTE, one was *chosen* to be a suicide bomber, an honour bestowed upon a privileged few, among many who reportedly vied for it (Swamy 2009, 235). LTTE's elaborate death rituals venerating the martyrs, exhibiting their photos and honouring their families, further reinforced the glorification of the self-sacrificing nationalist individual subject. The process leading up to *becoming* a suicide bomber was also an intensely embodied experience. On the other hand, suicide bombing, as it is practised across different conflicts, is a violent encounter *between* bodies: in which the bomber cannot complete her *becoming*, without reconfiguring other bodies as well as hers, most often resulting in disembodiment. The suicide bomber's climactic emergence as a bomber, therefore involves a necessary destabilisation of the association often made between identity and embodiment (Wilcox 2014, 72). I contend that suicide bombing is a process that involves the gendered body in various forms of embodiment and dis-embodiment. As a violent encounter *between* bodies, in which the suicide bomber cannot complete her becoming, without reconfiguring other bodies as well as hers, most often resulting in disembodiment, it also involves complex forms of inter-embodiment.

While cognizant of the ways in which the material body becomes, in militant nationalisms in particular, a marker of identity (Parashar 2013, 621 ) and a contested site where various “discursive effects get played out” (Spearey 2000, 178), I argue that the woman suicide bomber’s “becoming” needs to be understood vis-à-vis her material body and bodily experiences. By material body however, I do not mean to suggest an unmediated, pre-discursive body (Bordo 1993, 16; Butler 2011, 5): for all bodies are, as Susan Bordo maintains, culturally formed to varying degrees (1993,17). I draw here from Susan Spearey’s position that the body is more than a location of identity and a battleground for contesting discourses (2000, 178). In my exploration of a female suicide bomber’s embodied processes of becoming, I engage with portrayals of her material bodily experiences and transformations, as well as the complex re-constitution of her gendered body and of those she encounters in the suicide attack: as Sara Ahmed contends, subjectivity is redefined through bodily encounters, in which “a body is necessarily a body among other bodies” (2000, 92). Suicide bombing, I suggest however, gestures to the limits in subject-constitution through corporeality and inter-corporeality.

Associations between women’s bodies and their political agency can be rather complex. As suicide bombing renders female bodies in militancy more visible, it also mobilises cultural anxieties underlying “violent” female bodies. As feminists maintain, even as the gendered body is ostensibly “recovered” from the patriarchal, domestic domain and reinstated into political and public spaces (Oliver 2007, 32), the body’s centrality in suicide bombing functions to discursively relegate women to the realm of the natural and irrational (Naaman 2007, 49). On the other hand, the “uncanny” fusion of body and weapon, that constitutes the construction of the bomber (Oliver 2007, 32) complicates the embodiment of women’s involvement in militancy. I contend that the normalisation of the male body as weapon, partly generated by what Braidotti maintains as the “privileged bond between the male and the machine” in contemporary culture (1997,74), gestures to the complex associations between the female body and the weapon. Braidotti argues that in contemporary Western culture, even as technology renders bodies invisible, the anxiety created by technology is often displaced on to the fetishized female body (1997, 75). LTTE’s women suicide bombers, I suggest, destabilise the normative association between the male body and the weapon, and are more than tropes for the eroticisation of technology, as their bodies are mobilised in multiple and at times competing discourses, including, but not limited to, nationalism, rape, race and militarism.

## Tigers Don't Confess

Women militants in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka formed the all-female unit—"The Birds of Freedom"—fought in the frontlines, underwent rigorous military training and featured prominently in the LTTE's suicide bombing squad, "The Black Tigers" (Alison 2011, 134; Bloom 2005, 214). LTTE combatants, both men and women, were popularly known as "tigers", an association perhaps made on the basis of the organization's reference to the tiger as its symbol. Even though the LTTE's positioning of itself as the sole representative of the ethnic Tamil community in Sri Lanka was contested, the militant guerrilla organization was involved in a thirty year old war with the Sri Lankan State. The war was brought to a brutal end in 2009 with heavy casualties for both sides, with both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state being accused of committing war crimes.

By the mid-1980s, the LTTE's militant Tamil nationalist discourse reformulated women's militant agency in relation to two dominant images; the woman militant/suicide bomber as "armed virgin" (Schalk 1997, 67; Coomaraswamy 1996, 9) or as "raped victim" (Coomaraswamy 1996, 10; Chenoy 2004, 40; Bloom 2005, 145; Maunaguru 1995, 173). The reformulation of the *gendered* body of the female suicide bomber in the nationalist project as self-sacrificing and heroic relied on the dominant image of the female body as violated by the enemy: in order to be celebrated as the site of resistance, the body of the woman suicide bomber has to be first politicized as the site of oppression, or the "de-valued other". As Dorit Naaman maintains, in the Palestinian nationalist ideology of female martyrdom the annihilation of the female body serves as a spectacle which declares national defiance by claiming "my life is not worth living, but in my death I will produce a myth that is worth dying for" (2007, 949). In the aftermath of the first Palestinian woman suicide bomber, Wafa Idris' suicide killing in 2002, an editorial entitled "it's a woman!" in *Al-Sha'ab*, (an Arabic newspaper), was celebratory of her femininity primarily in relation to her body: "It is a woman who has now proven that the meaning of women's liberation is the liberation of the body from the trials and tribulations of this world, and the acceptance of death with a powerful, courageous embrace" (in Bloom 2005, 148). Similarly, Margaret Trawick maintains that the Sri Lankan woman militant perceived death in militancy in relation to liberation from the confines of a physical, gendered body (1997, 169). As gendered, racial and even class oppression is experienced through the women suicide killers' bodies, their agency is variously mapped out in the complex sites of freedom fighter, terrorist,

martyr and victim (Naaman 2007,951): concomitantly, their bodies “become” less straightforward signifiers of resistance, and more nuanced sites of agency.

Visakesa Chandrasekaram’s novel, *Tigers Don’t Confess*, which makes reference to the popular construction of the LTTE militants as “tigers”, was published originally in English in 2011, and features multiple protagonists who are involved in violence in different ways. The novel, I contend, with its different narrative styles engages with the gendered embodiment of violence. Bodies enact, witness and experience violence, which produces diverse subject-positions that include, but are not limited to, perpetrator, victim, survivor, and witness, and as such recalls Michael Rothberg’s position on the fluidity of these subject positions during the holocaust (2009). These embodied subjectivities, the novel suggests, are not mutually exclusionary, but rather fluid and interchangeable. I argue, that the text explores the association between a female suicide bomber’s becoming -- the process of her body’s transformation -- which is negotiated through the re-constitution of the gendered female body, and its reconfiguration of other bodies in the final encounter of the bombing. While in *Forbidden Area*, a play written by Chandrasekaram, the woman suicide bomber named Urmila detonates the bomb off-stage, with only the sounds of the explosion heard by the audience, in *Tigers Don’t Confess* readers are made aware, through the descriptions of Shalini’s suicide attack which she carries out in the midst of a crowd, and the scene afterwards, that the suicide bomber’s final bodily emergence is realised through *encounters* with other bodies.

The female suicide bomber, Shalini, is one of several perpetrators/victims/witnesses in the novel. She and the others, Haran--the LTTE gunman/suicide bomber who goes by multiple aliases; Nalin--the Sinhala security guard of a Tamil statesman; Kumaran--the Tamil youth who is arrested on charges of terrorism; Meenachi-- his mother who seeks revenge for his arrest; Tissa-- the deputy Head of the Sri Lankan Terrorist Intelligence Unit, and the unnamed other woman suicide bomber who features only as a dismembered body, are invariably implicated in each other’s narratives as well. At one level, Shalini’s narrative reflects the almost formulaic construction of a “typical” Tamil female suicide bomber; raped by the Sinhalese mobs who force her to witness the brutal murder of her parents, Shalini, joins the LTTE in an unwavering mission of revenge, and does not question or challenge her faith in the militant, radical organization. Instead she has complete faith in the LTTE leader’s ability to

liberate the Tamil people and deliver the promised nation, the separate Tamil homeland of *Eelam* (Chandrasekaram, 2011, 100).

Shalini is also portrayed in multiple roles: although she is a suicide bomber preparing for her final mission, she fulfils other roles within the organization, as an efficient spy in the Tigers' intelligence Unit, and as a combatant in the frontlines as well. The text gestures towards both her humanity and her terrifying ruthlessness --she is a loyal friend who honours the word she gave to a dying colleague- - but she also transforms into "a monster" who laughs "madly" at the spectacle of a brutalised body of an enemy and orders more torturing (Chandrasekaram 2011, 207). The narrative reinforces the motif of "revenge", which functions to invariably connect Shalini with the other characters, and implicate them in each other's experiences. The narrative on Shalini, positioned within a network of narrative intersections, suggests that the agency in performing revenge is differently constituted on male and female bodies.

## Revenge

I contend that the novel draws an uneasy association between nationalist resistance and revenge, as revenge is presented as the central motive in the narratives of both the female and male suicide bombers, Shalini and Haran. Revenge, unlike resistance, raises ethical concerns, which complicates its positioning in the novel. The text indicates that they are both inspired to militancy by the violence they were subjected to, and the subsequent trauma they experienced. Shalini's desire for revenge, for instance, is motivated by her sexual violation and the murder of her family, while Haran is inspired to violence by a desire to systematically eliminate the perpetrators involved in his and his Sinhala university colleagues' arrest and torture during the political insurrection in the South of Sri Lanka during the 1980s. On the one hand, such an association destabilizes distinctions imposed between the personal and the political, and dismantles the dominant notion that *only* women are inspired into militancy by personal grievances, but at the same time threatens to reduce violent nationalist resistance of its radical political content.

The text draws close associations between revenge and trauma. Presented as both empowering and destructive, revenge is also given as darkly therapeutic: a complex form of "healing" for the body and mind from the trauma it is forced to endure. Trauma, as Marianne Hirsch maintains, is a "deep" or "sense" memory located in the body, experienced as sensation

(2012, 80). The novel gestures to several instances where Shalini relives her trauma as an embodied experience:

She knew a few seconds before that she was going to feel the panic of the dark experience, so she could prepare for it. Then everything around her became pitch dark for a moment and she could hear her own voice begging for mercy. At once the darkness and the voices disappeared and she returned to normality. Shalini opened her eyes and ears again. (Chandrasekaram 2011, 217-18)

The performance of revenge however, is also gendered: it is primarily enacted by the body, and necessitates the body to be transformed, to be reinvented and also to re-constitute other bodies in the process in multiple ways. The reconfiguration of Meenachi's maternal body, into a body seeking revenge, is one such instance of female bodily transformation, which it is possible to argue, foreshadows or anticipates Shalini's narrative of becoming. Meenachi's motives for revenge, are determined by her son's imprisonment. The subjectivity of the vengeful mother seeking political redress is not historically aberrant in Sri Lanka. During the 1980s and 1990s, in both the North and the South of the country, motherhood was a powerful signifier of political protest and activism, with the mobilization of "Mothers' Fronts" which protested the disappearances of young people, mainly men (Maunaguru 1995,168). The movement visualised and legitimised the maternal as an embodied subject, protesting state sanctioned violence and oppression. The mother's curse, emerged during this period as a powerful public performance of protest, as mother's fronts mobilised groups of women to perform the curse in public spaces. In a desperate bid to save her son Kumaran, the young Tamil undergraduate who is held in police custody under false terrorist charges and subsequently tortured, Meenachi enacts a similar invocation of the curse. She first prays to the Hindu goddess Durga and then in desperation, invokes Kali, a punitive manifestation of Durga (Chandrasekaram 2011, 45- 46). Meenachi's anger and pain is expressed as a curse, which she performs through her body outside the court, "she started to scream hysterically, still kneeling down on the ground...the woman was hitting her breasts with her clenched hands and then hitting the ground with seething anger" (Chandrasekaram 2011, 78). This agentic moment, enacted as a bodily performance, necessitates Meenachi's transformation from a "grieving" to an "avenging" mother. The maternal identity inscribed on the female body gives authenticity and political legitimacy to her protest. It also transforms maternal grieving and mourning as an essentially personal, private act into a public, and politicised display of anger. Her performance, which

expresses a *desire* for revenge, rather than revenge per se, still achieves its intended effect on the head of the terrorist Intelligence Unit, Tissa, to whom it is partly directed, as his response clearly indicates, “the woman, initially very submissive and destitute-looking, had suddenly turned into a vindictive witch. Tissa already started feeling the effect of the woman’s curse” (2011, 78- 79). Tissa’s response to the curse is in turn experienced as a bodily sensation, and is registered on his skin in the form of chills and goose-bumps (2011, 79). In this performance of revenge, where the privately “mourning mother” is reconfigured as publicly “vengeful”, bodies of both the victim-turned agent Meenachi and the primary perpetrator of her son’s torture, Tissa, come together but draw apart : Tissa’s body recoiling from the frightening spectacle Meenachi’s withering, cursing body makes on the ground, outside the court. Such bodily encounters, I contend, gesture to the process of emergence and its re-constitution of subjectivity through embodiment and inter-embodiment. Emergence of such subjectivities also indicates how identities of victim and perpetrator are in a flux: continuously shaping and re-shaping each other. Even as Meenachi’s public performance of the curse, momentarily re-constitutes her subjectivity from “victim” to “agent”, its political significance is arguably limited. However, as an embodied act of protest, it clearly does unsettle Tissa: we are conscious that his response to her would have been very different, had she been the grieving or pleading Tamil maternal body, she used to be, prior to this encounter. As this episode suggests, the gendered body’s process of becoming an agent of violence, even if it is verbal violence as in this instance, involves inter-embodiment, or encounters with other bodies. I argue in the next section, that the female suicide bombers’ process of emergence, not only exemplifies but complicates subject and inter-subject re-constitution through corporeality.

### **The “becoming body”**

Shalini’s emergent self as a war hardened, suicide killer, is intimately associated with the process of re-inventions and transformations her body undergoes. A considerable part of the narrative on Shalini is devoted to her preparation of her body for her “final mission”: the surgical removal of her breasts, is a key moment which occurs early in the narrative. The mastectomy causes Shalini to lose a part of her body which makes her visibly identifiable as “feminine”: as several references to her “flat chest” afterwards remind the reader (2011,94, 287). Although I am yet to come across any “factual” references to this practised within the LTTE, the removal of the breasts in the novel also recalls the myth of the Amazons;

I contend, as does Kelly Oliver with reference to U.S military women's involvement in the prison torturing in Abu Gharib, that ancient myths of savage women are evoked in dominant narratives of militant women in order to present them as barbaric and excessive (2007, 20). However, I suggest that in *Tigers Don't Confess* Shalini's mastectomy complicates, rather than reinforces, the use of mythical referents in the popular constructions of violent women: the pain that is inflicted upon and endured by the body during and after the surgery is detailed in the narrative (Chandrasekaram 2011,94), gesturing to the bodily violence underlying the process of emergence. As breasts are a visible component of the female sexual identity, their removal indicates the de-sexualisation of Shalini's body that occurs simultaneously. For instance, Megan McFarlane engages with the anxiety the woman soldiers' sexualised bodies create in the U.S military by arguing that breasts, which are dominantly portrayed as an integral part of female sexuality, are essentially and systemically de-sexualised in the popular imaginary by reinforcing the role of the maternal on the militarised, female body, by reinstating through visual campaigns that breasts are primarily for breast-feeding babies (2015, 207).

In *Tigers Don't Confess* the mastectomy is also described in the narrative in precise, impersonal terms: Shalini travels to India, presumably to evade the surveillance of the Terrorist Intelligence Unit in Sri Lanka, and admits herself to a South Indian hospital posing as a woman suffering from breast cancer. Although the surgeon's complicity in the plan is implied, Shalini is not accompanied nor assisted by anyone else. The absence of a male colleague, in particular, is a particularly striking feature in Shalini's narrative and her militant agency: unlike dominant portrayals of LTTE women militants who are accompanied by men in their final mission, Shalini remains, to the final moment, unaccompanied.

In the final scene, as the bomb replaces her breasts, Shalini's body *becomes* the weapon, thus also affirming a link between modern technology and the feminine body. This link, which necessitates a radical transgression of the perceivably irrevocable boundary between the human and the machine, also reconfigures Shalini's body, as "a cyborg" or "a hybrid of machine and organism" (Haraway 2013, 274), an integration of mechanical, electronic parts with parts of her gendered body:

Shalini started carefully dismantling the triangular-shaped blocks that were strapped into the black jackets. There were ten such TNT blocks connected to each other with thin cables. Then she took out a padded brassiere from her handbag. There was a pair of false breasts inside

the cups of the brassiere, which she removed to reveal a net like arrangement of elastic tapes inside. She then carefully inserted the TNT blocks beneath the elastic tapes. The small detonator, which looked like a flat lipstick, hung down between the two cups of the brassiere. When she finally lifted the assembled bomb, she gazed at it proudly. This was what she had been waiting for over years and years-to wear the deadly pair of breasts over her flat chest ... (Chandrasekaram 2011, 289).

As Shalini meticulously assembles the bomb by herself, and carefully straps it into her chest, filling the void of her removed breasts, she in effect also "re-assembles" her body. Her body emerges not only in its figurative or symbolical functioning, but in its materiality too, as assemblage: the body *is* the weapon. I contend however, that Shalini's emergent "militant" self is not identifiable only with her "de-sexualised" or "trans-human" body as machine. Shalini cannot complete her process of emergence - or her status of "becoming"- without the material body's constant negotiations with the symbolic. The scene where the male suicide bomber assembles the bomb, "Haran took his blazer and shirt off and tied the improvised bomb around his stomach like a wide belt" (Chandrasekaram 2011, 270), gestures to his body becoming the weapon but the body is scripted differently, recalling that even as the female body is transformed into a lethal weapon, the male militant's body still remains the norm, and that suicide bombing on the one hand destabilizes, but on the other exploits, fixed and distinct racial and gendered categories marked on the body.

A distinctive feature between the transformation of the male and female body as weapon, is that Haran's body it is not simultaneously an object of irresistible, eroticised desire, as is Shalini's body. Despite suggestions of de-feminisation and de-sexualisation, Shalini's body-as-weapon- still needs to be crucially identifiable as a feminine body. The text refers to her sexualised, feminine body as "beautiful" (2011, 302), several times after the mastectomy, and eroticises her performance as a dancer to get access to her target, the Sinhala politician. From the militant nationalist perspective, the political investment in the feminized body, as she performs a sensuous traditional dance, is as crucial to the construction of the suicide killer, as is the investment in the de-gendered, trans-human body as weapon. It is after all, not the androgynous body but the gendered and sexualised body of the woman suicide bomber that allows her to slip through multiple layers of sophisticated security barriers erected by the state and its attendant military establishment, and grants her access to her targets. Beyond granting ease of access to her targets, Shalini's feminised

body is also mobilised to evoke the cultural anxieties centred on the female body. As Braidotti maintains, the feminine body transgresses the notion of a fixed bodily form and similarly to the "monster", or the non-human, evokes "a unique blend of fascination and horror" (1997, 64-65). The reconstitution of Shalini's body as a suicide bomber exhausts this dualism inscribed on the gendered body and her "success" as a suicide killer in fact, is contingent on the "performance" of her body in these domains. She is *both*, trans-human-body-as weapon, and the feminine, traditional dancer: in order to evoke both fascination and horror, her body has to necessarily be reconfigured in these multiple roles.

The dance in which Shalini excels--the *Kohomba Kala* - - is a graceful performance of balancing the *kala* or pots on the head while dancing to the rhythm of the music--and is ritually performed in Hindu and inter-cultural festivals in Sri Lanka, including Buddhist festivals and parades. As Shalini's dance, renders her body a "sensuous" spectacle (Chandrasekaram 2011, 302) and an object of desire, in racially tense Sri Lanka the performance also marks her as "Tamil" and "other", although not always, the *Kohomba Kala* dance is traditionally performed in Sri Lanka by Tamil, Hindu men and women. The female suicide bomber's body therefore exploits the anxieties generated by the "other" woman's body: exoticised as a dancer, her body is at the same time marked as "unknowable", and "unfathomable" to the dominant Sinhala "self". In the final scene, where Shalini "mesmerises" her audience with her performance, unbeknownst to her spectators, her body is simultaneously a lethal weapon, which will fatally or otherwise wound those very spectators drawn to her and her performance. Shalini completes her "becoming"- which is mapped out in the novel in relation to her body's transition from raped victim to subject of destruction, with the disembodiment of self and others.

The critical moment the body "becomes" the agent of violence, the moment of explosion, is contingent upon the body's encountering other bodies. Drawing from Sara Ahmed's position that encounters reconfigure subjectivities through embodiment and inter-embodiment (2000, 87), I contend however, that suicide bombing involves bodily encounters which, rather than giving shape to, gesture to the very limits of embodiment and inter-embodiment, as subject-constitutive categories. As Adrianna Cavarero points out, suicide bombing renders, not only the bomber's body, which is politicized as an agent of national resistance but his/her victims' bodies, weapons as well (2009, 100). Mia Bloom argues that it implicates not only the body of the bomber, but also the body of the witnesses who are its first "targets" (2005, 77). The mutilated and annihilated bodies of

both the bomber and the witnesses are constructed as emblematic of the nation; the former signals heroic national defiance while the latter is taken as an implicit sign of the antagonist nation's humiliation.

At one level, suicide killing generates a re-definition of bodily space: in the aftermath of a suicide attack, the burnt flesh and parts of *all* bodies, the Tamil female suicide bomber's and her victims', which are almost non-identifiable from each other, intermingle and become what Cavarero calls "spectacles of horror" (2009, 102). The creation of such indistinguishable bodies in suicide killing, Wilcox argues, also challenges the sovereignty of the nation, as it destabilizes the premise of the body as a signifier of national, communal identity and subsequent hierarchical difference (2014, 68). Disembodiment beyond recognition, as suicide bombing usually generates, where the distinctions between "self" and "other" are no longer implicit and evident, unravels the underlying tensions in locating difference on the body. The re-semblance of the "unnamed" first female suicide bomber's body in *Tigers Don't Confess*, the attempt to align the severed head, arms, legs, bits of burnt flesh and dress for the torso (Chandrasekaram 2011, 66) in the aftermath of the explosion, signifies the state's investment in "identifiable", or "knowable" bodies, which also betrays its anxiety in locating difference and identity on the body. The repulsion associated with the normative feminine body, with body fluids like menstrual blood, and bodily transformations like childbirth, is magnified towards the racialized (in this instance "Tamil") feminine body which is re-invented as a potential killing machine. The forensic team's attempts in the novel to reassemble the body of this "other", with the use of ornament and dress, "only Tamils wear these anklets", "looks like she was wearing a *salvar kameez* Tamil women mostly wear *salivary kameez*" (Chandrasekaram 66), is also a "recovery" operation which re-constitutes the suicide killer's -Tamil, woman, and terrorist body- as the *abject*, the border against which the privileged subject is defined (Ahmed 2000, 95), who in this instance, emerges as the Sinhala man or woman. However, as both the blown up bodies of the legitimate "subjects" of the nation (Sinhala men and women), as well as the constitutive abject (Tamil woman suicide killer) co-mingle and become an indistinguishably horrific spectacle, the border too becomes blurred and shifting. Such spectacles that suicide killing indiscriminately creates, reconstitute normative bodily space, and reconfigure the abject as not only the "other" woman's body, but the bodies of all victims (Wilcox 2014, 74). Tissa-- the deputy head of the Terrorist Intelligence Unit-- embodies the typical responses of horror and repugnance this spectacle of mutilated bodies generates, as he walks through the morgue shortly after the first suicide attack (Chandrasekaram

2011, 63-64). I contend that the constant negotiations that occur in suicide bombing between the abject and the subject—the “uninhabitable” border (Ahmed 2000, 88) and the “privileged” self— as each is redefined and reconstituted, gesture to the limits of embodiment in subject and inter-subject constitution in bodily encounters.

However, my contention in this paper is that the gendered, bodily experiences of “becoming” an agent of violence involves a complex reconfiguration of the woman’s body, which entails a simultaneous reconstitution of the body as a material, lethal *weapon*, defeminised and degendered, and the symbolical *feminine*, in Shalini’s case, as a sensuous dancer. At one level, the suicide bomber’s narrative/s of emergence, destabilize the presumed coherence between the body and subjectivity: the climactic moment of *becoming* is contingent upon the annihilation of the body and other bodies. While the feminized and sexualized body of the woman transforms from the object of desire to the subject of destruction and soon after into a mutilated body, the bodies of those around her too undergo reinvention: from mesmerized or indifferent but unsuspecting spectators to deformed victims or /and bodies that are dismembered or burnt beyond recognition. Post-explosion, therefore, the aftermath of the violent bodily encounter, results in a radical re-working of inter-subjectivity, where the distinctions between the abject and the subject, the expelled “other” and the privileged self, are blurred. I contend with Wilcox, that suicide bombing denaturalises such boundaries between self and other, and therefore challenges the very premise of a hegemonic and privileged national subject, or a body that “matters” over “other” bodies (2014, 78). However, I also argue that suicide bombing endorses an equally unsettling version of a counter-nationalism which renders bodies dispensable to its overarching project: its construction of female bodies as violated, or raped victims turned suicide bombers, suggests that women’s political agency as suicide killers is not conceivable otherwise, and certainly needs to be complicated. Furthermore, suicide bombing’s radical potential at the symbolical level—its subversion of racialized and gendered embodiment in subject and inter-subject constitution needs to be problematized in light of its complex formation of a militant but gendered nationalist subject—Tamil woman willing to sacrifice her body for the nation, and its premise that *everybody* (not only its targets but the witnesses who inevitably become victims) is complicit in the dominant and oppressive nationalist agenda it seeks to challenge. The indiscriminate annihilation of bodies, I argue, violently subsumes the potential and capacity of embodied performances of dissonance and resistance to both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic discourses that produce such bodies.

## References

- Ahmed, Sara. *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. London: Routledge, 2000
- Alison, Miranda. "In the War Front We Never Think that We Are Women: Women, Gender, and The Liberation of Tamil Tigers of Eelam." In *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, edited by Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, 131-155. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.
- Bloom, Mia. *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge, 2011.
- Braidotti, Rosi. "Mothers, Monsters and Machines." In *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, edited by Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury, 59-79. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Metamorphoses." *Theory, Culture and Society* 14, no 2 (1997): 67-80
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Becoming Woman: Or Sexual Difference Revisited." *Theory, Culture and Society* 20, no 3 (2003): 43-64.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Posthuman*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2009. Ebook.
- Cavarero, Adrianna. *Horroism: Naming Contemporary Violence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- Chandrasekaram, Visakesa. *Tigers Don't Confess*. Mumbai: Frog Books, 2011.
- Coomaraswamy, Radhika. "Tiger Women and the Question of Women's Emancipation," *Pravada* 4.9 (1997): 8-10.
- De Mel, Neloufer. "Fractured Narratives: Notes on Women in Conflict in Sri Lanka and Pakistan." *Development* 45.1 (2002): 99-104.
- Eager, Whaley Paige. *From Freedom Fighters to Terrorists: Women and Political Violence*. Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008.
- Hamilton, Carrie. "The Gender Politics of Political Violence: Women Armed Activists in the ETA" *Feminist Review* 86 (2007) : 132-148.
- Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Abingdon: Routledge. 1991.
- Hirsch, Marianne. 2012. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

- Maunaguru, Sitralega. "Gendering Tamil Nationalism: The Construction of 'Woman' in Projects of Protests and Control." In *Unmaking the Nation: The Politics of Identity and History in Modern Sri Lanka*, edited by, Pradeep Jeganathan and Qadri Ismail, 158-175. Colombo: Social Scientists' Association, 1995..
- McFarlane, Megan. "Breastfeeding as Subversive" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17. 2 (2015): 191-208.
- Naaman, Dorit. "Brides of Palestine/Angels of Death: Media, Gender, and Performance in the Case of the Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers." *Signs* 32.4 (2007): 933-955.
- Oliver, Kelly. *Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex and the Media*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Parashar, Swati. "What Wars and 'War Bodies' know about International Relations", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 26.4 (2013): 615-630.
- Rothberg, Micheal. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of Decolonisation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.
- Spearey , Susan. "Substantiating Discourses of Emergence: Corporeality, Spectrality, and Postmodern Historiography in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" In *Body Matters: Feminism, Textuality and Corporeality*, edited by Avril Honer and Angela Keane. 170-185 Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Swamy, Narayan, M.R. *Inside an Elusive Mind: Prabhakaran*. Colombo: Vijitha Yapa, 2009.
- Wilcox, Lauren. "Explosive Bodies and Bounded States" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 16.1 (2014): 66-85.