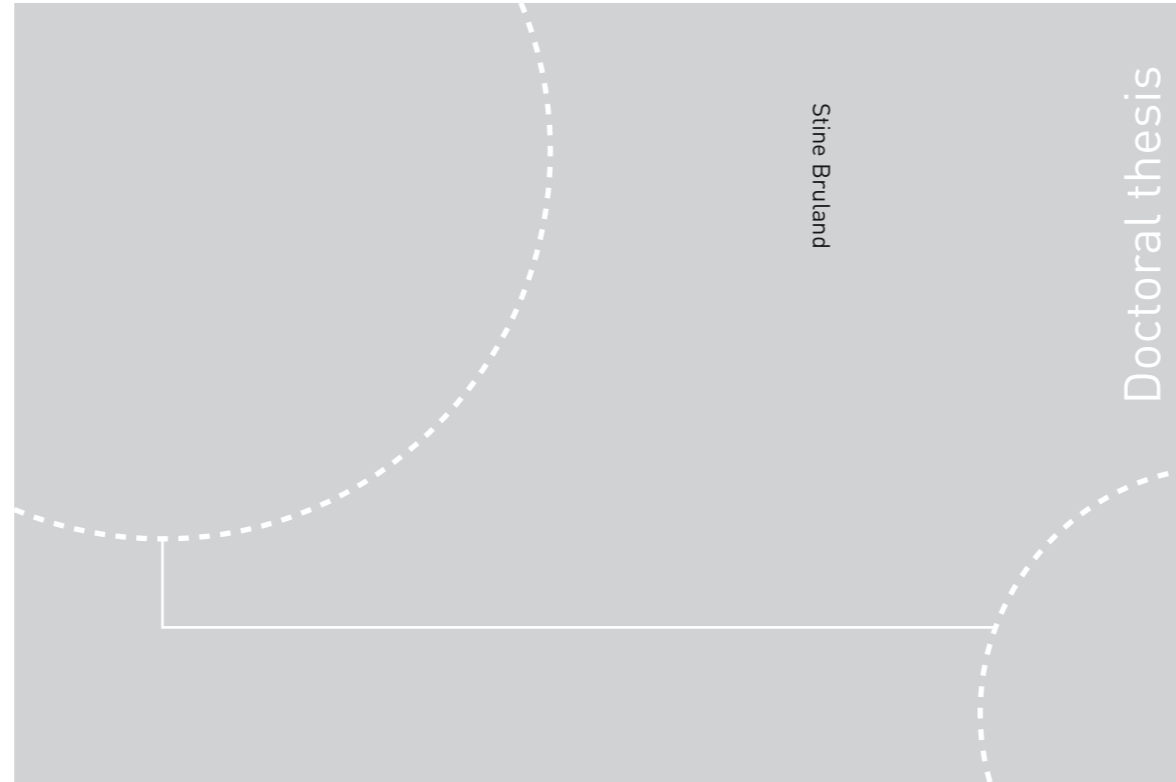


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Stine Bruland

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Re-creating meaning in a Tamil family after war and migration

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Thesis for the degree of  
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## Glossary

<i>Akhel</i>	people
<i>Akka</i>	elder sister
<i>Amamma</i>	maternal grandmother
<i>Amappa</i>	maternal grandfather
<i>Amma</i>	mother
<i>Anna</i>	elder brother/ elder parallel-cousin
<i>Apamma</i>	paternal grandmother
<i>Apappa</i>	paternal grandfather
<i>Aunthy</i>	elder female relative
<i>Arapanippu</i>	sacrifice/ dedication
<i>Bharatanatyam</i>	South Indian classical (temple) dance
<i>Elucci naal</i>	Day of rising/ Day of Edification
<i>Ende sondam</i>	“my own relatives”/ close relatives
<i>Engede akhal</i>	“our people”, i.e. relatives
<i>Enne?</i>	what?
<i>Maaveerar</i>	hero/ martyr
<i>Maaveerar Naal</i>	(Great) Hero’s Day/ Martyr Day
<i>Maaveerarvaranatukurippu</i>	(Great) Hero’s Week
<i>Mahal</i>	daughter
<i>Mahen</i>	son
<i>Machal</i>	female cross-cousin
<i>Machan</i>	male cross-cousin/ sister’s husband
<i>Miruthangam</i>	Indian percussion instrument
<i>Murukku</i>	spicy snack, formed in the shape of a coil

<i>Ondavodda (akka/tangechi/anna/tambi)</i>	“next step (relatives)”: children of mother’s sisters and father’s brothers
<i>Panjabi</i>	three-part suit used by girls
<i>Periyamma</i>	mother’s elder sister
<i>Puja</i>	worship to Hindu Gods
<i>Sadi</i>	caste
<i>Samathiya veedu</i>	puberty ceremony
<i>Sangeetham</i>	classical South Indian (temple) song/music
<i>Sette veedu</i>	death-house
<i>Sitamma</i>	mother’s younger sister
<i>Sitti</i>	father’s younger brother’s wife
<i>Sondam</i>	relatives/ family
<i>Sondam-illai</i>	non-relatives
<i>Sonde idam</i>	family place
<i>Tambi</i>	younger brother/ younger male parallel-cousin
<i>Tangechi</i>	younger sister/ younger female parallel cousin
<i>Tiyakam</i>	abandonment
<i>Tiyaki</i>	one who abandon’s (life)
<i>Ur</i>	natal village / home
<i>Urs</i>	the plural form of <i>ur</i> . I use the English <i>s</i> as a plural form. In Tamil the plural form of <i>ur</i> is <i>urkhal</i>
<i>Ur-akhal</i>	“ <i>ur</i> -people”; people from the same <i>ur</i>
<i>Veenai</i>	ancient South Indian string instrument
<i>Verum</i>	empty
<i>Vitai</i>	seed
<i>Vesthi</i>	four-yard long cloth worn by men

## Preface

As of today, probably more than half of Sri Lanka's entire pre-war Tamil population have left the country. Most of them have done so in order to escape the civil war. Another third have been internally displaced. In 2008, when I conducted my first fieldwork among Tamils, the cruel inter-ethnic conflict and civil war had ravaged Sri Lanka for almost three decades. The war and related migration has split and scattered families that used to live together in their natal villages, their *urs*<sup>1</sup>, in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Today, parents, children, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents live separated in different countries and cities around the globe.

One starting point to understand the outbreak of the civil war is the colonial history of Ceylon, re-named Sri Lanka after independence. Having been successively colonized by the Portuguese (1505-1658) and the Dutch (1658-1796), the British (1796-1948) were the first to unite the island under colonial administration. During the British colonization, identities formed around ethnicity became more solid and linked to concrete political and administrative structures, such as the preference for Tamils over Sinhalese as civil servants in the administration, giving Tamils a privileged position which was resented by Sinhalese. When Sri Lanka became independent in 1948, elections were held and the Sinhalese majority supported parties that addressed grievances and issues important to the Sinhalese. In 1976, intense debates over the issues of language, Sinhalese settlements in Tamil areas, university entrance and self-rule led Tamil parties to join together and demand a separate Tamil state in the North and East, called Tamil Eelam.

---

<sup>1</sup> I use *urs* as an English plural form of *ur* (the family's natal village or home) in this dissertation. In Tamil, the plural form of *ur* is *urkal*.

<sup>2</sup> These included the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil National Alliance

During the mid to late 1970's, several Tamil separatist movements formed.<sup>2</sup> By 1986-87, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), also popularly called "the Tigers" or "the movement", had outstripped the others and proclaimed themselves to be "the sole and only Tamil representatives". In a few years, the movement had gained an uncontested dominant political and economic position among Tamils both in Sri Lanka and the diaspora. During this period, LTTE developed into a highly professional and disciplined fighting force. Suicide bombing, cyanide capsules and the use of fear and intimidation became their "trademarks". From the 1990's they built a quasi-state structure controlling an area of eighteen thousand square miles in the north and east of Sri Lanka with their own banking, taxation, law and prison systems. Meanwhile, the state's incursions into the north and east escalated to a full war footing, including aerial bombardment, curfews, boycotts and disappearances.

In 2006, the Sri Lankan government, encouraged by the country's Buddhist extremists, began a military offensive against LTTE. On a narrow strip of beach outside Mullaitivu in May 2009, LTTE made their last stand against the government forces, in the midst of tens of thousands of Tamil civilians - most of them held against their will. LTTE also stepped up their recruitment amongst the civilians, including young children. The war ended bloodily and brutally: LTTE's entire leadership, including their revered founder and leader Vellupillai Prabhakaran, were assassinated, and the state heavily shelled the area where civilians were trapped, including hospitals, as well as the so-called "safety zones" which the state itself had set up for Tamils who wanted to escape the conflict zone. The United Nations (2011) estimated 40,000 civilian deaths within the last phase of the war.

Meanwhile, all over the Tamil diaspora, demonstrations and campaigns were organized under the flag of LTTE and pictures of Prabhakaran, calling for the end of the bombing by Sri Lankan government and recognition of the LTTE. As Sharika Thiranagama (2011, 3) points out, the gulf between the internally displaced Tamils in Sri Lanka and those in the diaspora supporting the LTTE could not have been greater.

---

<sup>2</sup> These included the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF), Tamil National Alliance (TNA), Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOT), and Eelam National Democratic Liberation Front (ENDL).

Ever since the aftermath of the 1983 massacres of Tamils in Colombo – “Black July” – hundreds of thousands Tamil refugees have been migrating overseas, particularly after major riots, forced displacements and military operations. Today, the Tamil diaspora numbers almost 900.000, with particularly large populations in Canada (Toronto), UK (London), France (Paris), Germany and Australia and smaller ones in many other countries such as Italy, The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and New Zealand.

In the dissertation that follows, little more will be said about this horrifying and brutal civil war.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the war, which was the primary factor driving family members to migrate to different destinations, forms the background for the topic of the dissertation; the desires and challenges of maintaining kinship relations across distances. My own journey into these war-afflicted relationships started during my first fieldwork in Oslo as a graduate student in 2007. Through Selvi I was included in a large family originally from Korte, a small part of the larger neighbourhood of Thiruppur in the village of Ariyalai in Jaffna. Most of this family had been living in Oslo, Toronto, Paris and London since the 1980’s. Only a few remained in Korte or internally displaced in Sri Lanka.

After completing my Master’s thesis, I was employed as a research assistant for the project “Creativity in a World of Movement” founded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. Through this project, I got the opportunity to conduct fieldwork among the relatives from Korte living in Paris. The project resulted in three publications, based on ethnographic material from the two periods of fieldwork in Oslo and Paris, which was completed and published whilst affiliated with the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). Revised versions of two of these publications appear as Chapters 8 and 9 of this dissertation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For interested readers I refer to studies dealing with the inter-ethnic issue specifically (e.g. Kapferer 1988, Manogaran and Pfaffenberger 1994, Tambiah 1986, Wickramasinghe 2006, Wilson 1988, Spenser 1990).

<sup>4</sup> These publications are, respectively: “Nationalism as meaningful life projects in transnational Tamil families”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2012, volume 9, no. 4, and “Long-distance aesthetics: Being here and there. Aesthetics and Emotions in Tamil Nationalism”, in Fuglerud, Ø. and Wainwright, L. (eds.) *Art objects and value; perspectives on creativity and materialization*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2015.



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Introduction:

## Re-creating meaning in a Tamil family after war and migration

Parvathi and I are drinking tea underneath the two palm trees in her garden in Korte, her natal village (*ur*) outside Jaffna city in the North of Sri Lanka. Parvathi, in her mid-seventies is one of the few family members from Korte who still lives here. She often sits here under the trees in the evenings, sometimes alone, sometimes with her husband or now with me. The breeze and the cooling shadow of the coconut trees make this a comfortable place. But to Parvathi, the real attraction of the spot is its view. Through the metal bars in the gate, Parvathi can see who passes in the street. *If* someone passes at all. We exchange news, and ask each other about what we had for lunch. Normally, we would continue like this, Parvathi doing most of the talking, but today she suddenly falls silent for a long time. The small village is also almost silent. The only sounds are the buzzing from the highway, mixing with the voices from the Indian Tamil drama her husband is watching on the TV inside. Parvathi seems thoughtful. Then, with her eyes fixed on the gate where no one is coming nor passing, she breaks the silence:

My relations, almost everyone are in Norway [pauses - silence]. Or London, or Canada. My eldest brother's children, they are eleven. Two are here, the rest of them are in Norway, London and France. And my children, all three of them are

*Underneath the margosa tree*

there [in Norway]. Then my London-*akka*'s [elder sister's] children; three children in Norway and two in London.<sup>5</sup>

Parvathi often stated that “we are alone here”, referring to the absence of relatives who had once lived with her in Korte. She contrasts spending much of her time by herself with her memories of engaging in activities with her relatives in the past: gathering underneath the margosa tree in the evenings, cooking and eating together, going to the temple together, watching a movie at the community centre, waving to the train arriving from Colombo, visiting each other's houses and gardens, coming together for celebrations. Today, watching the mostly empty street has become her “timepass” as she calls it; something to do to kill boring and lonely time.

In this dissertation I tell the story of one extended family that within less than ten years went from living together in houses clustered around a junction in the small village of Korte, to living dispersed throughout the world. Experiencing their life-world to have been ruptured and lost when family members were forced to migrate, those born and brought up in Korte remember life of living with people defined as their relatives, or *sondam*, in their natal village, *ur*, to have been a good life. The loss creates a rupture between the past and the present, as a result of which the good moments of the past are highlighted and cherished today.

Living separated after war and migration, daily activities of re-creating the unity of the extended family that used to live within their *ur* of Korte is difficult at best. Many, like Parvathi, experience emotions of loss, aloneness and emptiness or the threat of such emotions. Life has not turned out as they expected: they should have continued to live together in Korte, as their family had done for generations. Pierre Bourdieu (2000, 208-213) argues that when our expectations are shattered, when the gap between our hopes and desires and our actual possibilities is widened, time and being is felt as meaningless and hopeless. He argues that it is precisely at such critical moments that the present is experienced to be empty, little or no future can be imagined, and a longing for the past arises. And in such critical moments, when one has lost one's daily life, the things one

---

<sup>5</sup> A year-and-a-half after this conversation, one of Parvathi's elder sister's children moved from London to Oslo.

## *Introduction*

has been socialized to rely upon, the need to re-orient oneself, to find new ways to continue to live meaningfully, becomes particularly intensified.

The need to make sense of one's own experiences and life situation, and to experience life as meaningful is a prominent human universal (cf. Finnström 2008 p. 7). As Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, xix) has put it: "Because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning". Our sense of meaning, to experience life as worth living, is essential to wellbeing, but is always precarious and unstable; marked by ups and downs over shorter or longer time periods. To find wellbeing involves a dynamic relationship between the forces that act upon us and our capacity for bringing the new into being, to go on with our lives (Jackson 2005, x-xii).

The question I grapple with in this dissertation, then, is how do the family members from Korte continue their lives in a time of experienced rupture and loss? I argue that in their struggle to maintain and find new ways of living meaningful lives, it becomes vital to uphold and negotiate the relationships of family or relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) across distance, as these relationships are perceived as crucial to living good lives and therefore, maintaining personal wellbeing. I look at how being together and maintaining the unity of *ur-sondam* are expressed and practiced in new ways, sometimes using new technologies, as family-members seek to maintain established relationships in radically new contexts.

The ethnography will show that when family members engage in such activities, a re-connection with their past life in their *ur* is sometimes reached – and sometimes shattered. A sense of meaning is found, or lost. I argue that, through creating and engaging in these activities, through the presence of relatives and other Tamils, surrounded by food, objects, songs and sounds perceived as "Tamil", family members are able to gain a sense of the past life they remember, living together in their *ur*. Moreover, I argue that giving and receiving money and gifts over distances, such as food, saris, skirts and family photographs and videos, make absent family members co-present to each other. Yet, the same items can also enhance the sense of family member's absence, and of separation. I will show that, in their search to re-create meaning, family members' engagement in events and with objects takes on an aesthetic dimension which affect the family members: their emotions and experiences of

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closeness and distance, of presence and absence, of being connected and disconnected to those with whom one “ought to be”. I seek to capture why family members invest so much effort in family events and in the exchange of money and gifts, as well as in practices and rituals hosted by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), popularly also called “the Tigers”. I argue that dynamic engagement with objects such as food, flowers, flags, polystyrene gravestones, photographs and live images, whilst surrounded by Tamil songs and language, as well as other relatives and Tamils – plays a central role in bringing forth meaningful experiences when living dispersed. I argue that family members’ quest to recreate meaning is grounded in the significance of both relatives (*sondam*) and the surroundings of their natal village (*ur*) to personhood and, as such, is vital to personal wellbeing. Person, *sondam* and *ur* are perceived as inextricably entwined.

In order to develop these arguments, I will first show how family members remember and perceive their life in Korte to have been characterized by living with their relatives (*sondam*) within their natal village (*ur*). I show how their stories reflect a life of constant engagement in activities with their relatives and that this is perceived as a good life. I use these stories to capture the understanding of person, *sondam* and *ur* as inextricably entwined. Secondly I show how this life was ruptured when the war led most to migrate, either abroad or internally. I will analyse the ways this rupture led to emotions of loss, emptiness and aloneness, and how family members seek to avoid such emotions. Thirdly, I show how their quest to re-create meaning is grounded in their perception of *sondam* and *ur* being part of the person, leading to the arrangement of, and engagement with, lavish family events and rituals, obsession with photographs and videos, the exchange of money and gifts and an enthusiastic engagement with LTTE’s ideology and practices. I argue that in these practices, family members sometimes succeed and sometimes fail to reconnect with their past life, and thus experience meaning and wellbeing – or the lack of it. In this process, which seeks to maintain old belongings, new belongings as well as new practices emerge.

## **A story of family, migration and war**

Like those of many other Tamils, the lives Parvathi and her relatives had known were completely changed by the vicious war and ensuing migration. The Tamil-speaking Hindus and Catholics of the North and East of Sri Lanka are a minority of approximately 11.9 percent and one of the country's two largest ethnic categories.<sup>6</sup> The other is the majority; the Sinhalese-speaking Buddhists and Christians, together making up 74.5 percent of the population.<sup>7</sup> The country's three-decade long civil war has been fought by the Sri Lankan government on one side against LTTE on the other, the Tamil-speaking North and East of the country having been the main battlefield. With the rise and escalation of the war, the situation in Jaffna and Sri Lanka became unbearable. From the early years until the end, the LTTE recruited young men and woman and the Sri Lankan army harassed young Tamils they suspected of being LTTE-members, in particular young men. Many young Tamils disappeared, pulled into the governments "white vans" – many not to be seen again. LTTE also silenced critical Tamil voices with bullets.

In this situation, migration abroad became the only way to secure one's own and one's children life. By 1992, close to 700.000 Tamils, one-third of Sri Lanka's entire

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<sup>6</sup> Down from 12.7 percent, according to Sahrika Thiranagama (2011, 13) as result of major outward migration and deaths caused by the war. See also Øivind Fuglerud (1999, 1). The percentages of population are here based on the 2001 Census. This could only survey 18 out of 25 districts due to the war, leaving out the Northern and Eastern parts of the country. The survey showed the population to be "Sinhalese 82.0 percent, Sri Lanka Tamil 4.3 percent, Indian Tamil 5.1 percent and Sri Lankan Moor 7.9 percent" (Government of Sri Lanka 2001, 9). However, census compilers point out that "according to the 2001 estimated population of Sri Lanka as a whole, Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamil, Indian Tamil and Sri Lanka Moor population comprise 74.5 percent, 11.9 percent, 4.6 percent and 8.3 percent respectively" (Government of Sri Lanka 2001).

<sup>7</sup> The Tamil-speakers of the North and East, with Jaffna as their "cultural capital" are the largest group of Tamils in Sri Lanka, and it is these Tamils that are mostly referred to when speaking of Tamils in relation to Sri Lanka's civil war. Two other Tamil-speaking minorities are however also involved in the country's conflict, though not officially acknowledged to be so and their perspectives has often been neglected in representations of the ethnic conflict (Thiranagama 2007, 126). The first is Sri Lankan Tamil-speaking Muslims, making up 8.3 percent of the population, and also formerly residents of the disputed North and East. In October 1990 the LTTE expelled all the 75.000 to 80.000 Muslims from the five districts in the north under its control (Vavuniya, Mannar, Mullaithivu, Jaffna, and Kilinochchi) (Thiranagama 2007, 126). Most are now internally displaced, living in and around Colombo and the district of Puttalam (Thiranagama 2011, 13). The other most significant Tamil-speaking group and also affected by the war are the Malaiyaha Tamils, 4.6 percent of the population. These are descendants of 19th-century Indian plantation workers brought by the British (Thiranagama 2014, 3). For the sake of brevity, when I refer to "Tamils" without qualification, I refer to the Hindu and Catholic Northern and Eastern Sri Lankan Tamils that are officially acknowledged to have been in conflict with the Government.



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pre-war Tamil population had left the country (Fuglerud 1999, 1), and today probably more than half of the pre-war population lives abroad. Before the rise of the inter-ethnic conflict, emigration was, however, not an unknown phenomena to Jaffna Tamils. They have a long history of migration as means of economic and social mobility, in particular as civil servants for the British colonial administration in British Malaya and Singapore.<sup>8</sup> By the twentieth century “a spirit of migration mostly by middleclass Tamils, became built into Tamil cultural aspirations” (McDowell 1996, 69).<sup>9</sup> With the outbreak of civil war, however, migration was no longer a choice for economic betterment, but a means of saving one’s life.

Like many Jaffna parents during the 1980’s and 1990’s, Parvathi and her husband felt it too dangerous to let their children stay in Jaffna after they became teenagers. The only way to keep their children safe from both the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE was to send them to Parvathi’s sister Lakshmi, who had already migrated to Oslo. They had no chance to get a visa for themselves and would not risk a dangerous flight. Several of Parvathi’s other siblings’ children followed the same route to Norway, as did other relatives from Korte. Other relatives found their way to London, Toronto and Paris, and later to cities in Malaysia, Sweden and Germany. Others found refugee in the LTTE-controlled Vanni-area, where they felt a little safer than living under Army surveillance in Jaffna.

One by one, the family members left Korte.<sup>10</sup> Like many other Jaffna parents who sent their children away and saw others leave, Parvathi and her husband thought that their children and other relatives would return when the war ended. But the war dragged on for almost three decades. And to Parvathi’s and her husband’s sorrow, when the war

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<sup>8</sup> With reference to Bastin (1997), Thiranagama (2011, 15-16, 2014, 5) describes how factors including access to education through the many British missionary schools in Jaffna, overpopulation and lack of land together with the risks of cash crop agriculture, led Jaffna Tamils to invest in education. Education was, in turn, the ticket to government jobs as civil servants in the colonial administration, particularly in the south of the island, but also to overseas British colonial territories

<sup>9</sup> Rates of emigration were consistently high for the Jaffna peninsula throughout the colonial and postcolonial period (Thiranagama 2011, 15).

<sup>10</sup> Due to my unofficial status as a researcher in Sri Lanka, I could not access official statistics to document this thinning of the pre-war population in Korte, as well as the larger area of Thiruppur of which Korte is part. The many ruins, empty plots and houses rented out to strangers in Korte, and the few relatives that are left leads to an estimation that about eighty percent of the pre-war Korte and Thiruppur-population migrated. Due to Norway’s participation in the peace negotiations between the Government and LTTE, I was strongly advised, as a Norwegian citizen, to keep a low profile in regard to the authorities, including not applying for a research visa that probably would have been declined.

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brutally and finally ended in 2009, their children and other relatives did not return to live with them again. Those once young children and relatives who had left Korte had married, had children and were working abroad. For them, it was complicated to re-establish themselves in Sri Lanka, particularly because their children had lived all their life in Europe or Canada. Also significant was the situation of general insecurity and suppression of Tamil minorities that prevailed in the country following the war's end and still prevails as I write. Korte had become depleted of their once so abundant *sondam* or relatives. Today, only a few still live in their place of origin, leaving family members dispersed around the globe: Oslo, Paris, London, Toronto *and* Jaffna being their places of residence.

For those who stayed and those who left, life was changed beyond their control. In this dissertation I examine family members' quest to re-create meaningful lives when living dispersed through the stories of those who migrated *and* of those who stayed. While the geographical locations of fieldwork moved between Oslo, Paris, London and Jaffna, I regard the relationships of the extended Tamil family in question as one site. Taking the family living in different locations as starting point for study reveals the complexities of migration experiences (Olwig 2007, 20-21). I thereby move away from understanding the field as multi-sited or transnational. The problem with these "buzzwords" in ethnographies of migration (Hage 2005, 464) is that they imply a study of something or someone moving across or outside limited bounded sites within a nation's borders, taking these borders for granted. In my view, it is impossible to treat each geographical location, in which a family member lives as a different site (cf. Hage 2005). Within the family with which I worked, their expectations and feelings towards one another did not stop at the borders of their geographical places of residence.

The family members in question were all born in Korte between 1935 and 1970 and raised there in peace-time. Today they are between their mid-forties and mid-seventies. Valentine Daniel (1996) and Sharika Thiranagama (2011, 34) have pointed out that the rapidity of social change in Jaffna formed generations that did not share the same experiences. While the family members I am concerned with vary in age by up to thirty years, they all share a common first-hand experience of their life together in their family's natal village (*ur*) in Jaffna before the war. More importantly, they all

experienced the rupture of this life. As such, I suggest that they do have both shared experiences and memories of life prior to the massive migration and similar experiences of a rupture to that life.

### Living with relatives (*sondam*) in the *ur* of Korte

In approaching the family members' quest to re-create meaning after war and migration, I foreground the centrality of *sondam* (family or relatives) and *ur* (natal village or home). These are two of the most emphasised aspects of personhood and life in Jaffna, both by locals and scholars working within Sri Lanka and South India (Banks 1957, 1960, Barnett 1976, Clark-Decès 2011, Daniel 1984, David 1973, Dumont 1970, Good 1981, 1991, 1996, Kapadia 1995, McGilvray 1982, Thiranagama 2007, 2011, Trautmann 1981, Trawick 1990). *Sondam* and *ur*, however, are seldom discussed together by scholars. The vast literature that covers notions of kin or *sondam* has focused upon debates around Dravidian kinship which are full of technical details, abstract formulas and context-specific theories of bodily substances. This literature has been critiqued by Margaret Trawick (1990), Øivind Fuglerud (1996, 202) and Cecilia Busby (1997) (cf. Barnett 1976, Clark-Decès 2011, David 1973, Dumont 1970, Good 1981, 1991, 1996, Marriott and Inden 1977, Trautmann 1981).<sup>11</sup>

The few writers who have observed the importance of natal village or *ur* to Tamil kinship and personhood include Daniel (1984), Michael Banks (1957), and more recently Thiranagama (2011).<sup>12</sup> In his ethnographic study in Tamil Nadu, Daniel (1984) emphasises that *ur* becomes part of the person through shared substance generated by being and living in the *ur*. Studying kinship and marriage in Jaffna, Banks (1957) stresses that relatives and non-relatives living in one's *ur* are the most important social

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<sup>11</sup> Many of the studies of Dravidian kinship have forged "representational" views, in accordance with the general focus on structures and representations that dominated early studies of kinship (cf. Carsten 2004, Levine 2008). The analysis by Louis Dumont (1970) is the best-known structuralist approach to South Indian kinship. It is much inspired by the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) who explicitly draws on the linguistic theories of representation and meaning developed by Ferdinand de Saussure (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 20, 209). To Lévi-Strauss, systems of marriage rules are considered as an ideal, unconscious mental representation. Arguing that the essence of Dravidian kinship is the *idea* of affinity, Dumont (1970) considers actual experienced relationships between people as insignificant or nonexistent.

<sup>12</sup> Banks (1957) does not discuss *ur*, but rather *kiramam*, village, and ward. However he does state the importance of place (*ur*) and kin (*sondam*).

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unit in Jaffna villages. Moreover, in her study on war and internal refugees in Sri Lanka, Thiranagama (2011) emphasises the functions of ideas of *ur* in contexts of displacement, through a focus on the concept's historical and political trajectories. Basing my argument on the Korte-relatives'<sup>13</sup> own memories, practices and understandings, I will argue that lived and remembered emotional relationships between relatives (*sondam*) and between relatives and their natal village (*ur*) cannot be overlooked. Notions of kinship (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) are interdependent and therefore belong to the same debate on personhood.

*Sondam* means family or relations, including distant relatives (Banks 1960, 70). In daily life in Korte and Jaffna in general, *sondam* is used alternately with the expression *engede akhel*, meaning "our people". The translation of *sondam* or *contam* in The Tamil Lexicon (2007, 1651) is also "that which belong to oneself" (see also Clark-Decès 2011). Distinguishing *sondam* further, the family members in Korte separate *sondam* from *ende sondam*, the last meaning "my own relations". "My own relations" include one's parents, siblings, parents' siblings and their children, i.e classificatory parallel- and cross-cousins. Importantly, a term referring only to the nuclear family is not found in the Tamil language.

To family members born and raised in Korte, *ende sondam* are those that once lived within their family's natal village, the *ur* of Korte. *Ur* means natal village or home, where the family originates from and to which soil they perceive themselves to be connected. In Korte, *sondam* and *ur* thus overlap and are interdependent. Within this area, all kinship relations are known in detail (see kinship chart, Appendix 1). Stretching out from Korte, a few hundred meters to the south of the junction and the temple is the larger *ur* of Thiruppur of which Korte is a part. To the relatives in Korte, most of the people in Thiruppur are perceived to be relatives, although they may not always have detailed knowledge of kinship relations.<sup>14</sup> Rather, they perceive that somehow they are mostly all relatives or *sondam*, such relationships usually being explained through marriages a generation or more back, although precisely who married

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<sup>13</sup> In this dissertation I use the term Korte-relatives to refer to the family members of the *sondam* and *ur* of Korte. Terming other people from different places, Jaffna Tamils will say the name of the place and add the suffix *-akhal*, meaning people. Thus Korte-*sondam* or Korte-relatives becomes close to what they and others term themselves.

<sup>14</sup> Banks (1957, 53, 124) also notes the same among people in Jaffna in general.

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who may be only vaguely understood.<sup>15</sup> These are regarded as more distant relatives or *sondam*, and largely undifferentiated relatives.

Thiruppur, of which Korte is a part, is itself part of the main *ur* of Ariyalai. Korte is thus the smallest unit of an *ur*, what can be regarded as their “family-*ur*”, within the neighbourhood-*ur*, or sub-*ur* of Thiruppur, which forms part of Ariyalai: the largest unit of *ur*.<sup>16</sup> To the unfamiliar passer-by, there are no marked differences between Korte, Thiruppur and Ariyalai. The places consist of houses, gardens, empty lands and ruins, and to the untrained eye can seem as an extension of Jaffna city. To the inhabitants of Korte, Thiruppur and the rest of Ariyalai, however, these places are easily differentiated and socially clearly marked. The border of the areas follows the residence of kin, also belonging to the different sub-castes of the Siviyars found within Ariyalai.<sup>17</sup> Daniel (1984, 62, 68) has similar argued that the *ur* is a cognitively and contextually shifting space, the conception of which is relative to the person. The definitions and borders of *ur*, therefore, depend upon its inhabitants and, as such, are flexible.

In the childhood years of the pre-war Korte generation in question, Korte consisted of about ten houses, with approximately sixty to seventy family members. When the Korte-relatives married and build new houses for daughters and sisters as dowries, most of the houses were built within the land already perceived as Korte, but some expanded to build on plots in the surrounding Thiruppur. The new houses and plots then became

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<sup>15</sup> The normal explanation is that someone in the person’s own family married with that family in the past. When someone in your family marries into another family, that person’s relatives, *sondam*, will also be considered your family’s relations (cf. Banks 1957). As a brother, your sister’s husband’s family will also become your *sondam*, if they are not already. This is particularly evident when people are invited to family functions as all one’s *sondam* have to be included. Family members in Korte and Thiruppur thereby also belong to the same sub-caste of the Siviyars, that is the dominant caste (*sadi*) group of Ariyalai. Some small populations of the *ampadder*, *pallar*, *pariyar* and *koviyar* castes are also found within Ariyalai. I discuss the issue of caste more into detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> What I term sub-*ur* seems to be equivalent to what Banks terms as “ward”. As he points out, Jaffna Tamils lack a generic term for “ward”, or a smaller unit than village (Banks 1960, 71). Banks (1960) does not use the term *ur*, but rather *kirama* which refer to official boundaries of villages, rather than people’s own perceptions of what and where an village, or natal village, or in Daniel’s (1984) terms, *ur*, exists. That Banks (1957, 1960) are more concerned with official standards than people’s own lived experiences can also be seen in his general use of Tamil words. Banks use all Tamil words in the written form, such as *kirama*, *sondakarar* and *enennudaia sondakarar* rather in the spoken form of *ur*, *sondam* and *ende sondam*.

<sup>17</sup> I treat the topic of caste more in detail in Chapter 2.

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included in Korte, showing the flexibility of the *ur*.<sup>18</sup> Including the houses of Korte, Thiruppur comprises roughly sixty houses. As the borders of the *ur* of Korte can be expanded due to relatives and sub-castes settlement, so can also the *ur* of Thiruppur<sup>19</sup> as much as the *ur* of Ariyalai.<sup>20</sup>

The flexible units of the residential areas, *ur*, are thereby opposed to *kiramam* or *kirama* (village) that have administrative boundaries authorized by the government (see also Banks 1960, 69, Daniel 1984, 69). In the context of Korte, Ariyalai is both the village or *kiramam* and *ur*; it has formal and authorized borders, and can be found on maps. Divided into West and East Ariyalai, the *ur* also makes up two of the twenty-three municipal councils in Jaffna (Madavan 2011, 8). But, to the inhabitants of Korte and Thiruppur, Ariyalai as their *kiramam* is something that is mostly used in official settings or written language, such as school essays. To the inhabitants of Korte, Ariyalai is mostly talked and thought about as their *ur*. Depending on the context, Korte-relatives will state their *ur* to be Ariyalai, Thiruppur or Korte. When meeting others who are not from Ariyalai, they will name Ariyalai as their *ur*, when meeting someone from Ariyalai, Thiruppur or Korte will be named as their *ur*. *Ur* is as Daniel (1984, 62, 68) argues person-centric and flexible in terms of context, whereas the *kiramam* has fixed borders.

The daily term used to indicate kin (*sondam*); *engede akhal* (our people) also shows the fluidity in notions of *sondam* and *ur*. *Engede akhal* can include those who one perceives as related, such as distant *sondam* in their common *ur* of Thiruppur. However, people from the larger *ur* of Ariyalai are also regarded as like themselves although kinship relations may not be known or recognized. This “aliqueness” is due to the proximity of their residential areas. Such people are termed *ur-akhal*, meaning *ur-*

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, the area of Korte continue to be called Korte today despite that few relatives still live in the area. Thus *ur* only seem to expand and not contract in tandem with the settlement of the relatives. I suggest this conservatism in nomenclature is caused by the fact that change has resulted from imposed migration and war rather than voluntary movement.

<sup>19</sup> Three of the nuclear families of Thiruppur also lived in houses along one of the alleys of the junction where the houses of the Korte-relatives are clustered. One of these nuclear families consist of distant relatives to the fathers of the Sittampalam- and the Balasundaram-siblings (being brothers). To the two other families, the relatives of Korte stated a connection but without detailed genealogical knowledge. This does not imply that the property of the house is not termed as Korte, due to the flexibility of notions of *ur*.

<sup>20</sup> The Sri Lankan government estimates the population of the *official* area of Ariyalai to be about 7.000 in 2007, where about 1.300 are internally displaced (Government of Sri Lanka 2008).

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people. When I in this dissertation use the terms *ur* and *sondam* I generally refer to the closest units of both relatives and their natal village. However, as in daily life, these terms are flexible according to the context in which they are applied.

#### ***Meaning and value of sondam and ur***

A central point in my analysis is that through the activities, practiced relationships, ideals and language of kinship in everyday Korte-life, the emotional value of being interrelated with relatives (*sondam*) and the family's natal village (*ur*) becomes grounded in the persons who were born and grew up in pre-war Korte. Both the unities of *sondam* and *ur* are seen to give family members identity and a place within a larger set of relations that are central to the person's wellbeing. They also exclude the relatives from other sets of relations.

*Sondam* and *ur* is always distinguished from *sondam-illai*. The *sondam-illai*, non-kin or non-relatives, often also referred to as "strangers", are people that do not belong to one's own extended kin-group. This distinction between *sondam* and *sondam-illai* is based in the *ideal* of the bilateral cross-cousin marriage in Dravidian kinship (Dumont 1970, Trautmann 1981, Trawick 1990). In theory, this ideal will leave two men exchanging sisters in marriage and their sons again exchanging sisters through generations. In this pattern, mother's brother's daughter and father's sister's daughter is the same person (Trawick 1990, 121). In real life, of course, the ideal marriage is seldom fulfilled, but as I will discuss, it is still highly valued.

To the relatives in Korte, to marry a cross-cousin or as close as possible in terms of relatives within their natal village, remains an emotional ideal. Due to the practice of giving a piece of the parents' land in dowry to the bride, family members remain resident within the family's natal village. This confirms a family's belonging to a place or *ur*. In Korte, this implies that their *sondam* belong to their *ur*, while *sondam-illai* belong neither to their kin-group nor to their natal village (*ur*). As such, *sondam* includes notions of *ur*, as much as *ur* includes notions of *sondam*. Co-habitation in the family's *ur* is thus central to kinship and identity. Belonging to a family, one also belongs to an *ur*.

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Importantly, the ideal of the cross-cousin marriage places the person in relation to his or her socially relevant others. The system of cross-cousin marriage comes with an extensive set of kinship terms defining categories of kin. Each term has corresponding innate expectations, ideals and rules of conduct, and indicates obligations and rights between the different categories of kin. However, as I discuss in Chapter 2, these “guidelines” becomes much more complex in real life. This terminology is what is considered to constitute “Dravidian kinship” (Trawick 1990, 118).

Not merely giving people identity by virtue of its role in kinship, the family’s natal village (*ur*) itself is also perceived to effect and form its inhabitants. The qualities of the soil, water and food grown in the *ur* are perceived to give the family members similar characters to the soil in which they live, interact, drink and eat (Daniel 1984). The qualities of the soil become embodied in the personal characteristics. The characters of the soil thereby give corresponding moral values to the people who inhabit and consume it. For example, I will discuss in Chapter 1, the ways that dirty and clean, sour and sweet each correspond to higher and lower degrees of morality (cf. Banks 1957, Marriott and Inden 1977).

As I will show in Chapter 1, the family members’ stories of life in Korte before migration and war are characterized by the co-habitation of relatives in their natal village. The highlighted memories are those of primary socializing among themselves in this area, and secondly with more extended relatives living in the larger *ur* of Thiruppur. This life is remembered and interpreted as what constitutes a good life. Within this unity of close and extended family, or *sondam*, solidarity and support is expected, visits were made, joy and sorrow shared, rituals undertaken, food cooked and shared, and daily activities and responsibilities shared. The activities, types and qualities of the relationship of Korte-persons were, and are, involved in with their relatives and their natal village, including the qualities of the soil and water in the *ur*.

The value of living with relatives in the family’s natal village is also stressed in the overall discourse regarding the importance of marriage and children among Jaffna Tamils. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, marriage and married life with children are considered ultimate goals, necessary to lead a happy life. Marriage is regarded as *manam*, meaning “union” and “fragrance”, and seen as life itself (Trawick 1990, 39).



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Moreover, one does not become a complete social person before one is a mother or a father. Thus the ideal life of marriage, preferably with a cross-cousin or as close as possible in terms of kinship, and raising children within this union, maintain the bonds of a larger family through generations. The dowry practice also secures the family's continued residence in the family's natal village. Thus, the ideal of marriage and children gives expectations of a good life where the family live and continue to live within the family's natal village (*ur*) through generations.

In this dissertation I explore how, in the context of migration, these two belongings and relationships of *sondam* and *ur* are not abandoned as merely lost or longed for, but continue to be crucial to experiencing life as meaningful. In processes of re-creating meaning, belongings founded in notions of *sondam* and *ur* are both a force driving engagement in new practices and communities and a constraint on developing new relations. My contributions to studies on Tamil personhood is thus to bring together the concepts of *ur* and *sondam*, which have generally been separated in previous scholarship, and to highlight how experiences of wellbeing, and thus also the quest to re-create meaning are based in a particular notion of interrelationships between person, *sondam* and *ur*.

### **Towards a broader material analysis of meaning-making**

Living dispersed, experiencing the loss of the past way of life that had secured their wellbeing, I suggest that family members' desire to continue to be part of *sondam* and *ur* creates new practices. They both desire and feel obligated to exchange money and gifts across distances as tokens of love and care; they invest effort, time and money in arranging and coming together for lavish puberty ceremonies for daughters which they are preoccupied with recording in film and photographs; they participate in family rituals through the media technology of Skype; and, in diaspora, parents seek to implant in their children a Tamil identity and exhibit great enthusiasm to participate in national rituals to commemorate the dead soldiers of the LTTE.

In order to grasp how these practices and events becomes central to the processes in which family members re-orient themselves to their new context of dispersed living, I

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suggest that attention towards the meaning and experience gained in these events is needed. I argue that in these practices, and in particularly in the larger events, engagement with the presence of objects and persons plays a central role. Engaging with objects, their inherent sensorial qualities – such as their form, view, taste, smell and sound - are revealed. These objects include food and clothes defined as Tamil, such as rice and curries, saris and *panjabis*,<sup>21</sup> statues similar to those in Hindu temples, flowers seen in Jaffna, the flag of the LTTE, polystyrene gravestones, family photographs and film of family members. In these events, family members are also surrounded by the sights and sounds of Tamil song, dance and lyrical poetry, as much as language. I suggest that engaging with these objects, the sensorial qualities of the objects affect family members, leading them to associate these affects and objects to wider conceptions of their past meaningful life. I argue that engagement in such events and practices give experiences of closeness and absence, nearness and distance to their relatives (*sondam*) and to their life in the *ur*.

A perspective that, with some limitations, might contribute to grasping the meaning and experience of objects as well as surroundings is Tim Ingold's concept of "meshwork" (Ingold 2007a, 2008, 2011). Crucial to the meshwork is Ingold's central argument that all lives are relational, dynamic and open (Ingold 2000, 2007a, b, 2008, 2011).<sup>22</sup> Here, Ingold understands objects within a wider relational field in and through which both humans and objects circulate and are entangled (cf. Harvey 2013). All human and non-human beings live submersed in material worlds, all having substance and engage with other substances. All living organisms are as such open lines, where

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<sup>21</sup> A *panjabi* or *punjabi salwar* suit is used by girls for festive occasions before they have their puberty ceremony, and when dancing. The suit has three parts; a knee-long *kameez* top, a baggy *salwar* bottom and the long *dupatta* scarf. When dancing, the scarf is usually not worn.

<sup>22</sup> Ingold critiques other material views, particularly Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) (cf. Latour 2005a, b), which Ingold understands as regarding organisms as bounded circles. In Ingold's view, such perspectives reduce lives to inner cognitive or representational schemas (Ingold 2008, 1805, 2011, 70, 86, 92, 94) in which "material culture" or things are regarded as immobile (cf. Harvey 2013, 57). Here, Ingold sees the distinction between meshwork and the network of ANT as critical. Ingold's concept of the meshwork, and its inherent view on openness and life as lines in this meshwork, is not only a critique of the linguistic turn, but also a critique of ANT and its focus on networks (in opposition to meshwork). Ingold (2008, 1805, 2011, 70, 86, 92, 94) argues that ANT's network metaphor gives associations to connectivity. And to be connected requires a prior separation of the elements that connect, which involves a separate inside of bounded organism, or objects: "each is turned in upon itself prior to its integration into the network" (Ingold 2008, 1805). In Ingold's view, the network of ANT also gives a view of bounded organisms with a separated inside and outside, which he strongly argues against. The meshwork perspective sees organisms as multiple lines emanating from a single source, repudiating the network's inversion.

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organisms have no boundaries of inside and outside, rather being “trails of movement and growth” (Ingold 2011, 69).<sup>23</sup>

In the meshwork, all lives, all organisms – including humans – are as such regarded as open, unbounded lines (Ingold 2007a, 2008, 2011). Ingold gives weight to the processes and engagements in which humans are involved with, both with other humans and non-humans. Central to this view is his concern with perception. Ingold draws on James Gibson’s ecological psychology and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. Perception, to Gibson, was not an achievement of a mind in a body, “but of the whole organism as it moves about in its environment, and that what it perceives are not things as such but what they afford for the pursuance of its current activity” (Ingold 2011, 11). To Ingold, perception is thereby “fundamentally about *movement*” (Ingold 2011, 11, italic in original), revealed in the processes of habitation. Moreover, Ingold is inspired by Merleau-Ponty’s understanding that because we are in a sentient world we sense it. Ingold thus argues that open to the world the organism is a sentient body. This makes the organism both a perceiver and a producer of the world’s coming into being (Ingold 2011, 12).

Ingold’s meshwork is constituted by a plethora of organisms which exist as open and sensing lines. In a tissue of trails, the lines make up the texture of the lifeworld. Here, organisms are constituted relationally along with the other trails of life, interweaving their lines with those of other organisms as they move along pathways in their involvement in the world:

Organisms and persons [...] are [...] knots in a tissue of knots, whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other knots, comprise the meshwork (Ingold 2011, 70).

In this view, life, including human life: who we are and who we become, is constituted by our relational processes, in the meetings and entwinings with the lifelines of other organisms. To Ingold (2011, 72, 85), organisms are thereby lines of flow rather than lines of connection, and life is about movement and growth, of becoming, rather

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<sup>23</sup> This view draws on the philosopher Henri Bergson’s understanding that life is about movement and flow (Ingold 2011, 13).

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than of being.<sup>24</sup> In these practices, “we constitute our conditions for existence” (Ingold 2011, 8).

In Chapter 1, I will argue that it is in the remembered movements and activities in the alleys and houses in Korte and Thiruppur, that the Korte-relatives understand to have interweaved their own trail of life with the lines of their family members (*sondam*) and the environment of their natal village (*ur*). Meeting each other at the community well, cooking together or chatting underneath the margrosa tree, drinking the well-water and eating the fruits and vegetables grown in the soil, the person, the relatives (*sondam*) and the natal village (*ur*) sense and become caught up in each other. As such, the Korte-relatives constitute and are constituted by their environment (including other organisms) in what could be termed as a meshwork.

Attending to concrete and sensorial relations between humans and their surroundings, the concept of the meshwork serves to include objects and surroundings in our analysis of human world-making. In particular, such a focus opens up to include the environment of the family’s natal village (*ur*) as an active force, that along with relationships between kin, shapes their social practice and understanding of life in Korte as meaningful interrelationships between person, *sondam* and *ur*. However, recalling the scene with which I opened this Introduction; Parvathi was sitting under the palm trees in her garden, watching the empty street, as she often does, being alone. An element of this story is that most of those who sometimes pass by are mostly her new neighbours, who are “strangers”, *sondam-illai*. The strangers rent the houses of Parvathi’s relatives living abroad as the “stranger’s” own houses and natal villages have been more severely torn by war than Thiruppur and may still be under Army control.

Parvathi’s acquaintance with the residents closest to her house extends to short chats on the lane. Unlike previous relationships with her relatives when they were her neighbours, Parvathi and the strangers do not regularly visit each other, exchange food, participate in each other’s family celebrations, watch and take care of each other’s children, go to the temple or market together or cook together. As I show in this

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<sup>24</sup> Ingold here takes the metaphor of flow from the Actor-Network Theorists Annemarie Mol and John Law (1994) and their perspective on fluid space. A fluid space has no clear boundaries. Rather entities mix, leak, transform and disappear – they are fluid (Mol and Law 1994, 643, see also Ingold 2011, 86). To Ingold (2011, 86), every line is a relation in fluid space, as it flows on its paths. Lines too are open and “leak”.

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dissertation, Parvathi, like many of her other relatives in London, Paris and Oslo, finds it difficult to involve herself much with her new neighbours. Often sitting alone, doing her “timepass” of watching the empty street, Parvathi expressed her aloneness. But rather than seeking to entwine her lifeline with these new others in her present surroundings, possibly making her feel less alone, Parvathi withdraws from this possibility and prefers to remain alone underneath the palm tress.

If we were such open organisms as Ingold (2007a, b, 2008, 2011) describes, entangling our lifelines with “everything on our way”, human and non-human, why does not Parvathi entwine her lifeline with her new neighbours, and perhaps find experiences which make life more meaningful again? Here we seem to encounter the limitations of Ingold’s approach, and I will, therefore, not limit my analysis to the meshwork perspective in seeking to understand how objects give meaning and experiences.

#### *Endless openness?*

In my view, the problem with Ingold’s perspective of the open lines in the meshwork is that it gives endless possibilities for new connections and relations.<sup>25</sup> Finding it troublesome to interact with their new neighbours, Parvathi like many of her other relatives, rather seek avoid these possible relationships. To them, the characteristics of the humans and the non-humans in their surroundings, i.e their forms, shapes and other sensorial qualities are not the only way they understand and experience other lines of life that they encounter on their path. Rather, family members’ sensorial experience and understandings of humans, objects and environments is conditioned by specific qualities, ideals, and emotions ordering their life-world, which derive from notions of the particular interrelationships between persons, *sondam* and *ur*. The sensorial

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<sup>25</sup> A similar debate questioning the endless openness of the networks within ANT (Latour 2005a, b) is found among writes such as Jeremy Lecomte (2013), Marilyn Strathern (1996) and Yael Navaro-Yashin (2009). Their common critique is that the material perspectives are limitlessness. In the openness of networks, “one can always discover networks within networks” (Strathern 1996, 523-524). Strathern (1996) and Navaro-Yashin (2009) argue that analysis needs to be stopped from further extension, to be “cut” at some point. While Ingold (2008, 1805, 2011, 70, 86, 92, 94) has criticized Latour’s view of ascribing all agents similar agency, he has not address the problem of unlimited openness.

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encounter with persons such as “strangers” thereby also connect to further qualities of belonging or not in this meaningful interrelationship.

Because the meshwork perspective does not take into account that humans and objects have other dimensions besides their concrete material and sensorial forms, I suggest it only partly explain how objects and surroundings are part of human experience and meaning-making. This denial that objects, as well as humans have meaning beyond their sensorial qualities is based in what has recently has been called the “material turn”, of which Ingold is a part. From different perspectives diverging among Science and Technology Studies (STS), Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), ecologically-oriented studies of human-nature entanglements and studies of consumption, writers such as Bruno Latour (2005a, b), John Law (2010) and Ingold (2007a, b, 2008, 2011) have set out to move beyond what they regard as a representational framework wherein cultures are treated as systems of belief (concepts, language/terminology etc).<sup>26</sup> The material perspective criticize the representational views or the “linguistic turn” to be preoccupied with a Saussurian understanding of the sign; focusing only on the meaning of signs, primarily regarded as words, and the concepts they represent (cf. Barthes 1964, 43). The representational perspectives of the “linguistic turn” are critiqued for being too human-centred and concerned with abstract thinking and concepts, failing to ground their analysis in our material world.

Writers within the material turn, suggest that the “linguistic turn” has thereby forged a view that humans have access to the world only through language, and not directly through the worlds’ materiality. Seeking to move beyond such representational views, writers within the material turn have advocated a shift from subject-subject oriented analysis to a subject-object oriented perspective, in which objects, “things” and surroundings - the material - need to be at the centre of our analysis. Humans, objects, surroundings or spaces are regarded as relationally effecting agents, already engaged in

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<sup>26</sup> The interest in material perspectives and material culture is not new (cf. Fuglerud and Wainwright 2015, 2). The attention to objects, either in museums or as aesthetics, is part of anthropology’s history. The institutionalization of anthropology developed in close proximity to exotic collections brought “home” by missionaries, adventurers and colonizers. The discipline’s turn away from “the material” can be understood as a consequence of anthropology’s need to break free from the evolutionist paradigm and from its associations with colonizers (Fuglerud and Wainwright 2015, 3).

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each other, where nothing represents something else, but has meaning in itself, shaping the social (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007).

In my view, attending to objects and materiality in our analysis does not need to imply that objects, as well as persons that we encounter and with whose lifelines we intertwine, do not also connect to other objects, thoughts, ideas and actions. In contrast to Saussure, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze (2000) includes the *material* aspect of signs as central to the ways humans gain access to the world. In Deleuze's view, the materiality or "thingliness" of signs in terms of sensorial qualities of form, shape, smell and taste are not opposed to its symbolic representations and associations. Deleuze calls these "worldly signs" which have "two sides": one, its sensed forms of materiality; its appearance, taste, touch and smell that affect us with joy, nervousness and suffering that, in turn, motivates us to search for the second side of signs; the representational meanings which make the object a sign.

Deleuze is interested in how signs affect us and lead us to search for their meanings. Our understanding of the sign is thereby gained through our engagement with materiality and the ways we connect the material to other things or worlds, a set of meanings or a heterogeneity of materiality. The signs conjoin, bringing forth different meanings in various "families of mind" (Deleuze 2000, 5). From the infinite potential impressions of signs, we select those that have specific meaning for us, giving them correlations to specific materials associated with particular sets of thoughts and actions. In this process, in seeking signs, the infinitely meaningful impressions are exceeded, and we give them specific correlations to other materials, making them to a set of actions and thoughts (Deleuze 2000, 6). Feelings produced by these actions and thoughts can again correlate to other thoughts and actions, making up a world of signs, giving the signs further meanings. Thereby, one object can come to signify those other objects and impressions to which it correlates.

The worldly sign thereby intervenes in an action or thought by re-opening it or closing it off to specific forms of worldliness. It makes us anticipate new signs as much as it annuls other thoughts and actions by occluding certain objects. This "intervention" of the worldly signs, allow us to concentrate on specific worldly signs in order to discover meaning and reach an understanding of the world (Deleuze 2000, 6-7, see also

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Dohan 2007, 34). To Deleuze, it is through such interpretation of signs that we essentially learn, and to learn is thus first of all to consider a substance, an object (Deleuze 2000, 4). Our ability to understand the world, to gain more knowledge about it, is therefore based in sensorial materiality.

Like Ingold, Deleuze is concerned with how materiality is sensed. But unlike Ingold, he asserts that sensorial materiality affects us and leads us to search for its wider meaning, enabling us to connect this meaning to certain materials, thoughts and actions, and constraining us from connecting with others. I therefore suggest that taking a material approach to meaning-making, putting our concrete and sensed relationships to objects and other humans at the centre of analysis, does not need to force us to either study “objects” or “ideas”. Rather, I regard all interaction and treatment of materiality, of concrete and sensorial relationships, to be performed by humans who are socialized into specific worlds, such as a particular notion of kinship. Here, objects and persons are both experienced as holders and bearers of specific meanings. This implies that our relationships to other persons, surroundings and objects that we encounter on our path, or avoid encountering, are not endlessly open; they are part of specific “worlds” within which they connect to other materials, ideas and actions, such as the idea of kinship.

I suggest that the reason why Parvathi rejects entwining her lifeline with those of strangers is that Parvathi associates strangers with her idea of *sondam-illai*, someone that does not belong to oneself, and is supposed to be kept outside one’s family (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*). The strangers do not belong within Parvathi’s meaningful interrelationships of person, *sondam* and *ur*. As such, Parvathi finds it difficult to enter into open intertwinings with them. Rather, such physical and social distance-keeping from others not perceived as “their own” facilitated development of emotions between the Korte-relatives. The open entwining between the person, *sondam* and *ur* experienced *within* the social and physical borders of pre-war Korte, existed because certain people, strangers, were kept outside this unity. These interrelationships of person, *sondam* and *ur* thereby comprise a meaningful “world” where certain persons and objects belong while others do not.



***From meshwork to enmeshment***

The entwinings that are remembered to have taken place in pre-war Korte and the Korte-relatives relationships and meaning-making today, do not take place in an endlessly open and neutral arena, bounded only by the sensorial and material world. Rather in such processes of meaning-making, I suggest that the Korte-relatives interpret persons, as well as objects, in terms of ideals and desires based in their understanding of interrelationships between person, *sondam* and *ur*. I therefore propose that the tightly knitted sociality that is perceived and remembered to have been constituted in Korte between the person, *sondam* and *ur* does not form a meshwork, but rather an enmeshment. By enmeshment I refer to the ways the person, relatives (*sondam*) and their surrounding natal village (*ur*) mutually constitute and remain part of each other. These interrelationships include the dynamics between concrete and sensorial practices and relationships between the relatives and the relatives and the *ur*, and also the connected ideals, thoughts and language that condition these practices and relationships. The enmeshment excludes and includes other objects, thoughts, ideas and actions. This is where the “worldliness” of the enmeshment lies: other objects, persons and thoughts are associated with the enmeshment by either belonging, or not belonging, to this “world”.

Being enmeshed in a particular environment of relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*), the persons’ entanglements with *sondam* and *ur* becomes part of the person through time. As I will describe, these entanglements persist as part of the person long after the physical practices of interweaving cease; to be part of *sondam* and *ur* is desired and longed for when living dispersed, expressed in actions such as exchanging money and gifts between relatives and arranging ceremonies so that the family can come together, as well as reminiscing about past life. This process is a result of both concrete and sensorial relationships with relatives and their surrounding *ur*, but also with ideals and language connected to these relationships, such as kinship terms and ideals of keeping *sondam* and *ur* together.

In the processes of enmeshment, the relationships between person, relatives and the family’s natal village becomes interdependent; they constitute and are constituted by each other, they are “mutual” in each other’s being (cf. Sahlins 2011): one cannot feel

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the *ur* if not for the presence of the relatives; the relatives do not become close if not living together, and the person is only a social person by having *sondam* and an *ur*. Emphasising that the relationships are imbued in the person through time, the term enmeshment also captures how concrete disentanglements from relatives and their natal village become emotionally troublesome; the unity is longed for and both fuels and constrains the re-creation of meaning.

Taking in the Deleuzian material approach to signs, I aim to explore meaning-making, and hence the role of signs in world-making, considering both the sensorial affects of objects and human relationships and how these affects are associated with a “worldliness” of other objects, thought, ideals and actions. I suggest that such a perspective can illuminate the experiences the family members achieve when sending and receiving money and gifts to and from other family members, or when participating in rituals that are staged in a certain way, or when viewing photographs and video images of family members. By attending to these activities and events in which family members engage themselves, I suggest that we can gain insights into the striving of the Korte-relatives and their experiences of re-creating meaning in times of rupture and loss. Here, attention is needed both to how they are affected by objects and other persons in these settings, and how they connect these relationships to other objects, thoughts and actions within the particular “worldliness” of the enmeshment between the person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). It is in these dynamics between the sensorial qualities of objects and humans in the events, and the worldliness to which they connect, that experiences arise and meaning can be achieved – and lost.

### **Enmeshment, meaning and aesthetics**

Exploring the practices and events in which family members engage in times of rupture and loss caused by war and migration, I emphasize their *performance* and engagement with objects: When seeing, hearing, tasting and touching objects such as money sent by a mother’s sister, food bought with remittances or sent by a son, the skirt gifted by a sister, or the range of statues, flowers, people dressed in Tamil clothes, LTTE-flags and polystyrene boxes used in rituals, the family members are engaged with objects and

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other persons. I suggest that in this engagement with or the *performance* of the objects in their surroundings, the materials' inherent sensorial qualities - such as their smell, touch, view, taste, and sound - are revealed and affect us.

I regard this affect, produced in human interaction with objects, as aesthetics. Here I understand aesthetics in line with Aristotle's notion of *aisthesis*. *Aisthesis* emphasizes that our understanding of the world comes through our five senses, as an inseparable whole. This understanding of aesthetics is thus a wider understanding than the Kantian sense, in which aesthetics is understood as mere beauty (Meyer 2010, 743). The broader conception I embrace emphasizes that aesthetics, the affects produced in persons by their engagement with objects, needs to be recognized as central to our making and understanding of our life world(s) (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005, 4, Meyer 2010, 743, Verrips 2006). The produced aesthetics gives rise to affect and feelings, experiences which we connect to other objects, thoughts and ideas in a particular "worldliness". These experiences can produce a sense of life as worth living, or not, or somehow in-between.

Throughout this dissertation I show that as family members strive to re-orient themselves in new situations, the degree of meaningfulness that is achieved in their new practices depends on how the engagement with objects in events and practices enables them to bring forth experiences of the enmeshment between the person, relatives (*sondam*) and the family's natal village (*ur*). I argue that not just any objects and produced aesthetics brings forth notions of meaningfulness. Rather, I suggest that the particular enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* that was perceived as a meaningful world also makes particular objects and aesthetics "work" better than others.

In Chapters 4, 6 and 7 I discuss how money and food bought using money from a mother's sister or a son or, viewing, in Korte, the video of a granddaughter's puberty ceremony in Norway, can bring absent and distant family members into co-presence. I suggest that these practices become ways to participate in each other's lives across large geographical distances. Moreover, participating in family or national rituals with many other relatives, as well as other Tamils, where the whole event is carefully staged with decorations of flowers, colourful fabrics, served rice and curries, brings forth an aesthetics that gives a sense of past life in the *ur* by bringing many together within an

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ambience that has qualities resembling those of the past. This affective aesthetics leads family members to associate the sensorial qualities of objects and persons to wider “worlds”, bringing forth a sense of the meaningful life that was lost. I will suggest that in these situations they can experience closeness to their relatives: those whom they “ought to be with” (cf. Daniel 1989), and an environment similar to that of the past life in the *ur*. The person’s own lifeline can thus re-entangle or re-enmesh with *sondam* and *ur*, although from a distance.

I suggest that family rituals become what Pierre Nora (1989) terms *lieux de mémoire*; static representations of the past where memories are transformed by passage through time, strategically selecting and highlighting moments of the past. Thus, when a life changes completely, as it did for the Korte-relatives, it is experienced as a rupture between the past and the present. Preserving what has been in the past, then, becomes central for family members (cf. Nora 1989). Experiencing to have lost Korte; their past *milieu de mémoire*, the environment of memory where memory is carried in traditions and costumes, lived and acted out in daily practices (Nora 1989), specific *lieux de mémoire* come into being. These *lieux de mémoire* uphold the ideal of how life should be; the person being enmeshed with *sondam* and *ur* and the ideal of this enmeshment as a meaningful life. Engaging themselves with specific objects that produce particular aesthetics affecting the participants is one way such meaningful experiences can be achieved.

These meaning-making activities, however: sending and receiving money and gifts, planning and participating in family rituals, being photographed and filmed in these events or viewing these images afterwards, can only take place after much planning and effort. Practices and events which function as *lieux de mémoire* cannot be undertaken on a daily basis. Moreover, as I discuss in Chapters 4, 6 and 7, these practices not only bring affects or emotions of closeness and co-presence with one’s relatives, but also emotions of distance and aloneness. These emotions confirm the rupture with the past, and the experienced distance in time and space to their relatives and their past lives. Weight is given to the past and what has been lost, in a situation where there appears to be little future. And the future is, as Bourdieu (2000) argues, vital to experience life as meaningful.

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Thus, the ambivalence that arises from family members' involvement with these objects in practices and events, the difficulties of undertaking such practices on a daily basis and the perceived lack of future may result in failure to achieve a complete and satisfying experience of a being re-enmeshed in a meaningful unity of *sondam* and *ur*. In the last two chapters of this dissertation, I show that this incomplete experience of a meaningful *ur-sondam* unity opens space for other forms of togetherness and unity to emerge, particularly in the diaspora.

In Chapters 8 and 9, I discuss the way in which LTTE's nationalism has become important to many Korte-relatives in their striving to re-create meaningful lives in the diaspora. In this process, LTTE's claims to, and fight for, a future independent Tamil Eelam is central.<sup>27</sup> This fight for the future is conveyed in the organization's extensive use of objects and artefacts producing sounds and images in their rituals. The participant's engagement with sound, light, images, colours, flowers, polystyrene gravestones and flags, produces aesthetics that simultaneously draws upon the Korte-relatives' belonging to *sondam* and *ur*. By bringing forth affects that the participants associate with their past life living with *sondam* in their *ur*, but in a context with a future, the produced aesthetic is able to convey past belongings into a present national belonging. By formulating and articulating the relatives' loss of, and longing for past life in Korte, LTTE seems able to re-formulate the pre-war generation's frozen memories of the past and longing for this past life as a notion of nationalism. The produced aesthetics thereby affect the participants in such a way that associations of loss and ambivalence are blocked out and thoughts and imagination are directed into a specific national world (cf. Deleuze 2000, 6-7).

By including the relatives' loss of past life and turning it into engagement with a national future, conveyed in the use of objects producing aesthetics as well through discourses produced in new activities and relationships, I suggest that LTTE is able to create a new meaningful *milieu de mémoire*. In this national community memories are carried in lived and acted tradition and costumes, where past and present brings forth a future (Nora 1989). This production of a future contrasts with the more static memories of the past that relatives maintain through engagement with objects in family practices

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<sup>27</sup> LTTE wanted to establish Tamil Eelam as an independent country in the North and East of Sri Lanka.

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and events, that bring forth *lieux de mémoire* of their past life. For those involving themselves in LTTE's nationalism and believing in their national project, new activities, relations and meanings are found and engaged with. Here, any ambivalent emotions are framed within LTTE's world-view, where overwhelming emotions of distance, absence and loss are outstripped by feelings of togetherness, presence and future. In other words, the aesthetics produced within LTTE's community enables notions of meaningfulness to be brought forth more efficiently than family practices and aesthetics does. Nationalism, therefore, can be experienced as an active and meaningful belonging, and as a part of everyday life, unlike the belonging to *ur* and *sondam*.

Focusing on how the Korte-relatives re-create meaning after war and migration, I provide descriptions of the daily and ritual practices which the Korte-relatives involve themselves in within their (new) surroundings: the relatives across distances, involvement and non-involvement with strangers, the "new" national community and interaction and application of objects in these surroundings and relationships. Re-creation involves a dual relationship, with others and with the environment, and creative actions are a necessary part of it. As Ingold and Elisabeth Hallam (2007) argue, human creativity occurs in a mutual relation with our surroundings. However, the Korte-relatives seem to prefer objects and practices that draw upon known belongings to relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) in order to experience life or moments of life as meaningful. The "re" of *re-creation* underlines that the relatives participate from within the world of which they are a part, but a re-creation of something that once was will never produce an exact copy. The production of meaningful lives is then, not so much a *re-creation* as a creation of something new based on the lost past. One creative creation is turning puberty ceremonies into rituals that memorialize the family on photos and in film. Another is the involvement in LTTE's national community.

### **Fieldwork in a dispersed Tamil family**

The ethnography for this dissertation was collected during fieldwork conducted largely since the end of 2007 in the relationships of an extended Tamil family from Korte. Living in the same city (Oslo) as some family members during periods of writing has

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allowed for a lower-level continuation of fieldwork. Intensive fieldwork was conducted in the following periods in different geographical locations: late 2007 to August 2008 in Oslo, September to November 2010 in Paris, July to August 2011 in Jaffna and Oslo, January to December 2012 in Jaffna, January to February 2013 in Oslo, Paris and London, and July to August 2013 in Jaffna.

It was my acquaintance with certain family members and inclusion into their relationships that led me to seek out other family members in new destinations. During fieldwork for my MA degree in Oslo, I was included in Selvi's nuclear family. When Selvi understood that I needed to see and participate in all aspects of Tamil family life, she invited me to live with them, an offer that I gratefully accepted. For about six months, I shared a bedroom with Selvi's then nine-year-old daughter, Kaviya. Their apartment became my home for these months, during which I participated in their daily and ritual life. I got to know Selvi's sister and two brothers, and also the families of several of her cousins and more distant relatives, all living in Oslo. I also met another sister, who lived in Paris and another brother, who lived in Canada. During the first months with Selvi's family, I was Selvi's "white adopted daughter". In the later years, Selvi has dropped the words "white adopted", and now only refers to me as her *mote mahal*, "eldest daughter".

My inclusion in Selvi's family from Korte was also crucial to my two following periods of extended fieldwork. In Paris, I was accommodated by one of Selvi's distant relatives and I spent much time with Selvi's sister Inthu. During these two periods of fieldwork in Oslo and Paris among the relatives of my chosen family, I was gripped by the stories they recounted of life in Korte. Through their stories of past and on-going daily life, I learned much about Selvi's sister, Puspha, and her two children, her mother and sister-in-law, and her mother's sister's daughter Parvathi, who lived in Korte. And through other Korte-relatives living in Oslo and Paris, I also heard of other sisters and their families who also lived in Korte.

When I embarked upon my PhD-research in August 2011 Jaffna had just been opened for entry to non-Sri Lankans in June the same year, offering a unique chance to conduct fieldwork in Jaffna. After a short visit in June 2011, I arrived in Jaffna and Korte in January 2012 to spend the year. Because of my close connection to Selvi and

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her children, cousins and siblings in Oslo and Paris, I was received as a member of the family, and the family members opened the gates to their homes and gardens to me. During my time in Korte, I maintained contact with family members living abroad, in particular Selvi, her daughter Kaviya and Inthu by telephone and Skype. In Korte, I also met several family members who lived in Oslo, London and Paris, who came for short visits during the European summer holiday. Some of them I had until then only heard of, in particular those living in London. Returning to Europe from Jaffna in December 2012, I followed up family members in Oslo and Paris, and visited members in London twice. Six months after finishing initial fieldwork in Jaffna, I returned for a further month, which coincided with the visit of some other relatives from abroad and with the annual Temple Festival in Korte.

Approaching the extended family as a single fieldwork site, I regard the relations between family members, rather than particular locations, as what is most important in defining the limits of my research. The ethnography is based on participant-observation in different geographical sites, during which I kept in touch with other family members through phone or Skype, as well through updates and news from the family members I was staying with at the time. This ethnographic material and its analysis is thereby located within what has been termed as “regimes of mobility”. This perspective emphasizes the relationship and on-going dynamics between those who stayed and those who have migrated (Schiller and Salazar 2013). These dynamics are in turn affected by political structures. Through mobility practices, political power and control are inscribed in family life (Dzenovska 2012, Schiller and Salazar 2013). These can make visits to each other difficult, or even impossible, as I will show in Chapter 7.

Participant-observation was undertaken by living in different family member’s households or staying in a separate house as I did in Jaffna in 2012, whilst regularly visiting other households in all the geographical sites. In Oslo, Paris, London and during the month in Korte in the summer 2013, I lived in the flats and houses of Korte-relatives. During the year in Korte, I stayed in a separate house outside Korte, first in the neighbouring fishing village of Manthurai and then in a house in Nallur. As my partner at the time accompanied me to Jaffna, it seemed more appropriate to stay in a separate house, but a house in Korte was difficult to find. Those few that were not already rented



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out or inhabited were empty and required extensive work. Instead I cycled every morning to Korte and stayed until late evening. Living separately also made it more acceptable for me to spend time freely in different households, not tied to expectations of housework in a particular household, which can be very time consuming in Jaffna. Most stories were shared with me during everyday activities, as when cooking, walking to the shop or the temple, over meals and endless cups of tea, particularly in Jaffna.

My focus on relationships between family members results in the presentation of more data on family relations than on local sites. This does not imply that family members, and in particular their children, the so-called “second generation”, are not active members of the local societies in which they live. The detailed data provided on family life, relationships and practices, however, reflects the study’s main focus. Moreover, in Oslo, Paris and London as well as in Korte, family members tend to socialize largely with other relatives and, to some extent, other Tamils. Birthday parties, family visits, religious festivals and family rituals are conducted solely among relatives and some other Tamils. In Korte, relatives rarely take part in social contexts outside the close and extended family in Korte and Thiruppur. In Paris, Oslo and London they also usually perform and participate in such social events together with other Korte-relatives. For large rituals, however, the social circle is expanded to include extended relatives from Thiruppur, and some other near-by places in Ariyalai. In pro-LTTE events, social interaction is extended to involve Tamils in general. Family members seldom involve themselves in social contexts outside the Tamil community, apart from work and school activities.<sup>28</sup> It is within a context firmly set aside, socially and institutionally, from the Norwegian, French and British communities that the majority of Korte-relatives seek to

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<sup>28</sup> In Oslo, Paris and London parents and children work or go to school and take higher education, and particularly in Oslo, parents participate in local politics and parents’ committees for schools and sport teams. There are some differences between countries. During recent years, for the second generation in Oslo, “hanging out” with friends in their spare time seems to find more understanding and toleration from their parents, particularly compared to those living in Paris. Nevertheless, even in Oslo, this acceptance is still less than that experienced by their peers with Norwegian parents (cf. Engebriksen and Fuglerud 2009, Fuglerud and Engebriksen 2006). Demelza Jones (2013b) also shows how the majority of Sri Lankan Tamils in the UK, particularly the first generation, prefer to confine their social networks to other Sri Lankan Tamils. A minority of students and second generation professionals, mostly migrating to the UK without family, found alternative multi-ethnic social networks through studies, work or participation in Christian church congregations. Regardless of their participation in the range of social relationships and settings, the Tamils in her study all maintained their family networks. Elsewhere, Jones (2013a) also shows how Tamil students in the UK prefer to share student housing only with other Tamils, so that meals and culture are “Tamil”.

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re-orient themselves after being dispersed. Focusing on the relations between the Korte-relatives living in different locations over time, I suggest, gives valuable insights to the social community of relevance to the people studied (cf. Olwig 2007, 24).

### ***Being part of and presenting the Korte-family***

To present the complexities of lived and remembered relations of the dispersed Korte-relatives and their quest to re-create meaning, “thick” ethnographic descriptions are essential. The thick descriptions that follow have been made possible by my inclusion in the family, starting with my close relationship to Selvi and her nuclear and extended family in Oslo. To them, and to her relatives in Paris, London and Korte, having entangled my lifeline with theirs for many years, I have become “as *sondam*”; included in their circle of trust and confidence, trusted with joys and sorrows, problems and secrets and given access to intimate family events.

In particular, I will let Selvi and her siblings and children, as well as Parvathi and Balasingam, accompany us throughout the text. These relatives are also those who have accompanied me most closely through the site of the extended Korte family. Selvi is the youngest of the eight Sittampalam-siblings, now in her early fifty’s. In Oslo, it is her flat that is the gathering point for her three other siblings living in Oslo and their families. It is to their flat that Inthu from Paris and her brother from Toronto mostly come to stay when visiting Oslo. In Selvi’s flat, on her initiative, the close family also conducts the yearly death rituals for their parents. Parvathi is Selvi’s parallel-cousin and classificatory sister and the second eldest sister of the Balasundaram-siblings. Parvathi’s house in Korte is the gathering point when her sister living in London visits. Balasingam, the second eldest son of Parvathi’s eldest brother, was the first to migrate from Korte and settle in London.

With regard to Chapters 8 and 9, revolving around family members’ engagement with LTTE, Selvi’s family is also a poignant example. Selvi has, since she moved to Norway, been involved in the activities of Tamil organizations in Norway that support the LTTE. Balraj, whom she married a few years after migrating, is engaged in different LTTE-sympathizing organizations. When the children were born they continued to participate as a family in all the LTTE-supporting events in Norway. Selvi and her

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husband Balraj are both dedicated, active, and resourceful persons and role models within the community of LTTE supporters in Norway.

Due to the political situation in Sri Lanka and the personal nature of the topics discussed in this dissertation, all persons presented have been given pseudonyms. Some personal details less relevant for the analysis have also been altered. With regard to the places presented, all have been given pseudonyms, except for Ariyalai, Nallur and Vavuniya.

### **The chapters**

My overall focus throughout the chapters will be the Korte-relatives' quest to re-create meaningful lives after war and migration and how this is based in the ideal enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*). The dissertation has nine ethnographic chapters. In Chapters 1 and 2, I focus on how life in Korte perceived as a life characterized by kinship relations to relatives and their natal village. Chapter 1 focuses on the concrete practices of building kinship, while Chapter 2 focuses on the dynamics of lived kinship relations and ideals and language of kinship. Together these two chapters establish how the person experiences to be enmeshed in their *sondam* and *ur*, and how the activities and relationships within this unity are perceived to have constituted meaningful lives for the Korte-relatives.

In Chapter 3, I let the family members present their migration stories, and I analyse how the tight knitted enmeshment of life in Korte of person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) dissolved as a consequence of war and migration. This chapter can be seen as a traumatic break between the life in Korte before migration described in Chapters 1 and 2 and the relatives' quest to re-create meaning in the following chapters.

In Chapter 4, I focus on the practices of sending and receiving money and gifts between those who stayed and those who migrated. I argue that money and gifts maintain and establish emotions of intimacy and bring family members into each other's co-presence. Yet, the objects also create feelings of longing for those absent, disappointment in a gift not returned or ambiguity towards the exchange of "useless" gifts. In Chapter 5, I discuss the Korte-relatives experiences and emotions of loss,

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aloneness and emptiness as a consequence of the dissolution of their past life. In the absence of meaningful activities or relations in which to engage themselves, time appears as daunting and the future as uncertain. Their quest to re-orient themselves and re-create meaning is not always experienced as successful and they turn to longings for the past.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I explore the use of images and media technologies as the relatives' strive to re-create some of the sociality they remember experiencing in their past life. In Chapter 6, I focus on the uses of images in production and consumption during puberty rituals which take place in Oslo, with video-recordings being viewed in Korte. In Chapter 7, I describe in detail the funeral ritual of Puspha in Korte, and how her siblings in Oslo, who could not travel to Korte, participate through live audio-visual images on the Internet. I argue that the family members' interaction with these images produce aesthetics that brings forth ambiguous emotions of being present and absent, connected and disconnected with one's relatives and their past meaningful lives. Meaning is both gained and lost.

In Chapters 8 and 9, I discuss how the Korte-relatives in diaspora find new meaningful activities and relations in pro-LTTE activities and relationships in Oslo. In Chapter 8, I look at the parents' obsession with giving their children a (national) Tamil identity through the "Tamil school" operated by a pro-LTTE organization. In Chapter 9, I discuss parents' participation and experience during LTTE's grandiose yearly ritual of *Maveerar Naal*. Here, the parents longing and loss of their past life with family in their natal village is played out in the produced aesthetics and directed into LTTE's national project. Including past belongings into meaningful activities and relationships of nationalism, meaning is more successfully experienced. To direct the parent's loss of, and desire to be re-connected with, a past meaningful life into a future hope for Tamil Eelam, was crucial to LTTE in order to attract supporters. Without this support, LTTE could not have financed and legitimized their fight for a separate Tamil state.

Finally, in the Epilogue, I re-examine the central role that the particular enmeshment of person, relatives and natal village play in the parents' quest to re-orient themselves in their new situations. In particular I review this question with regard to generational conflicts. The discussion will illustrate that the ideals, thoughts, language

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and emotions of the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*, makes the process of re-orientation to new surroundings slow. The discussion will also show that LTTE's nationalism does not provide fully meaningful lives; the ideal of maintaining the relationship of person, *sondam* and *ur* prevails in questions of children's marriages. For the parents, the process of change involves strong emotional wrenches and painful efforts and adjustments.

## Chapter 1:

### Life in Korte as enmeshment

You know the way from my sister Vijaya's house, to Parvathi's house and Selvi's house? All of them, about ten houses were my cousin brothers'- and sisters' families. All of them. And the ones in front, on the other side of the railway track. Now they are all gone, scattered. All because of this war problem. We are used to live in unity. Now all are in different places. (Balasingam, Korte-born, living in London)

Sitting in his flat in London, Balasingam describes how his family used to live closely together, in houses next to one another in their natal village, or *ur*, Korte. Ever since I started to do fieldwork among Tamils, I had heard warm remembrances of their lives in their home places in the North and East of Sri Lanka. Korte was no exception. Through their many stories, family members born in Korte and living in the diaspora had painted a vivid picture of life in Korte, its' people and the activities in which they engaged together. The geographical and emotional unity of family living close to each other: visiting, supporting each other, particularly during difficult times, as well as gathering for happy events such as the girls' puberty ceremonies, weddings and religious festivals. Surroundings, tastes and smells are also remembered: the almost ever-present sun and heat; the sweet scent from the flowers and fruit trees in the gardens their parents looked after; the delight of picking and eating ripe mangos straight from the tree; a mother's delicious cooking, and after the meal, the good, tasty water from the community well;

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and when the rainy season made the evenings cold, mother's newly fried *rotis*<sup>29</sup> were warm treasures.

In this chapter, I explore a question with which I have grappled from the moment I realized the remarkable manner in which the Korte-relatives remember and cherish the particularities of the life there: what is it about life in Korte? Or rather; what was it about life in Korte? First, I thought of the nostalgia migrants often have for the life and place left behind (cf. Alinia 2004, Lindstrom 2011, Wessendorf 2010, Dawson 1998, Jansen 1998, Ganguly 1992).<sup>30</sup> But, as I got to know life in Korte and the family members who remain here, I heard the same warm stories of the past. Cherishing the past life was therefore not exclusive to the migrants within the family.

Listening to the stories of both migrants and those still living in Korte, as well as observing and taking part in daily life in Korte, I realized that the stories of many family members living together in the family's natal village were not only a question of a nostalgic lost past. The family members' similar remembrances about being together and interacting frequently with each other in Korte, the physical structures of the environment and the houses located close together, one next to the other, point to deep-seated values manifested in the qualities of the life they had lived here. Their memories of the life in unity with family in their natal village also expressed conception of themselves as being part of, or related to the family members (*sondam*) and their place (*ur*).

Drawing upon the memories communicated to me by Korte-relatives, and on everyday practices in Korte today, this chapter outlines an understanding of pre-war life in Korte as a life revolving around concrete practices of "building kinship", as they term it, with relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*).<sup>31</sup> I show how everyday practices and encounters in Korte, as remembered by people who live and used to live there, have led to a particular form of life wherein person, *sondam* and *ur* are experienced and perceived as tightly enmeshed. A central argument is that the *ur* must be regarded as

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<sup>29</sup> *Roti* is a flat bread made of wholemeal flour, oil, salt and water. A popular version is the sweet coconut roti.

<sup>30</sup> I have made a similar argument in an earlier publication based on ethnography from the period before I did fieldwork in Jaffna (Bruland 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Whilst this chapter focuses on the concrete or "material" practices of building kinship, Chapter 2 will consider the ideals, thoughts and language of Tamil kinship.

## Chapter 1

important to the ways that family members perceive the “building of kinship” and, as such, as part of their understanding of kinship. The aspect of natal village, *ur*, in the account of Tamil kinship have, as pointed out in the Introduction, only been included by few writes (i.e. Banks 1957, Daniel 1984, Thiranagama 2011). As the stories in this chapter unfold, I will show that important components of the socio-environmental space of pre-war Korte appear to be entangled and inseparable from each other; alleys, houses, trees, wells, the water, the market, the temple and the many family members are prominent elements in stories of past life. Kinship, and consequently personhood, in Korte cannot be understood without including the aspect of *ur*.

To grasp how life in pre-war Korte was perceived as meetings and entwinements between family members and their surroundings, I develop Ingold’s (2007a, b, 2008, 2011) concept of the meshwork into “enmeshment”. In enmeshment, the person, relatives and their surrounding natal village mutually constitute and remain part of each other. This particular enmeshment, constituted in practices of living together with kin in their natal village, is what gave life in Korte a particular quality, sensorial as well as ideational. It is this enmeshment with relatives and their natal village that is esteemed in family members’ memories of their past life in Korte as good and meaningful. Before I turn to the ethnographic material, let me first lay out some aspects of the ethnography that is used in this chapter.

### A note on the ethnography and memory

The ethnographic material for this chapter is based on family members’ memories of life in Korte before people started leaving and on my observations and descriptions of the everyday life of the Korte-relatives remaining here today. There is a clear contrast between memories of past life in Korte and everyday life in the same area today: the once lively streets and houses of pre-war Korte are today mostly empty of *sondam*.

Nora (1989) argues that when a society drastically changes or even disappears, memory – that before existed unnoticed in the traditions, custom and repetition of daily social life, comes into awareness and gains importance. Elizabeth Tonkin (1999) similarly points out that the experienced difference between now and then is one of the



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reasons why the past is talked about: “people talk about past to separate ‘then’ from a different ‘now’” (Tonkin 1999, 9). Recalling and sharing memories of past life in Korte, family members typically idealize the past, emphasizing the harmonious unity and warmth of life. Memory is “selectively recalled” (White 2000, 493), and certain aspects are neglected, blocked out, or simply forgotten (Carsten 2007, Connerton 1989, 26).

The present ethnography, therefore, is not an attempt to recover the past. In line with Nora’s (1989) argument, however, the rupture with the particular form of pre-war life in Korte, makes important aspects of the past life - which before were part of their daily habits and customs - part of their present memory. I therefore suggest that the way the past is told and what is remembered reveals important and cherished aspects of the life that was led and how this life is perceived in the present. In this chapter, it is the Korte-relatives’ memories as a perceived experienced past that is at the centre of my analysis.

### **“Underneath the margosa tree” and other stories**

An often-retold memory of life in pre-war Korte evolves around the evening gatherings of the sisters and cousin-sisters living in Korte. I have heard the story many times, both in Selvi’s kitchen and Lakshmi’s living room in eastern Oslo, and in Korte under the coconut trees in Parvathi’s garden and at the well next to Sasikala’s house. In their childhood and youth, the margosa tree stood between the houses where the cousin-sisters lived and it was thus a convenient point for everyone to come together. The story gives a glimpse of how the lived unity of family life in Korte is remembered. I choose here to tell this story as recalled by Selvi. Throughout the seven years I have known her, Selvi has oftentimes told me about these cherished moments underneath the margosa tree:

Every evening, after finishing our work, all us girls from all the families used to gather in the space between Parvathi’s [family’s] house and our house underneath

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the *veppa maram* [margosa tree].<sup>32</sup> Parvathi, me, Inthu-*akka*[elder sister]<sup>33</sup>, Lakshmi, my *mote akka* [eldest elder sister], Parvathi's eldest sister, the one in London, and Puspha-*akka*, Vadena and all of us used to come there when we had finished our work. We used to talk, make jokes and laugh. It was a good time. But the big girls, my *mote akka* and Parvathi, Lakshmi and their eldest sister used to chase us away sometimes: "Go, go, go away!" [laughing]. Because we were younger than them, so they probably wanted to talk about things we shouldn't listen to [laughing]."

The first time I heard Parvathi recall these evening gatherings, sitting in her garden in Korte, I could only nod and smile, recognizing the story. Like Selvi, Parvathi also told the story with a happy smile and light tone of voice. Parvathi returned to the story many times, sometimes recounting it to me alone, and sometimes when more people were gathered. As she finished her story, Parvathi used to add, with a confirming nod: "*anthe neram nalla enjoyed pandenange*", "those days we enjoyed [life] well", followed by a pause as she gazed into the air, clearly remembering and thinking of those days.

Parvathi and Selvi, as well as Lakshmi and Sasikala each recounted the same story as their own. But the memories revolve around the social "we"; living and being together, and the unity and warmth of the family. It is a social and moral consensus that the good life was a life when they were always in each other's company and did things together.

### *Waving to the Colombo train*

Another often retold remembrance of many family members being gathered together is the arrival of the Colombo train at Korte, stopping at the junction that constitutes Korte before continuing to Jaffna station. Today, where the station once stood at the junction is only a single remaining wall peppered with bullet holes, and what used to be the

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<sup>32</sup> Neem or Margosa tree. Usually planted in every garden or plot of land in Jaffna, it is seen as the tree of the Hindu goddess, Durga, and often used in worship. It is believed to give healthy qualities to the air. Durga is the mother of the universe, and comes in many incarnations. She is worshipped for being the power behind the work of creation, preservation and destruction of the world.

<sup>33</sup> *Akka* means elder sister and is added as a suffix to the person's name, as Selvi does here.

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railway track is empty and overgrown with grass and plants.<sup>34</sup> The Tigers blew up the tracks in the initial years of the war, during the early 1980s. The story of the train's arrival made all of them; Selvi, Parvathi, Sasikala, Vijaya and the other "girls", laugh and smile. Parvathi tells:

In earlier days, Selvi's eldest *akka* and the other [Sittampalam-] siblings in that house, we were good neighbours. They have five girls, we were also five girls. We always talked together. At that time, the train from Colombo came. When the train came, Puspha-*akka* [Sittampalam] called us to come and see the train. Our house was inside, at the back. Then Puspha-*akka* will call Inthu [Sittampalam]<sup>35</sup> and Jayam [Sittampalam] and we all run towards the gate of the Sittampalam house. "Run, run! The Colombo-train is coming!" we shouted and ran. Then we waved to the train and said "hi" to them. In our day we enjoyed life a lot.

Selvi would also often recall how "all of them" ran to the gate and waved when the train arrived, emphasizing the passengers' reactions: "People used to ask if it was a girls' hostel! [laughing] Because we were so many, so they thought it was a girls hostel [laughing]". Selvi always laughed recounting this part. They were many, and to be many, and to be together was part of their daily life.

One cold January evening when Selvi and I visited Parvathi's sister Lakshmi in her flat in Oslo, she also emphasised how many they used to be together in Korte. I had just returned from Jaffna a few weeks before. Welcoming me back from her *ur*, Lakshmi said, as to make me aware that what I had experienced in Korte what not the *ur* she had grown up in: "It [Korte] is not how it used to be, you know. We were so many there before".

As the conversation went on, Selvi and Lakshmi turned to remembering how they, all the sisters and cousin-sisters of Korte, used to walk to town or take the bus together to go to see the latest movie at the cinema, and then walk back again. Or when a movie was screened at the community centre, about two hundred meters from Selvi's house, they would bring mats and popcorn, and sit together to watch the movie, even if it was

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<sup>34</sup> The railway between Colombo and Jaffna re-opened in October 2014, when the tracks were replaced.

<sup>35</sup> A person's last name is always their father's first name. When a woman marries, they take their husband's first name as their last name.

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late at night. In Korte, Parvathi had told me the same. All living next to each other in their *ur*, they would frequently meet and be together.

### *“That crowd was enough for us”*

The unity of being together in large numbers was not restricted to girls of around the same age. Balasingam often emphasised the value of many relatives living together. Speaking to me in his flat in London, for example he spoke of “when we all lived together”: “Those days, if it was a function, we would not go anywhere. We would just stay here. We didn’t need to call anyone, because that crowd was enough for us”. It is still important to Korte-relatives that many people are present for a function. The way Balasingam phrases it, it is implicit that “those days” is opposed to “now”, when they do have to “call” others to have sufficient number of people to attend their functions. Moreover, today they will normally also call other Tamils beyond the close and extended family to assure that it will be “a good crowd”.<sup>36</sup>

The unity of family members in Korte also implied support, both social and practical, as Balasingam explains:

Being together, the unity. You know what? Those days, even, if some of us didn’t cook, the other ones would be hearing it “oh, they didn’t cook today!” If the wife and husband are fighting and they didn’t cook in that house today, the others will be hearing it. So they know there are children there starving. So they will all together cook for us and the food will start to come. That way we lived.

Food is important to Tamils and their way of life. To give someone food shows affection and care for the other. One should also always offer something to drink or eat when someone is visiting. Moreover, when meeting or talking on the phone, it is the minimum standard of respect, honour and affection to ask the other if he or she has eaten. It is a greeting equal to the English “how are you?” When someone has not eaten, it is recognized that the person is not well. Living geographically close together,

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<sup>36</sup> I discuss the planning and gathering of family members for family functions in Chapter 6.

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

relatives were able to see daily that everyone had eaten, and thus care for each other. The sharing of food nurtured their kinship bonds.

### **Meeting and building in the *ur***

The stories of life in the past all have in common an emphasis on being many together, engaging in common activities and meeting frequently. These activities and meetings were facilitated by the way that, as Balasingam described in the introduction to this chapter, they used to live in “a knot of houses”: their houses were all next to each other, with none of the strangers, open land or abandoned houses in-between which are seen today in the landscape.

Balasingam is the second eldest of the Kumarasamy-siblings and the first to migrate from Korte. One morning, when I was visiting Balasingam and his family in London, where he has lived since the late 1970s, Balasingam drew a map of the Korte junction. Through Balasingam’s drawing, Korte gradually appeared on the white paper: One lane following the former railway track from north to south, where it turns west and passes the (Hindu) Amman temple, another broader road crossing the first and stretching from the seaside towards the north-west where it meets the A9, the highway connecting Jaffna with the capital, Colombo. Then he sketched a triangle for the Amman-temple, a circle designating the community well at the junction, and rectangular boxes for the community centre and the market. Then he filled the lane along the railway track with square boxes on each side of the lane, each indicating one of his relatives’ houses.

Side by side, Balasingam had drawn all his relatives’ houses, filling Korte. These were the same houses I had seen when staying in Korte, either intact and inhabited, or in ruins. The community well, the temple and the community centre also remain in Korte today as in Balasingam’s map. In these houses, the close Korte-relatives lived side by side: The Sittampalam’s lived approximately in the middle of the families’ houses, along the railway track. The mother in the Sittampalam family was Balasingam’s father’s mother’s sister. In this house Selvi, Murali, Inthu, Puspha and four more siblings grew up. To the left, and a little behind the Sittampalam’s family house is the Balasundram’s house. Sittampalam, Selvi’s father, and Balasundram, Parvathi’s and

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Lakshmi's father were brothers, married to two sisters. Together the Balasudram's were eight siblings. Parvathi's and Lakshmi's eldest brother Kumarasamy married when Parvathi and Lakshmi were small girls. Kumarasamy settled in a house across from his natal family house and just behind the Sittampalam's house. Here Balasingam, Kumar, Vijaya, Sasikala, Vadena, and Sita and the rest of the eleven siblings were born and raised. Across the railway track was the house of Selvi's and Parvathi's mothers' third sister, married to the third brother of their fathers. This is also the house of Balasingam's grandmother's brother. When the eldest son from this marriage married, he settled at the end of the railway track, where the lane turns down towards the sea. Here, five siblings were born and raised. Across from their house was the Sivananthan's house, the father being one of the elder brothers among the Balasundram-siblings, and brother of Balasingam's father. Here, the two sons, Raja and Ravi, were born and raised.

Balasingam's map of the houses, and the houses remaining intact or in ruins in Korte today, illustrate well the geographical closeness of family members. Balasingam, as well as Selvi and Parvathi and their siblings, their cousins and cousin-siblings remember having moved in and out of their relatives' houses and gardens. Living side by side in Korte, gathering underneath the margosa tree in the evenings, watching a movie together at the community centre, attending each others functions, exchanging food or making sure everyone had eaten, meeting and seeing each other on a daily basis in the temple or on the way to the temple, by the community well, or visiting in each other's houses and gardens: all are lived practices that family members recall as vital parts of their everyday life in Korte.

Selvi, living in Oslo since 1984, stressed how geographical proximity in Korte played a central role in "building kinship" as she terms it:

When we are in our country we build more kinship<sup>37</sup> [...] We had many meeting points. We meet in the temple, in the community centre, at the market and in the street. We had many opportunities [...] And we also visited a lot. We didn't need to

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<sup>37</sup> Selvi said this in Norwegian, "Når vi er i hjemlandet bygger vi mer slektskap". Living in Norway since her early twenty's and having also studied in Norwegian universities, her Norwegian is almost impeccable.

*Underneath the margosa tree*

call to each other before we visited [...] That way of life has become completely changed here [in Norway].

In Selvi's view, living in houses next to each other forged interaction between family members, tightening their kinship bonds. In their daily meetings, keeping company with each other, their kinship bonds were nurtured. These practices "built" their kinship. Interacting daily, they developed close and intense bonds, becoming vital and mutual participants in each other's lives and being (cf. Sahlins 2011).

Ingold's (2000) notion of dwelling, captures the quality of building relationships in the daily activities of the Korte-relatives. Ingold's perspective is inspired by Martin Heidegger's work on human dwelling in the world. From Heidegger (1971), Ingold (2000) adopts the idea of life as dwelling, wherein dwelling is understood as building. As such, Ingold regard dwelling as happening where the forms humans build "arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings" (Ingold 2000, 186).

The dwelling perspective involves process, practical interaction and activity between organisms, including humans, where the organisms mutually constitute each other and their surroundings. Ingold (2000, 189) argues that it is these processes of activity and building that constitute the landscape. Parvathi, Balasingam, Selvi and the others remember themselves as being involved in an everyday life of daily activities in which kinship bonds were the important relationships that were built. Their activities of building kinship shaped the feel of life in Korte, or its landscape, and gave it meaning and direction. As Bourdieu (2000) argues, when we are occupied in meaningful activities and relationships, time is not felt and life is perceived to have meaning.

These daily practices that built kinship and unity and provided life with meaningful activities were a product of their co-habitation in Korte. When Priya, Ravi Sivanathan's daughter,<sup>38</sup> visited Korte in summer 2012 with her family, she was struck by the geographical closeness of the family houses of her father and his relatives. Ravi migrated to Norway in his late teens and married another Tamil, though not from Korte. Priya is his eldest daughter, nineteen years old when their family visited Korte. Two

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<sup>38</sup> The last name of Ravi, Sivanathan indicates that he is the son of Sivanathan.

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other nuclear families living abroad were also visiting at the time. The day they had arrived, Priya's father had taken Priya for a walk around the alleys and lanes. He had explained who used to live in which house and they had stopped for a short visit in the houses where relatives still lived and where the other visiting families stayed. Summing up the walk, Priya enthusiastically said:

I sort of knew that we had a lot of family here and my dad had told me about it and that Selvi-*akka* and Aishwarya's family, and all of them, lived close by, but it is only now when I *see* this I understand *how* close they lived together. I'm thinking; "shit, did they really live so close together!?"

Priya had been in Korte once before, in 2003, but at that time there were few living in Korte, and no other migrant families were visiting. Many of their relatives that have now returned to Korte had migrated internally to Vanni, Vavuniya, Colombo or overseas to India due to the war. Priya had, of course, been told that her father was closely related to her other relatives, but seeing the closeness of their houses, Priya also grasped the intense social unity that characterized life before family members migrated. She realized how close her father, and his brother and cousins had lived, and also how closely she herself is related to her father's cousin-siblings and their children. Only when confronted with the structures of the houses did Priya comprehend this intense sociality.

Family members from Korte were born into a set of kinship relations: the kinship bonds between Selvi, Parvathi, Balasingam and Lakshmi were already there when they were born in houses next to each other in Korte. But it was in the daily meetings whilst living close together that they "built" their kinship. As Janet Carsten (2000) argues, a known genealogical kinship bond is not sufficient in order to be kin. In order to be related and feel the relationship, family members need to continuously practice their kinship bonds. Through their daily practices in Korte, family members acted out their kinship relations, and build their kinship more strongly. It is this life, revolving around activities of building kinship, that relatives emphasize in their memories of their past life.



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Regarding every life as a line, Ingold (2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011) argues that it is when lives, or trails of lives meet that they entwine, and “life becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot” (Ingold 2011, 148). Family members in Korte met and were together frequently, enabled by their co-habitation. Living together in Korte, relatives entwined their lines on a daily basis. Life in the past, as a life of living and moving within the same *ur*, is perceived to have produced close and dense kinship bonds: the more they met, the more they built their kinship, becoming intrinsic participants in each others’ life and being (cf. Sahlins 2011).

When Kumar (Kumarasamy) met up with Balasingam, his elder brother, in their cousin-sister Sothi’s wedding outside London,<sup>39</sup> he stressed how co-habitation provides dense kinship bonds:

You see, if I’m there [in Korte] I will see my brother in the morning, I will see my brother in the evening. And if he doesn’t see me, he will come looking for me, asking “Where were you? Why didn’t you come?”

In Korte, the trails of Kumar’s life and that of his brother would have crossed several times daily, building their bonds and enhancing the intensity of their felt kinship relation. Living together, love and concern for the other is provided, important to kinship bonding. This day in Sothi’s wedding, the two brothers lamented that they had not seen each other for about six months. Both of them live in London, but in houses about twenty minutes bus-ride from each other. And Kumar being busy with work and taking his son to school and tutoring, the two brothers seldom see each other. Their more distant settlement does not allow them to daily build their kinship bonds as when living in their natal village.

Deidre Boden and Harvey Molotch (1994) emphasise how physical proximity is fundamental to social life. They describe how moments of physical proximity, or co-presence, are “thick”: they involve rich and dense interaction. In moments of being co-present, body language, facial gestures, mutual engagement between persons, status, voice intonation, the facility to touch, to see, all give a thick experience of social

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<sup>39</sup> Parvathi’s and Sanjeeven’s daughter, living in Oslo.

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interaction. Trawick (1990, 155) also stresses the importance of physical sharing of life between family members in Tamil Nadu, India. Seeing each other constantly, listening to each other, working together, sharing food, touching, often makes feelings grow, especially feelings of love. In the relatives' memories of life in Korte, the actual and concrete or "material" nearness to each other and access to such "thick" co-presence and sharing with each other, is portrayed as giving a tight and intense experience of the family's unity and one's own belonging to it.

### Mutual (re)making of *sondam* and *ur*

Talking about Korte in her home in Oslo, Selvi told me that:

My *ur* is there [Korte]. But if you are to *feel* the *ur*, you need people there, and kin. Kin are important. You need a society there.

Selvi's understanding of Korte as an *ur* or natal village only when kin are there, may be related to Ingold's (2007a, 2011) argument that places are made through interaction between people. In his exploration of lives as open lines, weaving their way through the world, Ingold (2007a, 2011) stresses that it is when inhabitants meet, that places, or what he calls "knots" are made:

Where inhabitants meet, trails are entwined, as the life becomes bound up with the other. Every entwining is a knot, and the more that lifelines are entwined, the greater the density of the knot (Ingold 2011, 148).

In Selvi's view, it was the family members' practices of building kinship: meeting underneath the margosa tree, in the temple and alleys, that made Korte an *ur*. In contrast to Ingold's view, however, it is not just anyone that can contribute to the entwining that brings the *ur* of Korte into being, but only kin. Moreover, the density of the *ur* depends on the presence of many relatives. In this view, one cannot *feel* Korte, the *ur*, unless it's many relatives are there at the same time. Korte as a place is, as Edward Casey (1996) points out, understood:

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[not as] something simply physical [...] Rather than being one definite sort of thing – for example physical, spiritual, cultural, social – a given place take the qualities of its occupants, reflecting these qualities in its own constitution and description and expressing them in its occurrence as an event: places not only *are*, they *happen* (Casey 1996, 26-27, italics in original).

In the relatives' memories of life in Korte, Korte gained its qualities, or "feel", from the family members who made it an *ur* through their activities. Family members constituted the landscape of Korte in their practices of relatedness. In Korte, the relatives made the *ur* as much as the *ur* was central to building and enhancing the emotional bonds of kinship between relatives.

While co-habitation within the *ur* was crucial to build kinship, the environment of the *ur* is also emphasized as figuring prominently in the life-practices which constitute personal identity in Korte.

### **Drinking and bathing the *ur***

In his exploration of *ur* (natal village or home) Daniel (1984, 63) argues that the relation between *ur* and person is expressed through a shared substance of soil and body that comes through being and living in the *ur*. Daniel (1984, 84f) argues that this is because persons who live in a particular *ur* will absorb the nature of this soil by eating the food grown in the *ur*, drinking the water from the *ur*'s well and taking in the air. The belief is that the substance of the soil is mixed with the bodily substance of the *ur*'s inhabitants. The inhabitants' substances, therefore, also have an effect on the substance of the *ur* itself (Daniel 1984, 79).

I have never come across people referring explicitly to the exchange between the *substance* of the *ur* and the person, as Daniel (1984) describes. However, the Korte-relatives point to many forms of connection between themselves or others and their *ur*. A central connection between themselves and the substance of Korte to which family members point is water. The relatives are proud of their good water, in particular the water in the common well at the junction. Almost everyone in Korte, as well as the larger Thiruppur area, will come here to fetch drinking water. Every early morning and

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in the evenings people line up to fetch water from the well, bringing bottles back to their houses. When served water in people's houses after a meal or on particularly hot days, I was often asked the rhetorical question "Good water, right?" Pleased that I appreciated their water they would smile, satisfied.

The water moreover has character, as I learned one morning when Parvathi and I were cooking in her kitchen in Korte. While Parvathi cleaned the prawns in the water, she told me: "The water from this well is good water. It is not salty or sour like in some other places. This is a good area". Parvathi has a well (*kinnaru*) on the land surrounding her house.<sup>40</sup> She uses the water from this well to cook food and sometimes also for drinking water if her husband find it inconvenient to go to the common well. Parvathi is very proud of the good water in her land and the rest of Korte. Sometimes, after having poured water into her mouth from one of the bottles of water she kept on the dining table, she would make a soft pleasant sound with her mouth and say "Ah, good water. We have good water". Parvathi connects the good quality of the water to the quality of the area, or the *ur*.

When visiting Korte from Oslo, Murali also goes to the community well near the junction to fetch drinking water. Upon one of his visits he stated that "We have good water, you don't need to buy [bottled] water".<sup>41</sup> Expressing pride in their good water, and contrasting it to water from other areas and *urs* which they consider to be salt or sour, is, I suggest, a statement of themselves. The following incident shows how the quality of the *ur*'s character is transferred to its' inhabitants.

### *Good water – good people*

Manthurai, where I first stayed during my fieldwork in Jaffna, is an *ur* located close to Korte. As the *ur* is populated by the fishing caste, the people of Korte, belonging to the medium high Siviyar caste, consider people from Manthurai to be lower than them in

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<sup>40</sup> Today, with very few exceptions, all houses in Jaffna have a well on the land belonging to their houses. The well is seen as most important when a house is constructed and digging out the well is the first work done. In some cases, such as the land Parvathi's youngest son has bought in Korte, the well and the fence around the land is built, before the building of the house is planned.

<sup>41</sup> Some Korte-people visiting from abroad do buy bottled water for their children, fearing their children may become sick from drinking the local water. However, the parents drink the water from the well themselves.

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status.<sup>42</sup> Before I moved to Nallur, a mainly high-caste (Vellālar) area, Parvathi and all the other family members in Korte, as well as those living in the diaspora, were concerned about my wellbeing. The word most frequently used about Manthurai was *ote*, dirty.<sup>43</sup> One morning I passed the house Murali was constructing at the time. The house is about five minutes bike-ride from Korte, still within Ariyalai but outside Thiruppur. He was in the garden and came out on the lane to chat. Soon after, a distant relative of Murali living in Thiruppur came and joined the conversation. When he heard where I was staying he spontaneously spat out the words “*Ote itam!*” – “dirty place!” Murali laughed and explained:

You see, everyone think that place is dirty. It is not clean, and it smells of fish there and it is so crowded. They don't have good and tasty water and people are not educated there, like in our place, or here, or Nallur.

Here, “our place” shows the fluidity between Korte and the larger *ur* of Thiruppur, also pointing to the degrees of close and distant *sondam*, and known and unknown kinship bonds. Murali relates the bad character of Manthurai, including their bad water, with the people's equally bad character and low caste status. Similarly, Daniel (1984, 67, 85) shows that the lands of the highest Indian caste of Brahmins in South India are regarded to have “sweet” soil, whereas the lands of low-castes have sour or salty soil. The Brahmins regards their “sweet” soil to have a positive or good character and themselves to have equally good character (Daniel 1984, 85).

Although some men in Korte would admit that they have friends from Manthurai they would also say that the Manthurai-people are harsh, extremely proud and easily get angry and turn to fights. This was in contrast to the way they talked about themselves and their place; having good water, being educated and keeping their houses and spacious gardens neat and tidy. They and their *ur* are thus seen as good, and as superior to people and castes living in other *urs* with different characters. The quality of the *ur* is, as Daniel (1984) found, transferred to its inhabitants.

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<sup>42</sup> I will discuss caste with regard to kinship in more in detail in the next chapter.

<sup>43</sup> *Ote* means dirty, whereas the word *thodakku* is used for polluted, as in death-pollution.

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In particular the association between a good and a bad place, water and persons is interesting as the source of water is in the soil of the *ur* and water is absorbed by the body when drinking. A relationship is thus stated between person, natal village (*ur*) and relatives (*sondam*), as well as caste, which will be discussed in more in detail Chapter 2. Here, all three components entwine and reinforce each other through the water. Moving around within the *ur* they inhabit, the Korte-relatives, therefore, not only build a relationship with kin, but also with the *ur*.

Ingold (2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011) emphasises how our immediate physical surroundings and our encounters with substances and materials within them, participate in our making and understanding of our world. Every organism is a line, and when they meet they are constituted by their relational processes, perceiving these relationships. These relational fields are what Ingold (2008, 1805) describes as a “meshwork”. As in the meshwork, the relative’s consumption of the water can be regarded as an entwinement of their lifeline with the lifeline of the *ur*. In these processes, the family members seem to regard themselves as mutually constituted by the *ur*. Like relatives (*sondam*), the water of the *ur* is regarded as part of individual family members, and as a significant participant in their constitution. The water from the *ur* that all family members share also becomes part of their experience and understanding of themselves as part of the *sondam* and their particular *ur*, showing the centrality of *ur* to kinship. Not only providing a habitation that assures the “building of kinship”, the *ur* also plays a significant role in the constitution of persons and family groups.

As I read Ingold’s account of the meshwork, however, lines that are entwined are only relationally constituted, perceived and giving affects in the moments they entwine. In contrast, I have argued in the Introduction that family members perceive their entwinings with their surroundings, both *ur* and *sondam*, as relations that continue to characterize the person after the entwining is dissolved. This also seems to be Daniel’s (1984) understanding when he argues that the substances of the *ur* and the person mingle as they are mutually exchanged. In my view, the *ur* gives the person identity. It is part of the “mutuality of being” of the person (cf. Sahlins 2011). This mutual experience and understanding of their own being as entwined with *sondam* and *ur* is

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materialized in the fluidity of the water, circulating between the three components. The person, *ur* and *sondam* entwine their lines physically and remain part of each other.

Eating fresh fruits and vegetables from the gardens, having a good meal based on local food and bathing in the well are also activities appreciated by family members which directly involve the person's body with the *ur* or products derived from the soil of the *ur*. These activities are those in which migrants like Murali wish to engage on their return, or when they dream of, or plan visits.

Until his younger sister Puspha passed away in June 2012, Murali used to stay in her house in Korte when he visited from Oslo, as he did during his last stay while Puspha was still alive in February the same year. When I went to welcome him one morning in February, he had just completed the nine-hour bus journey from Colombo, immediately following a twelve-hour flight from Norway. He was showering by the well, pulling buckets of water. The water made a sharp sound when it hit the cemented ground in splashes. Drying off his hair with a blue coloured towel, entering the house with wet *batas*<sup>44</sup> he sighed with pleasure and said:

When I come here, I always like to bathe in the well. I don't like to shower in the shower inside. These people here do that, but I don't like that. We are used to the well.

Murali smiled and seemed happy as he checked his moustache and hair in the small green-framed mirror hanging angled between the iron bars in the window.

I often found Murali showering at the well when he stayed in Korte. Bathing by the well, drinking water from the well, and appreciating the good quality of the water and the fruit and vegetables signifies a bodily involvement with the place. Murali's insistence on bathing at the well, and fetching drinking water from the community well can be seen as important in his reconnection with his *ur* after months of absence. I thus agree with Daniel (1984) that a bodily relation with the *ur* remains crucial, even after regular physical entwining ceases. By living in, or laying ones trace of life in the landscape of Korte, the *ur* and the relatives (*sondam*) become part of each others. In

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<sup>44</sup> *Batas* is used to refer to cheap rubber slippers. The name derives from the shoe fabric and company with the same name who introduced these slippers to Sri Lanka.

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these processes, *sondam* and *ur* becomes part of the person's "mutuality of being [...] participating intrinsically in each other's existence" (Sahlins 2011, 2).<sup>45</sup>

### ***Where is your ur?***

The local belief that a place affects the person complies well with Ingold's (2007a, b, 2008, 2011) understanding of life itself as an entanglement of threads, both human and non-human. It is these perceived entanglements of relatives and environments, *sondam* and *ur*, that gave life in Korte particular sensorial qualities: persons, trees, houses and alleys are seen, relatives touched and heard, sun, heat and humidity sensed, water and food smelled, touched, and tasted. Family members regard these entanglements as enduring in the person, rather than dissolving along with the physical entwining, as Ingold argues. People and landscape interact in each others' space and affect each other through time.

The understanding that entwining endures in the person through time is also seen in the practice and belief of Tamils who ascribe the habits and behaviours of others to the person's *ur*. As a result, they also find the knowledge of the other's *ur* to be crucial for interaction. When explaining their own or other's habits and behaviour, Tamils will refer to the persons' *ur*, talking of "Korte-people" or "Naveladi-people", even if the person concerned has migrated from their *ur*. Thereby, the *ur* defines a person's characteristics. By inhabiting a particular *ur*, they will become a person with specific characteristics associated with that place. These characteristics will endure even after moving away from the place. Hence, those who have lived in the same place will share something with others from that place. In many cases, as in Korte, these people are also related by blood or marriage, and thus also belong to the same kin-group and caste.

In her monograph of internally displaced Tamil Muslims in Sri Lanka, Thiranagama (2007, p. 131) similarly observes that "referring to somebody's *ur* is also a shortcut to discussing the nature of the person themselves". Moreover, those from neighbouring *urs*,

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<sup>45</sup> While Sahlins has used the term "mutuality of being" to describe kinship relationships between persons, the "mutuality of being" in Korte also covers the person's practices and relationships with the *ur*. This is manifested in the relatives' practices of gathering underneath the *margrosa* tree, drinking water from the well, and the practices of cohabitation and dowry land within the *ur*.



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particularly family *urs* within larger *urs*, regard those in the larger *ur*, such as Thiruppur as being more similar to themselves than people living further away. Consuming the same water, similar food and air – perceived to constitute enduring qualities of persons – might also partly explain why people in the larger *ur* of Thiruppur are regarded as distant relatives, although the exact genealogy is not always known.<sup>46</sup> Thereby, the common nourishment of people from the same *ur*, or neighbouring *urs* makes people “place centric” as Thiranagama (2007, 131) argues.

The inter-relation of place and people is also visible in the need to know the *ur* of other Tamils in order to interact with them. When Tamils born in the North and East of Sri Lanka meet for the first time, in and outside Sri Lanka, they ask the other person *ongethe ur enge?*, literally “where is your *ur*?”, meaning “where is your home?”, or “where do you come from?” I suggest that knowledge of the other’s *ur* is connected with the belief that people from a particular place have certain qualities or characteristics.<sup>47</sup> As Daniel (1984) points out, the answer to this question depends on the context. If the person asking the question is from the same area, the smallest unity of place, such as a neighbourhood *ur* like Korte, will be given as the answer. If the other person is from a distant area, the larger village will be named, for instance, Ariyalai. The more specific the answer, the more one is able to determine a person’s characteristics, as different parts of an area are known to have different qualities, particularly when different sub-castes and caste groups inhabit a larger area as in Ariyalai.

In daily speech, one’s *ur* is also termed as *sonde itham*, meaning family or one’s own place. Here *sonde* literary refers to *sondam* in the meaning of property (cf. Kapadia 1995, 184). This use of language also illustrates how places can be thought of as kin, or “kinned”.<sup>48</sup> This understanding of tight involvement and interaction between the person and the *ur*, I suggest, is why the *ur* invokes sentiments of belonging as powerful and potent feelings, as also described by Thiranagama (2007, 131, 2011, 19) and Daniel

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<sup>46</sup> In Chapter 2, I discuss aspects of known and unknown kinship bonds in more detail.

<sup>47</sup> The connection between people and *ur* is also connected to caste and sub-caste. I will return to aspects of caste and kinship in more depth in Chapter 2.

<sup>48</sup> Thiranagama (2007) discusses how internal Tamil Muslim refugees from Jaffna living in Puttalam “kinned” the new place by buying land and building houses. However, the generation who were born and had lived most their life in their Jaffna *ur*, did not find the place to be completely like home. Moreover, the *ur* in Jaffna continued to be central to sociality in Puttalam.

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(1984). Thiranagama (2011, 29) notes that “because one is a person, one has a *ur*”, which one loves or feels obliged to love.

### Life in Korte as enmeshment

Knowing the other’s *ur* remains central even when Jaffna Tamils have lived twenty to thirty years away from their natal village. I suggest that this implies that Tamils understand their entwinement with *sondam* and *ur* to affect them, to some significant degree, throughout life by remaining vital to their own and other’s being. I therefore suggest that life in Korte is not simply an entwining of the relatives’ lifelines with each other and the substances of the *ur* in a meshwork, as Ingold’ suggest. Rather, the family members and the substance of the *ur* are enmeshed into each other; their connection to each other persists through time. What happens in the streets, alleys, houses and gardens in Korte, then, is not a meshwork, but an enmeshment within which person, *sondam* and *ur* constitute each other. The intertwining of *sondam* and *ur* and perception of the sensorial qualities of these relationships endures and remains part of the person through time. This sensorial enmeshment is what gave life in Korte a particular quality.

Moreover, person, family group and natal village are inextricable; *sondam* depends on individual family members and their natal village in order to form kinship bonds. The *ur* needs the kin to be felt as an *ur* and the family members needs both a belonging to the kin group and to their natal village in order to be a social person. These three components remain part of each other’s being and are central to the emotional bonds family members develop. The qualities of these relationships, characterised by *sondam* all living together in the *ur* are also what relatives remember as significant to life before war and migration.

The qualities of the *ur* are, therefore, central to notions of kinship and personhood, facilitating the building of kinship bonds and contributing to the person’s identity. Moreover, Janette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern (2000, 153) argue that a common belonging will enforce already existing relations. A shared attachment to the *ur* through the appreciation of drinking or bathing in its water and eating its fruits and vegetables acts as a mediating device for the emotional unity of kinship. *Ur* and kin knit the

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practiced and emotional unity of *sondam* together. I therefore suggest that this life, as an enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* in Korte, must be regarded as constituting the relatives' experience of kinship.

#### ***The person within sondam and ur***

The shared practices of visiting, meeting, exchanging food, drinking the water in the *ur* and so forth, provide a particular quality to life in Korte and to close kinship relations in which *sondam* and *ur* become part of the person's existence. Selvi told me that:

I have attached a lot there [Korte] [...] But I have only lived there for a short time. My oldest brother he lived more time there so he has attached more. He was the secretary for the cultural group at the community centre, he was very famous there [laughing].

Selvi said this in Norwegian, using the word “knytte til”, meaning “tied to” or “knitted to”, conveying the sense of having an attachment to something. Living in Korte means tying bonds or developing an attachment with the place and its inhabitants – the *sondam*, the close Korte-relatives and more extended relatives in the larger *ur* of Thiruppur. *Sondam* and *ur* become part of the person's “mutuality of being”. In this process, “the self are variously distributed among others, as are others in oneself” (Sahlins 2011, 10). These transcendent dimensions of persons move them to participate in each other's realities (Bastide 1973, in Sahlins 2011, 10).

This understanding of the Tamil self as including other relatives and their surrounding natal village resonates with Mackim Marriott's (1976) conception of the “dividuality” of the South-Asian person. In the conception of the “dividual”, persons are understood not as individuals; separated and bounded, but as openly constituted “dividuals” of the relationships in which they are involved. Dividuals are not complete in themselves, but composed by other actors' substances (Marriott 1976). In this view, a person exchanges substances with other actors, absorbing the substances that they take

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in and in turn, give out from themselves (Marriott 1976, 111).<sup>49</sup> In this context I find it interesting that in Tamil, the closest word to self in daily language is I, *naan*, which is similar to the word for we, *naame*. Moreover, the notion of the person is also included in the daily use of *engede akhel*, “our people”, to refer to those to whom we are related.

In Selvi’s view, her eldest brother has become more strongly attached to their natal village and their relatives than herself, as he lived and moved there longer than she. By participating in the Thiruppur Community Centre, he also formed a stronger attachment to the larger Thiruppur-relatives and place. His lifeline became knitted with close and extended *sondam* and the small and larger *ur* over a longer period of time through his daily practices of living in this place.

The person dwelling in Korte and, for some, in the larger Thiruppur area, becomes mutually part of *sondam* and *ur* and this becoming is regarded as being reinforced through time and remaining embedded in their experience of themselves as persons. Living, moving and socialising within their natal village with their kin gives the person a particular belonging or identity. I thereby suggest that what is lacking in Ingold’s conception of the meshwork is this emotional endurance that people experience with subjects and objects with which they entwine their lifeline over time. It is an enmeshment, not a meshwork.

Similarly, the anthropologist Michael Jackson (2005, 17) argues that through our everyday relationships with and within the environment we inhabit, there is a phenomenological fusion of personal identity and physical environment, and with the others with whom we dwell. As we sense with our body, our corporal presence and with our imagination, the habitual pattern of our practiced life makes intersubjective bonds between our world and ourselves:

“[P]ublic buildings, familiar streets, neighbourhoods, parks and squares become invested with the vitality and experiences of we who dwell and work in them [...] At the same time, we come to feel that we incorporate and depend on the existence of the people and places with which we habitually interact” (Jackson 2005, 17).

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<sup>49</sup> These substances are coded and can exist as bodily substances through parentage, marriage and other interpersonal contact, but also through food. Other codes are also regarded as influential, such as words, ideas and appearance (Marriott 1976, 111).

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In the stories of past life in Korte and the practice of the relatives in Korte today, the physical environment of the *ur* and the social environment of the *sondam* are relations that anchor them as persons: crucial to how they think of themselves. Each Korte-relative born and grown up here is understood as constituted within this relational field of *sondam* and *ur*.

In the remembered daily life in Korte, family members knit their bonds together with *ur* and *sondam*, first and foremost with the close *sondam* and the smallest unity of *ur*; Korte, then with extended *sondam* and larger *ur* of Thiruppur. I suggest that what appears in the space of Korte is a “zone of entanglement” (cf. Ingold 2011), which forges a self-understanding wherein the person is neatly interwoven, emotionally as well as physically, with close family members and the *ur*. A social and geographical unity of person-*ur-sondam* is developed. Here the individual both constitutes and is constituted by this unity, and remains enmeshed in these relations through time.

While the Korte-relatives regard themselves as intertwined with and mutually enmeshed in relations with their relatives and place, this does not imply that they do not see themselves as individuals. The ethnography that follows in this dissertation will also show the relatives’ own emotions, thoughts and desires. I thereby regard the person as who they, the I, understands himself or herself to be, both socially in relation to others (presented and confirmed to others), manifested in practices (such as interacting with others and surroundings) and in terms of their personal thoughts, emotions, desires and conceptions of the world. My understanding of person here thus includes what Godfrey Leinhardt (1985, 143) refers to as outer and inner activities. The outer activities of the person are public and shared, and they confirm the person’s inner conception of him- or herself.

### **Life as enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur***

An important aim in this chapter has been to lay the groundwork for what is to follow by showing how daily life in Korte is perceived and remembered to have revolved around sensorial practices of building kinship with *sondam* and *ur*, and moreover how Korte-relatives understand kinship in these terms. Through a focus on the relatives’

## Chapter 1

stories and memories of life in pre-war Korte and the geography and activities of Korte today, I have sought to illuminate how everyday practices of “building kinship”, both with relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*), gave life in Korte its particular qualities. I have therefore argued that the pre-war relationships of Korte-relatives to the *ur* need to be recognized as a vital part of their contemporary understanding of kinship. Through these concrete practices of “building kinship”, relatives come to understand themselves as mutually constituted participants in each other’s existence, and the existence of their natal village.

The understanding of *sondam* and *ur* as part of the person persists through time, even after the person is no longer daily entwining his or her lifeline with *sondam* and *ur*. I have therefore argued that Ingold’s concept of the meshwork (Ingold 2007a, b, 2008, 2011) does not explain this tightly-knit relationship. Rather this sociality is better understood as an enmeshment; entwinements between person, *sondam* and *ur* that remain part of the persons’ self-understanding. The physically tight entwinements between person, relatives and their natal village is what gave life in Korte a particular character and what forms the pre-war generation’s particular understanding of kinship. Here, *ur* as much as *sondam* forms part of the person’s mutuality of being. Moreover, I suggest that the endurance of these entwinements between person, *sondam* and *ur* is what makes the pre-war Korte-relatives remember and talk about life in Korte as having a specific “feel”, and stimulates attachment and longing.

The perception of life in Korte as being in unity with relatives and their natal village, and this life as a meaningful life, may be heightened by the rupture imposed by migration (cf. Nora 1989, Tonkin 1999). Living separated throughout different countries, cities and even within different parts of the same city, life now is experienced as significantly different than when living together. This separation may enhance awareness of *sondam* and *ur* as part of themselves. Nora (1989) and Tonkin (1999) argue that it is when we experience drastic changes in our conditions of life and society, that the memory of this life comes into being and we give the qualities of that life importance. Family members’ memories of how life used to be provide fruitful insights into the ways they experienced life in pre-war Korte and how this life was constituted by practices of kinship, even though parts of that life may be left out of these accounts

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(cf. Carsten 2007, Connerton 1989, White 2000).<sup>50</sup> In the next chapter I move on to discuss how the enmeshment in Korte is only partly a result of concrete and sensorial practices. Language, ideals, and conceptions of kinship also play a role in forming the enmeshment of life in Korte.

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<sup>50</sup> Memory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2:

# Dynamics of blood and love

Sitting on the patio in front of their house in Korte during the early morning, shaded by the steel roof, Parvathi and Sanjeeven were drinking milk tea as they usually do. Growing up as neighbours and distant relatives, Parvathi and Sanjeeven married out of love more than forty-five years ago.<sup>51</sup> It was July, the time when Korte-migrants come on holiday to Korte. Ranjini, a girl from the neighbourhood and distant relative to Parvathi on her father's side<sup>52</sup> and to Sanjeeven in another (unknown) way, came by and sat down in one of the plastic chairs. A few minutes later a man in his fifty's came with his elderly mother and his sixteen year-old son. I had never seen them before, and Sanjeeven introduced him: "He is our *sondam*. He lives in London and he just came". I nodded and asked, "In which way are you *sondam*?" Sanjeeven raised his arms in an upward "V": "We are *sondam* [relatives]! Someone married to my mother's family loooong time ago, so we are *sondam*. We don't know exactly how, but somehow we are all related." Ranjini joined in, as to support Sanjeeven; "we are all *sondam* in this area". The man's mother smiled and nodded affirmatively. Sanjeeven took the last word: "Here we are all *sondam*, we all marry within each other. It's '*sikkel-sikkel*'", waving the fingers on both his hands into each other, as to illustrate.

In this chapter, I explore how ideals or ideologies of kinship interact dynamically with concrete sensorial kinship practices involving relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) among the Korte-relatives. People in Korte and Thiruppur *ideally* only marry within the relatives of the natal village. This practices forges the "*sikkel-sikkel*" in Korte

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<sup>51</sup> Sanjeeven was the son in one of the houses in Korte, being a distant and undefined relative to the Korte-relatives.

<sup>52</sup> Belonging to the same family as mentioned in Chapter 1, related to the Sittampalam-siblings' father, and thereby also to Parvathi's father, in an unknown way.



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and Thiruppur; a term which refers to people mixing into each other.<sup>53</sup> The practice of marriage is based in the ideal of the cross-cousin marriage in Dravidian kinship and in conceptions of caste. The concrete practices of building kinship discussed in the previous chapter, making the relatives enmeshed or “*sikkel-sikkel*” with each other, thereby happens in an interplay with ideals, thoughts and language of kinship, as well as social rules, ideals, practices and preferences of caste (*sadi*), marriage and dowry. These ideals and practices connect the relatives to Korte and Thiruppur and sharply separate them from other kin- and caste groups.

Moreover, I discuss how ideals of kinship *within* the close Korte-relatives, defines specific categories of kin through detailed kinship terminology. These categories in turn influence their practices of kinship, contributing to the structuring of relations and emotions between the close relatives. The discussion will show, however, that in their activities, family members do not always follow the categorical use of kinship terms, but use them in order to re-label and re-define relations to fit their needs. In this interaction between ideals, rules, terminology and practice, emotions play a central part. I thereby engage with the topic of Dravidian kinship through the ways that family members relate to understandings of terminology, genealogy, blood and love (cf. Banks 1957, 1960, Clark-Decès 2011, David 1973, Fuglerud 1996, Kapadia 1995, Trawick 1990). The discussion thus illuminates the dynamics between concrete and sensorial relationships on one hand, and dynamic ideals, thoughts and language, on the other, in forming senses of belonging through kinship.

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<sup>53</sup> People in Korte and Thiruppur tend to use the expression “*sikkel-sikkel*” to refer to something getting mixed into something else, as here with relatives. *Sikkel-sikkel* is also used to refer to occasions when people gossip and involve themselves in others lives when others think they should not have done so. In my view, Sanjeeven’s expression of the relatives being “*sikkel-sikkel*” and waving his fingers into each other is a good illustration of how relatives consider themselves to be entangled and enmeshed in each other. Describing relatives in Korte as *sikkel-sikkel* is also a good illustration of how they consider kinship within Korte and Thiruppur: as all your close relatives’ “in-laws” become your own family: they all become entangled into each other. Similarly, Isabelle Clark-Decès (2011, 421) notes that her Tamil informants in South India use the Tamil dish *idiyappam* as an analogy of their kinship practices. The *idiyappam*, or “string hoppers”, are mushy and sticky spiral noodles made from steamed flour where all threads are mixed together, making it impossible to find either start or end of the strings, much less separate them. Continuously marrying within the extended family, and as we will see later in this chapter, seeking to marry as closely as possible, even if not following the ideal, they all become mixed into each other, often with several complex relationships.

## Borders of kin and natal village: caste in Korte

In my fieldwork, I found that the enmeshment between person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) described in the previous chapter, is made tighter and denser by ideals and practices of caste. To introduce the notion of caste in Korte and how it is related to kinship and natal village, let me return to Balasingam in his flat in London the morning he drew the map of Korte that was described in the previous chapter.

As Balasingam finished the map, he looked at it and again recalled the life in Korte, reminiscing about the unity of his family and their dominance of the area:

We used to call that place Korte, like slang. Like Kortey in town [the fort in Jaffna town built by the Dutch]. Because my dad used to be a little like a gang leader, those days. Not a gang leader like here, but he controlled and people respected him. So people knew that this was my father's area. [...]. So we used to live all of us within that area. And people knew me, after my father also, they knew that that was Balasingam's area. So no strangers could come inside. If a stranger came inside we would know at once! [he snaps his fingers, making a high and sharp sound] Then one of us would go and ask; "Who are you? What do you want? Who do you know?" If he said that "I'm a friend of Kumar", or "I studied with so and so", then ok, we would let him go. Otherwise no people came inside there. No strangers. [...] All of us used to live inside here.

Balasingam here distinguishes between the unity of relatives who lived "inside here" and strangers who came from outside. The relatives are confined to the *ur* of Korte and more distant relatives of Thiruppur whereas strangers were kept outside Korte and were not allowed to mix with their kin, except for those who were their friends. This social distinction between relatives and strangers is significant and still frequently applied in daily life in Korte today, despite the fact that strangers now rent houses in Korte.<sup>54</sup> The words applied to this distinction are *sondam*, "relatives" or *engede akhal*, "our people" and *sondam illai*, "non-relatives" or *engede akhel illai*, "not our people". As I will show,

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<sup>54</sup> I discuss the relationship between those who remain in Korte and "the strangers" in Chapter 6.

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“strangers” thereby implies people from a different kin-group, natal village, caste and sub-caste.

Bryan Pfaffenberger (1994, 143) has described the pre-war Jaffna peninsula as the most caste-conscious and conservative region of Sri Lanka. Korte being part of Thiruppur and Ariyalai, the Korte-relatives belong to the dominant caste of Ariyalai; the Siviyar caste. Their ancestors were royal palanquin bearers during the Jaffna kingdom era (1215-1624). The related name and work of the caste, the Siviyars’ work as palanquin bearers for the Jaffna King, illustrate that castes in Jaffna can be and often are very local and specific. The origins of the caste illustrate that castes in Jaffna can be and often are very local and specific. This results in different caste structures among Northern and Eastern Tamils, as well as a different caste structure from that found among Tamils in South-India (cf. Banks 1960).<sup>55</sup> The only literature on castes among Jaffna Tamils mentioning the Siviyar caste, is Simon Casie Chitty’s (1988 [1934]) work “The Castes, Customs, Manners and Literature of the Tamils”. The brief information given here is that the Siviyars were palanquin bearers and he ranks the caste as number 32 in a list of more than 65 castes, together with other labourer castes.

In later literature on caste in Tamil Sri Lanka, such as the work of Pfaffenberger (1982) and Kenneth David (1974), the Siviyar caste is not mentioned. There seems to be two interlinked reasons for this. One is that in the works of Pfaffenberger (1982) and David (1974), only 21 castes are identified, indicating a decline in number of castes due to formations of mega-caste groups (Thanges and Silva 2009, 53). The other reason is that the Siviyar caste was only found in the area of Ariyalai in Jaffna, as their traditional caste occupation was limited to working for the King of Jaffna.

From the limited information found in literature on the Siviyars in Jaffna and from what the Siviyars themselves assert, we know that the caste group is “not a high caste, not a low caste, but a ‘middle-class’ caste”, as Selvi once put it. Members of the land-owning Vellālar caste in Jaffna also confirmed this to me. I have also heard through others that some Vellālar say that the Siviyars are “almost Vellālar”. In David’s

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<sup>55</sup> Banks (1960) shows how the system of caste and caste ranking in Jaffna found in Jaffna differs from that found in Tanjavour and other parts of Tamil Nadu in South-India. However, Edgar Thruston and Kadambi Rangashari (1909) mention a Siviyar caste in Tamil South India. Although this caste does not seem to be equally ranked with the Jaffna Siviyars, Thruston and Rangashari’s work confirm the Siviyars origins as palanquin bearers for the king.

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(1974, 47) list of 21 castes, the castes identified are, in the order of high castes to low castes: Brahman, Śaiva, Vellālar, Kurukkal, Pantāram, Cīrpacari, Kōviyar, Thattar, Karaiyār, Thachchar, Kollar, Nattuvar, Kaikular, Cāntar, Kucuvār (Kuyavar), Mukkuvar, Vannār, Ampattar, Pallar, Nalavar and Parayar. The four last castes are so-called untouchable castes. The Siviyaars, as well as the other castes in Jaffna, put the Siviyaars as higher in rank than the Karaiyār (fishermen), but lower than Vellālar. Since there are very few Brahmins or Śaiva in Jaffna, the land-owning Vellālar are the dominant caste group in Jaffna, in terms of traditional power, rank and number. Over fifty percent of the Tamil population in Jaffna during the 1950s were Vellālar (Banks 1960, 67).<sup>56</sup> The Siviyaars' position as a medium high caste seems reasonable seen in relation to their traditional caste occupation.

The same conclusion of the Siviyaars' medium-high status can also be drawn from Edgar Thurston and Kadambi Rangashari's work on castes in South India (1909). Here the same caste name of Siviyaars or Siviyan is found and also defined as palanquin bearers. Here the Siviyan were a sub-caste of the Idaiyans, the great pastoral- and shepherd caste in Tamil South India. However the sub-caste of Siviyan allowed freely remarriage of widows, and was thus regarded as a low sub-caste of the rather higher caste of Idaiyans (Thurston and Rangashari 1909, 391). In the case of the Siviyaars of Jaffna, widow re-marriage is little known and is considered to be awkward, which is in conformity with their position as a medium-high caste.

The Siviyaar caste is further divided into different labour groups: *adikke*-Siviyaar ("punching-Siviyaar", ingraining wheat, coffee- and chilli powder), *oppo*-Siviyaar ("salt-Siviyaar", making salt) and *arasi*-Siviyaar ("rice-Siviyaar", cultivating rice). The Korte-relatives and also Vellālar in Nallur pointed out that these divisions occurred after the fall of the Jaffna kingdom. Together with the people of the area of Naveladi near to Thiruppur, Thiruppur (including Korte) remained "pure" Siviyaars. Lacking large cultivatable lands such as those held by the Vellālar, they staked their future on

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<sup>56</sup> Banks (1960, 67-69) shows that Brahmins have a lower ranked position than the Vellālar. Brahmins are not allowed to adopt superior attitudes towards Vellālar, and a Vellālar will discipline Brahmins whom they consider to behave incorrectly. Brahmins will also seek assistance from influential Vellālar. This underlines the difference between the caste systems of Jaffna and Tamil Nadu in South India where Brahmins are the highest ranking caste.

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education and moved into civil-service jobs during the British colonial period (1815-1948), like many other Tamils (cf. Introduction).

Today these divided sub-castes remain within Ariyalai. Also, groups of the castes of Nalavar (“toddy tapper”<sup>57</sup>), Koviayar (helper to other castes, cooking in particular), and some Vellālars also lived in Ariyalai. However the sub-caste of the Siviyars and the different castes are geographically separated in terms of settlement, as Balasingam explained:

The Siviyars start from my area, and then going down towards Colombo. Thiruppur and Naveladi, that is Siviyar. And then branches: *oppo-*, *arasi-*, *kavathu*, that is the dust from the paddy, they take it off – and then, *prambo*, the bamboo tree, they make the chairs and everything. They for us are all low-caste. They are Siviyar, but low-caste Siviyars. We don’t marry each other. And they all come to us, to respect me.

Thiranagama (2011, 45) also notes that in Jaffna, before the war, there were strictly controlled residential caste restrictions. Living geographically separated from the other sub-castes of the Siviyar and other castes, the Korte-relatives did not socialise much with other sub-castes or castes, nor did they (ideally) intermarry. This division of sub-castes is not only restricted to the Siviyar caste. There is, as Paramsothy Thanges and Kalinga T. Silva (2009, 53) point out, a tradition for “caste-within-caste” in the Jaffna society, each group containing hierarchical divisions. Although not terming the groups as sub-castes, Banks (1960, 70) also notes that within a village of the same caste, groups are ranked differently. This differentiation reduces the social relations between the groups. Thanges and Silva (2009) confirm that the sub-castes do not socialise much with each other, nor do they, ideally, marry with each other.

Balasingam expressed these caste and sub-caste restrictions: “No strangers could come inside” and “we don’t marry each other”. Only distant Thirupppur-relatives and friends of the Korte-relatives got permission to come inside Korte. Strangers, those not belonging to their exact caste, sub-caste and natal village (*ur*) were preferably kept

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<sup>57</sup> Those engaged in collecting the raw materials and preparing toddy: a liquor produced from the sap of palm trees.

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outside, and still are today. Not only are they ideally kept outside the geographical borders of Korte and Thiruppur, but also outside the kin-group (*sondam*) of Korte. The social life of Korte-relatives mainly remained inside the protected borders of Korte and Thiruppur, among their kin- and their sub-caste-group. Vellalars in Jaffna confirmed similar social- and marriage restrictions between castes, as well as sub-castes. The restriction of social interaction, marriage and residence related to caste produces a strong connection between place and caste manifested in subdivisions of the village into smaller units, the smallest *urs*, and corresponding sub-castes. The boundaries of the Siviya caste thus correspond with the boundaries of the *sondam* and *ur* of Thiruppur, whilst Korte is a sub-*ur* within which all kin bonds are known.

In his study of caste in Jaffna, Banks (1960) consider these units of similarly ranked castes as the most important units of the social structure. According to Banks (1957, 1960), each caste is divided into unnamed units of local residence, scattered in different villages but viewed by its members as equally ranked. Banks terms these units as “*sondakarar castes*”. *Sondakarar* is the written form of *sondam*, meaning relatives or family. The term “*sondakarar castes*” is not used by locals and Banks thus only uses it as an analytical term. Banks (1960, 70) describe these groups as a “conceptually endogamous closed system”, marrying ideally only within each other – across villages. Thus, new marriages and relationships can be established with groups residing in other places.

I agree with Banks that the units that he has termed *sondakarar castes* are indeed the most important units of the social structure in Jaffna (see also Yalman 1962, 548). However it is important to point out that the Siviya in Thiruppur have no such equally- ranked group of their Siviya sub-caste residing in other areas. The sub-caste of those who remained “pure” Siviya is geographically restricted to Thiruppur and Naveladi. Although people from Thiruppur and Naveladi are both “pure” Siviya, the Korte-relatives recognize the Naveladi-people as higher than themselves in status. As Balasingam explained: “Naveladi-people are more educated than us. So they got jobs like doctors and engineers”. Moreover, the Siviya from Thiruppur and Naveladi

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traditionally do not intermarry.<sup>58</sup> The kin and place or *ur-sondam* group of the Thiruppur-Siviyars is traditionally restricted to the geographical area of Thiruppur only. The reason for this is likely to be that the Siviyars traditionally only lived within Ariyalai and their caste work was very limited. This implies an even higher social importance of the *ur-sondam* group of Siviyars in Thiruppur and Korte compared to other places and castes in Jaffna as they have, ideally and traditionally, no other residence groups with which to intermarry. However, as I will discuss below, Korte-relatives do marry outside Korte and Thiruppur.

In Korte, the kin group is thereby a social unity where relatives (*sondam*), natal village (*ur*) and sub-caste overlap. The ideology of kinship, of who is considered to be relative or stranger (*sondam* or *sondam-illai*), is the means by which the Korte-relatives ideally and practically distance themselves from strangers. This separation from kin-groups of different castes, sub-castes and natal villages, I suggest, is made possible, and even intensified by the tight enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* within pre-war Korte that they remember and perceive to have characterized their life in Korte. Living within Korte and Thiruppur, largely separate from strangers, the Korte-relatives interacted mainly with each other, and to a lesser extent, more distant kin.

Thus, the crucial social distinction for life in pre-war Korte, but also largely today, was and still is the one between kin and strangers (*sondam* and *sondam illai*). Studying gender, caste and class among non-Brahminian castes in a Tamil village in South India, Karin Kapadia (1995, 40) finds the same: “The crucial distinction in Tamil kinship in Aruloor was that between those who were kin (*sondakarakar*<sup>59</sup>) and those who were not kin (*sondakarakar illai*)”. The episode of the visiting relative described in the introduction to this chapter is an example of this distinction. Although Parvathi, Sanjeeven and their visitor do not have exact knowledge of how they are related, the crucial aspect is that they are relatives, *sondam*. This ideology of kinship, inserted into practices of co-habitation and marriage, is what allows the “cutting” (cf. Strathern 1996) of what would

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<sup>58</sup> The marriage between Sothi and her husband mentioned in Chapter 1 is the first exception to this social rule. Sothi is from Korte and her husband was from Naveladi. During the wedding ceremony, Sothi’s family members commented several times how unusual this kind of union was. Sothi’s own brothers had also initially opposed the union, and her parents, Parvathi and Sanjeeven living in Korte, found it strange, but slowly got used to the idea and accepted the marriage.

<sup>59</sup> *Sondakarakar* is the written form of the spoken word of *sondam* in Tamil. *Sondakarakar-illai* is thus equivalent to *sondam-illai*

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otherwise be an endless open meshwork of persons, families and places. The abstract ideologies of kinship allowed the enmeshment to be both intensified and constrained within Korte.

### Terminology, emotions and co-habitation

Being separated by ideals and practices from *sondam-illai* or non-kin and people not belonging to their place or sub-caste, the Korte-relatives mostly entwined their lifelines with each other. These entwinements within the *ur-sondam* group are reinforced by the kinship terminology pertaining to the ideal of bilateral cross-cousin marriage characteristic of Dravidian kinship. Trawick (1990, 121) describes how, if the system of cross-cousin marriage is followed over generations, it creates aesthetically beautiful patterns. It is from this ideal system that the kinship terminology derives. Here the term for brother-in-law and sister's husband, *machan* or *attan*<sup>60</sup> is the same because he ideally should be the same person (cf. Trautmann 1981). The system defines and organizes family members and kin groups into categories of kin in which all the terms, and thus the persons are always defined in relation to others (Trawick 1990, 148), such as: *amma* (mother), *appa* (father), *akka* (elder sister), *anna* or *annan* (elder brother), *tangechi* (younger sister), *tambi* (younger brother), *mama* (mother's brother), *attai* (father's sister) and so forth.

In Tamil families, I have observed that the first words children learn are these kinship terms. Their relatives will be pointed out along with the corresponding kinship term, teaching the children who others are in relation to themselves (see also Trawick (1990, 154, 157)). One of the most important distinctions in this system is also the one between marriageable and non- marriageable kin (cf. Trawick 1990, 120). Hand-in-hand with the learning of the correct kinship terms thereby also goes the convention of the appropriate sentiments to be expressed, and equally which inappropriate sentiments are to be suppressed towards this kin (Trawick 1990, 152). Importantly, behaviour and sentiment towards marriageable and non-marriageable kin is distinguished: more distance in terms of physical and emotional affection needs to be kept between those

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<sup>60</sup> The latter term is more affectionate.



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who are marriageable. Whilst the genealogically closest cross-cousins are marriageable, parallel-cousins are not.

While kinship terms play a significant role in forming behaviour between relatives, or *sondam*, they work in complex dynamics with practiced and emotional kinship *within* the *ur-sondam* group. Kinship terms can also be applied without following the exact classification system, where emotions or affect come into play in re-labelling or re-defining appropriate conduct towards kin and categories of kin. The following example of two sibling groups, the Kumarasamy-siblings and the Sittampalam-siblings, who call each other “sisters and brothers” illustrates this.

Balasingam, the eldest of the Kumarasamy-siblings, and Thavan, the eldest of the Sittampalam-siblings, born on the same day and year and living in houses next to each other, had a particularly close brother relationship. But according to the local classification system and associated kinship terminology they are not siblings: Balasingam’s paternal grandparents are respectively the sister and the brother of the mother and father of the Sittampalam-siblings. This does not prevent Balasingam from expressing a felt sibling relationship to the Sittampalam-siblings. Balasingam expressed this sibling-relationship when he talked about how the rule of cross-cousin marriage regulated his relationship with his female cross-cousins, as opposed to his sisters:

Sothi [Sanjeeven<sup>61</sup>] is my father’s sister’s daughter. Which is, I can marry her. She is my [cross-] cousin. Cousin-sister. But according to our culture, I can marry her. She is my *machal* [cousin]. So with Sothi we keep the distance, our parents won’t allow us to move closer to them. With Inthu [Sittampalam] we can go closer, because we respect her. She is my *aunty*, my parents they allow, because whatever happens, we can’t marry. With Sothi, if anything ever happened I could marry her, so that’s why I keep a distance.

Here, Balasingam used the term *aunty* to describe his relationship to Inthu Sittampalam, the daughter of the brother and sister of his paternal grandparents. In Tamil kinship terminology, *aunty* is oftentimes used to pay respect to a female relative

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<sup>61</sup> Among Tamils, children receive their father’s first name as their last name. When a woman marries she takes her husband’s first name as her last name. Sothi is thus the daughter of Sanjeeven and Parvathi.

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or non-relative. But more often when talking about Inthu, rather than calling Inthu *aunty*, Balasingam used to refer to her as his *akka*, elder sister. The crucial point here is that Balasingam claims that his relationship with Inthu is as close as his relationship with his own elder sisters. That is the reason why they are not allowed to marry and they can interact as brothers and sisters.

When Balasingam explained to me why his relation to Inthu was close and important, he emphasized that Inthu's mother and his paternal grandmother were sisters. Here he left out the sibling relationship between his parental grandfather and Inthu's father – suggesting the greater importance of close relationships between sisters among Tamils. The sister-relationships between Inthu's mother and his own paternal grandmother made Inthu's mother Balasingam's *periyamma*, he explained. *Periyamma* is the term for mother's elder sister. In Tamil kinship the term and relationship indicates that the relationship between a child and his mothers' sisters is the same as between a child and his own birth-mother.

Here, Balasingam cuts out his father and makes his father's mother's sister his own *periyamma*. In this logic, Inthu, his father's mother's sister's daughter, is his parallel-cousin, simply regarded as his own sister since they share the same mother. This same relationship is also termed *ondavodda* sister or brother – *ondavodda* referring to one-step-removed, i.e. mother's sisters' children or father's brother's children. However, in everyday life people do not normally use these terms to call each other, but merely uses the term for sister (*akka* or *tangechi*) and brother (*annan* or *tambi*).

Balasingam also emphasized that this *ondavodda* relationship between the two sibling groups was due to the two sibling sets being close in age. So instead of calling Inthu *aunty* or *periyamma* – which would indicate someone much older than him, he called Inthu his *akka* – elder sister and could thereby relate to her emotionally and behave towards her as is socially acceptable for a brother-sister relationship.

Regarding relations and terminology in Tamil kinship, Trawick (1990, 152-153) emphasizes that the linguistic terms applied also convey sentiments: “sentiments, like ideas, [are] channelled by means of words [...] These sentiments, in turn, are given shape by what they call each other”. Trawick's point here is similar to Claude Levi-Strauss' (1963) view of kinship as a system of terminology and a system of attitudes.

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But in contrast to Levi-Strauss, Trawick (1990) regards the words used to express relationships as dynamically interdependent with peoples' actual behaviour and their feelings towards each other. Calling each other *tambi* and *akka*, "younger brother" and "elder sister", from their earliest childhood, Balasingam and Inthu evoke the feelings associated with a brother-sister relationship, which also makes them enact this relationship, implying emotional closeness and the repression of any sexual relation. The family member's ideals of kinship and kinship behaviour thereby enter into a complex dynamic with their practices of kinship. Here, kinship terms with corresponding acceptable behaviour are applied to re-label specific kin in order to establish and maintain a sibling relationship despite lacking the genealogy of siblings. I suggest that this "manipulation" of kinship terms is selected in order to fit the reality that they actually were emotionally close. Their emotionally close bonds, I suggest were enhanced by the two sibling groups living in houses next to each other.

This same "manipulation" of kinship terms is also seen among young girls who sometimes apply kinship terms as a strategy to avoid any potentially "dangerous" relationship with an unknown boy or man, i.e. to avoid the suggestion that the boy "flirts" which can create rumours of inappropriate sexual relationships.<sup>62</sup> Sangeetha, the daughter of Balasingam's sister Sasikala, living in Korte, nineteen years old in 2012, said that calling a boy or man *annan* [elder brother] or *tambi* [younger brother] signifies that the girl gives the boy respect:

Then the boy has to call the girl *tangechi* or *akka*. That also show respect and that one is not thinking anything sexual about them, they can't think of marrying them. Also, they can't *side adikke*,<sup>63</sup> they can't do anything.

It follows, then, that calling someone by a kinship term places that person in a specific category with a certain given repertoire of possible actions and behaviour.

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<sup>62</sup> Rumours about a person's relationship with the opposite sex give the person a bad reputation. Any relationship between persons of opposite sex outside the nearest kin group will be interpreted as promiscuous, and conclusions are drawn that the girl no longer is a virgin and as such has violated the purity of family and caste. The rule also applies to boys, but the importance given to the wife being a virgin when she marries makes girls more vulnerable to such rumours than boys.

<sup>63</sup> *Side adikke*, literary to "hit side", meaning to give a look, is a common way in which young girls and boys show that they are interested in a person of opposite sex.

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Kinship terms applied in daily life, either between people who are not related at all or people who are more distantly related, will give an emotionally closer relationship than if not applied. This does not imply that boys who are non-kin (*sondam-illai*) become kin (*sondam*), but it restricts them from behaving as they would toward potential spouses. To Balasingam, calling Inthu and her siblings, who are already relatives, by sibling terms makes him feel closer towards them than he otherwise would have done. This illustrates the dynamic between concrete relationships and representational aspects of kinship: kinship ideology in terms of terminology can thereby affect behaviour and relationships. It is the persons' actions of applying these specific kinship terms, however, that activates the behaviours and emotions associated with the kinship term in the ideology of Dravidian kinship. People act out kinship terminology, based in ideals, in order to fit their interest or need.

By applying the kin terms for sibling to Inthu and her siblings, Balasingam also feels closer to this sibling group than to his cross-cousin Sothi, although genealogically he is closer to the latter. Being closer to Inthu than Sothi is also affected by the structural social rules of cross-cousin marriage: whatever happens between Inthu and Balasingam, or between any members of the siblings group, they cannot have a sexual relationship because they are like siblings. The opposite is true for cross-cousins, with whom they will keep their distance, as Balasingam pointed out above. Cross-cousins are marriageable, even ideally so, and emotional distance will be upheld through kinship terminology and social norms that prescribe strict restrictions on sexual behaviour, whilst still admitting its eventual possibility. The terminology their parents socialise them into has a significant effect on how they can relate to each other, and thus the feelings they develop. Depending on the applied kinship term and its inherent acceptable behaviour, close or distant practices and emotions of kinship are acted out and felt.

With regard to debates on Dravidian kinship there are two central and connected points I would like to stress from the example regarding Balasingam and Inthu. The first has to do with classificatory kinship. In classificatory terms, Inthu's and Balasingam's relationship would not be termed as an *ondavodda akka-tambi* relationship. Rather Balasingam's *father* and Inthu are to be termed *ondavodda tangechi/anna* (one step

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removed younger sister/elder brother since Inthu is younger to Balasingam's father). However, in real life, Balasingam and Inthu practice an *ondavodda akka/tambi* relationship with each other. They term each other siblings, and interact as such on a daily basis. They become present in each other's existence, considering each other as belonging to each other as brother and sister. Their intersubjective participation in each other's life is what makes them close kin (cf. Sahlins 2011, 10). What matters in the actual relationship between Balasingam and Inthu is co-habitation and feelings rather than strictly classificatory thought. Lived feelings of close kinship relations is more a question of co-habitation, generation and how people choose to term and relate to each other than classificatory structures.

The second point, following the first, is that Balasingam is socially and emotionally more attached to his father's mother's kin than his own father's kin. This is expressed when he emphasizes his relation to Inthu through his parental *grandmother* rather than his parental *grandfather*, although in both cases Inthu becomes his parallel-cousin and *akka* by cutting out his father. In my view, this indicates the importance of matrilineal kin and attachment to (grand)mother. This brings me to the debate regarding whether Dravidian kinship should be considered matrilineal, patrilineal or bilateral.

### **“One thing is blood relations, another thing is love”**

Jaffna kinship, as Dravidian kinship, has been presented as matrilineal (Kanag-Isvaran 2013, 12), bilateral (Banks 1960, Pfaffenberger 1982), and patrilineal (David 1973). David's (1973) argument for a patrilineal understanding of Jaffna kinship has been particularly debated (see Fuglerud 1999, Kapadia 1995). Based on Jaffna Vellālar's perception of blood and how it is transferred between husband, wife and child, David (1973) argues that his informants understand this relation as the woman going through a process of “transubstantiation” during marriage. Through marital intercourse, the husband's substance: his blood, is understood to be transferred to the woman. The woman is then believed to partake in her husband's substance and not her natal family's substance. Thus the child will also have the father's substance. Fuglerud (1996, 204) disagrees with these findings. According to his Jaffna-Vellālar informants, no such

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“transubstantiation” takes place. Moreover they claim that children indeed have natural bonds to their maternal kin.

Among Korte-relatives I have heard similar explanations to those David (1973) recounts. They were not contrasted, nor seen in opposition to the closeness one feel to one’s own mother’s kin, however. Sangeetha told me one afternoon as we sat on the doorstep to her family’s house in Korte:

In the wedding, the girl is given to the husband’s family. Then she goes to the husband’s family. So she will have the husband[’s blood], and her children will also have the blood of the husband. That is the *rethathanam*, blood donation. My sister now has her husband’s blood, not my family’s blood. We are not blood relations now. But we are sisters. That is *pasam* – love. That is very close. My sister is my sister. Every day I talk with her and her baby on Skype. So he [the baby] says ”*sitti, sitti*” [short of *sittamma* – literary “small mother”, meaning mother’s younger sister]. He always asks for me. Because I always talk with my sister and him. But my sister’s husband’s sister,<sup>64</sup> she only comes a few times. So who is the baby most close to? Me. Because that is love. One thing is blood relations, another thing is love.

Sangeetha emphasises that there are no contradictions between what is considered blood relations and “love-relations”. Moreover the “love-relations” are stronger than the blood relations. Here it is their mutuality of being that is essential: their daily participation in one another’s existence (cf. Sahlins 2011).

A similar understanding that belief in blood being transferred from husband to wife is not in conflict with being close to mother’s kin is also seen in the practices of death pollution. Following the understanding that blood is transferred through the father, those who share patrilineal blood with the deceased are considered as polluted, *thodakku*, thirty days after the death of a family member. However close kin, emotional as well as genealogical, on the mother’s side who do not share patrilineal blood will also consider themselves polluted and undergo the same rituals to free themselves from pollution as patrilineal kin.

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<sup>64</sup> Living in London, not far from Sangeetha’s sister’s house.

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Differences in blood are thus not the only important category in people's daily life and in their interaction with each other. Kapadia's (1995) study shows the same ideas and practices: while her informants believe they have more common blood with one's fathers' brothers, they are socially more attached to their mother's brother. Love for one's mother's relatives thus gives a stronger emotional bond than the bond created by conceptions of shared blood. If, as David (1973) argues, Jaffna Tamil society was patrilineal based on blood, this would mean that mother's kin eventually would be considered as non-relatives or at least socially unimportant. However, as the relationship between the Kumarasamy- and the Sittampalam-siblings proves, this is not at all the case in Korte.

Sangeetha's mother Sasikala also confirmed the importance of mother's kin. When Sangeetha was talking about blood- and love-relations, her mother had been listening as she prepared the evening meal in the kitchen. As Sangeetha ended her explanation, Sangeetha's mother walked out of the kitchen while stirring together the flour and water for the evening's *pittu*,<sup>65</sup> and added to her daughter's account:

Blood-relations is the father's relations. So my blood relations are Sangeetha's father's sister and brother and their children. But in my heart I am closer to my own relations, my own family.

To Sangeetha's mother, her own relatives are the ones closest to her heart. These include both her mother's kin and those with whom she used to share patrilineal blood before her marriage. In the same way, Sangeetha also remains close to her sister and her sisters' son although they no longer share the same blood. An important characteristic of lived kinship relations among the Korte-relatives, therefore, seems to be that "love relations" through the mother's side remains stronger than "blood relations" on the father's side. Fuglerud (1996, 209) also notes that among Jaffna Tamils in general, there seems to be a stronger attachment and relatedness among both men and women to their mother's brother rather than their father's brother. Trawick (1990, 174) suggests that a stronger attachment to the mother's kin is a consequence of the intense attachment

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<sup>65</sup> Popular morning- and evening dish in Sri Lanka and Tamil speaking South India. It is made of steamed layers of ground rice and ground coconut, served with curries or banana.

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between sister and brother among Tamils, and that the brother's protective role gives this bond moral and spiritual priority over the husband-wife bond. The brother-sister relationship has its material correlate in the brother's obligation to help his sister and also his sister's daughter in raising dowry, which, in theory, should come from the maternal line.

Lived kinship relations are thus not only a result of kinship terminology and conceptions of blood, nor only of practices. Kapadia (1995, 30) and Fuglerud (1995) have also argued against David's (1973) perspective with regard to Tamil kinship and blood. Emphasising that the emotional aspects of kinship and marriage are the significant, Trawick (1995) argues that the meaning of kinship relations are complex, varied and not internally consistent as they are likely to be more based on feelings than thought. Similarly Fuglerud (1999, 145) argues that that questions of "differences in blood" and marriage patterns belongs to a different discussion than questions of to whom one feels closest.

What I find important here is the dynamic between abstract conceptions of kinship, both in terms of blood and kinship-terminology and practiced relatedness. It is in such dynamics and tensions that kinship relations are lived and negotiated. Similarly, Trawick (1990, 135) argues that to understand Tamil kinship we need to take into account face-to-face personal relationship between whole and actual persons and how lived relationships give and restrict emotions. As such, rigid views based on classificatory kinship terminology or conceptions of blood downplay actual relationships between persons in their day-to-day interaction and association with each other. And these are indeed varied and complex.

Central to the negotiation of kinship terms, I suggest, is co-habitation. The fact that the houses of the Kumarasamy- siblings and the Sittampalam-siblings were geographically close facilitated and enhanced the sibling-relationship between the two sibling sets. While Balasingam and his own brothers talked warmly about their mother, Balasingam seldom spoke about his relatives on his own mother's side. Their mother was not from Jaffna and had moved to Korte when she married Balasingam's father. Balasingam and his siblings, therefore, had little contact with the other relatives on his mother's side. Inthu and Balasingam see themselves as sister and brother because they



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lived together, spoke and enacted their sibling-relationship on a daily basis. Without this geographical closeness, the experienced kinship relationship would have been more distant, as in Balasingam's relationship with his mother's relatives. Those perhaps more distant in terms of blood, such as Balasingam's father's mother's sister's relatives, were emotionally closer because they lived together. As Carsten (2000) argues, to be related implies that one has to practice the relationship in order for the relatedness to be felt. Behaviours, emotions and affect towards each other are thus central to people's processes of re-labelling and re-defining appropriate kinship terms and conducts. Who they are emotionally closer to depends on love and feelings of the heart, and on whom they can practically interact with *within* the borders of *sondam*, *ur* and caste – which in Korte overlap. Here, the question of kinship ties being matri- or patrilineal is not of social importance.

In order to maintain the unity within the *sondam* of Korte within which such negotiations of kinship relations can take place, the marriage pattern and accompanying dowry system are important.

## Ideals and experiences of marriage

Our system, we only marry within Ariyalai, we never go outside. If we marry Ariyalai, first we have a choice to marry my father's sister's daughter, like Sothi. We arrange marriage with such closeness. And if we don't have that, then we go with the rest. They are also the same, but within Ariyalai.

Balasingam here explains the closeness of their marriage pattern. He describes the ideal of the bilateral cross-cousin marriage. This ideal, being the most important aspect of the Dravidian kinship semantics (Trautmann 1981, 37), is also the ideal marriage to the Korte-relatives. In this system, if the ideal is followed, each generation is the realization of the kinship history (Trawick 1990, 121). If the ideal of bilateral cross-cousin marriage is followed in Korte, it implies that their kin- and sub-caste group and their natal village (*ur*) are reproduced, as it leaves the same relatives and sub-caste group residing in Korte over generations. As pointed out in the Introduction, the

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practice of dowry moreover secures their kin-group's continued living in Korte: daughters are given a share of their parental land upon marriage, together with jewels and cash. This is called *sidenum* (Banks 1957, 256).<sup>66</sup> In Korte, as already pointed out in the Introduction, the families built new houses for the daughters in dowry on the land of the parents.<sup>67</sup>

However, only marrying close kin, and thereby to keep only close kin within Korte is not always a straight-forward arrangement. The ideal cross-cousin marriage is not always possible to follow. Then marrying within the natal village (*ur*) is the second best ideal, as Balasingam stated above: "if we don't have that [the first choice] we go with the rest". The practice of marrying within the *ur* shows the flexibility in the *ur*; an *ur*-marriage is preferred when the cross-cousin marriage cannot be fulfilled, but one always seeks to marry as close as possible in terms of both *ur* and *sondam*, and thus also caste, although this practice implies the possibility of marrying within the lower sub-castes of the Siviyaar residing in Ariyalai. This practice, whilst keeping Korte-relatives within their family place, at least brings in only others who "belong to" or are "like" them in terms of belonging to *sondam* and *ur*. It also keeps Korte-relatives who marry outside Korte in nearby *urs*, thus keeping them as close as possible. If the person to be married has a bad reputation, in other words has had a love affair, an *ur*-marriage is difficult. Then a spouse is sought outside the nearest *sondam*-, *ur*- and caste group, and thus outside Ariyalai. Commenting on this issue, Balasingam explained:

Now, say that my people do something bad. In my family, say my sister: she has some love affair with someone, we won't have it. What do we do? He is an outsider. Not Ariyalai, some other place. To avoid that, we just propose. But not in our area. Everyone knows, so and so had a love affair. So no boys want to marry her. So then what we do, we go to the low caste, and then find a good man. In the low caste they are also educated, they have a good job, *enne* [what, i.e right]? So we find a good job and educated, and they are proud to come to marry in our society. They don't mind that she had a love affair and everything, they don't mind. They come and marry. That's the way. But I'm talking about my times.

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<sup>66</sup> Sons get their share of the parental land after the parents' death. This is called *mudisum*.

<sup>67</sup> Dennis McGilvray (1988, 108-109) has noticed this same practice among east-coast Tamils in Sri Lanka.

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Marrying an “outsider”, i.e. outside relatives (*sondam*), natal village (*ur*), and sub-caste, and also outside Ariyalay is acceptable if necessary, but it is certainly not the first choice. This illustrates that while the *ur-sondam* group of Korte does not have any equally ranged sub-caste group residing in other areas, as Banks (1960, 70) describes, they will in practice marry and establish relations with new kin-groups and residents of other places. But ideally, they prefer family or kin, and also the sub-caste to be kept together in their family’s natal village.

The desire and ideal to keep relatives (*sondam*), natal village (*ur*) and caste (*sadi*) together is also related to the purity of the group. The family itself is responsible for their purity (cf. Banks 1957, 64-65): “He is an outsider [...] we won’t have it” as Balasingam put it. It is better to have one’s sister or any family member married within the lower sub-castes of Siviyar, than a different caste group. Such a person from the lower sub-castes of the Siviyars who moves to Korte to reside in the sisters’ dowry house, will not be near kin, but at least he will be within the same caste-group and from a nearby place. As such the person will not be *as* different as a complete “outsider” or stranger would have been.

What makes an *ur*-marriage possible and preferred when a cross-cousin, or a close relative is not available for marriage, I suggest is the emphasis on the present living generations. The episode discussed in the opening to this chapter, in which Sanjeeven was visited by a distant relation born in Korte, but living in London, illustrated that detailed knowledge of genealogical relationship is unnecessary for recognition as *sondam*. Nor is it what is socially relevant. Banks (1957, 53, 124) also notes that people in Jaffna villages only have detailed genealogical knowledge of their exact kinship relations with the generations with whom they live. Ancestors are only traced back one or two generations (Banks 1957, 174, Busby 1997, 34, Yalman 1962). Only a few of the eldest Korte-relatives remember the name of their grandparents, but they all have an idea that their grandparents and great-grandparents for generations were from Korte and Thiruppur. And when exact genealogical relationships are not known, the decisive aspect in acceptance of the other as a relative is residence, or past residence, within the *ur*. This underlines that the distinction between kin (*sondam*) and non-kin (*sondam-illai*) is the significant social distinction.

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The focus is thus on the current living or remembered generations, and it is this group of people that is important to the ego. Thereby, following the ideal of the cross-cousin marriage, the history of kinship is given its outcome in each generation (cf. Trawick 1990). It is a “wide structure” of relatives (close and extended) that lives together in an area or *ur*, where the *ur* is flexible and corresponding to close and extended relatives (*sondam*). Each present generation holds the totality of the structure that has produced it, even if the ideal of cross-cousin marriage is not followed, as long as the marriage is made within the *ur*.

Aided by the use of kinship terminology, detailed knowledge of an ancestor coming from another village will at some point fade from memory. As Nur Yalman (1962, 550) argues, the kinship terminology for husband and brother-in-law, absorbs the stranger into kin. The kinship term used to refer to a sister’s husband and by the wife to refer to her husband is the same as for cross-cousin: *machan* or *attan*. If the husband or brother-in-law is not one’s cross-cousin by blood he will still become the cross-cousin by terminology and affection (cf. Trawick 1990, 153). “New” alliances with people from outside the nearest kin group will be absorbed into the kinship system and the system will bear some new linkage outside the overlapping social group of relatives (*sondam*), natal village (*ur*) and sub-caste. However, these marriages are not the “first choice” as Balasingam stated, stressing the preference for marriage within *sondam* and *ur*. This preference will also keep *sondam* and *ur* together without much instability.

### *The emotions of marriage*

Marrying an outsider not only has social implications for the kin-group, but also for the individual themselves and the emotional consequences are strongly felt. Because of his own experience, Balasingam was much concerned with these kind of “outside”-marriages. When his first marriage with an English woman ended, it became difficult for him and his family to get a second marriage for him within the *ur-sondam* group, as well as within Ariyalai. They had to look outside. Through his brother, Eswary from a Vellālar family in the northern parts of the Jaffna-peninsula, was found. Although Eswary is from a higher caste than the Siviyaar, Balasingam finds such a marriage not

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recommendable and much more difficult than marrying with a lower sub-caste in Ariyalai:

[If] we go with [i.e. marry] the rest, they are also the same, but within Ariyalai. That means that there's no problem, they understand each other. They know our way of living. Same like Ariyalai-people. If I marry in the North, then I find Eswary, there are some difficulties to move with them. Eswary always has a problem to move with our people. Because our style is different. I have some difficulties to go to her place. Ehh, and then, I went there to her father and mother in their place for holiday. I was sooo..., I was not comfortable. Honestly. I was not comfortable at all, so I had to stay, like, I can't talk nicely with her father and brothers and her relatives. Because they are not friends of mine, they are now. So how I can openly talk with them? So better keep to myself. But then I'm just bored. I want to break that, so sometimes I go to Ariyalai, myself. To make myself enjoy. If I go there, I have friends, I'm free. Same like that. We are all Tamils, but still we have differences. This is all changed now. Even I marry in a different place, I couldn't marry Ariyalai girl, but most of them marry in Ariyalai.

Balasingam is not comfortable in his wife's place, in this new and unknown *ur* with unknown relatives. Banks (1957) also notes that the Jaffna Tamils generally feel most comfortable inside their own place. The relationship with his wife's relatives is not what he is used to with his own family. Likewise, he says that his wife finds it difficult to socialize with his family:

If I go [i.e. marry] outside, my society won't accept me. So that's problem, right? So sometimes if I go to a wedding or a party, any party on my side, and I take Eswary, they won't talk with her. They will sit and talk, talk, talk, in the beginning. So that's the difficulties we got. [...] Now everybody are marrying here and there, have love-affairs and they have all freedoms. Even some of my relatives married very, very low-caste: *pallar*, *parier*. They married and they live happily. But sometimes we don't invite them for our weddings, and parties, and something like that.

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The social discomfort of not being with one's own relatives (*sondam*), seems to be of as much importance as keeping the purity of their caste group. However one can wonder, if Balasingam would not have felt differently after some years of marriage through daily interaction with his wife's relatives if he had lived with his wife in her *ur* and not in London. Thus the incentive for marrying within the kin, and sub-caste *ur*-group is also socially and emotionally founded, knitting together the bonds among their own relatives (*sondam*) and caste-group and between this group and their natal village (*ur*). This keeps close relatives together through generations, and keeps the relatives and sub-caste together in the *ur*.

Following this ideal of cross-cousin marriage, each generation both makes new and recreates old affinal links. Links that would otherwise be lost. When the new couple is given a house in Korte, the pattern of marriage reproduces the *sondam* and *ur* of Korte, as well as contributing to re-producing the larger *ur* and extended *sondam* of Thiruppur. It keeps alive a consciousness of common *sondam* (cf. Banks 1957, 174) within sub-*ur* and *ur*. The families' houses can be seen as materializations of the persons' and the family's relationship to the *ur* and thus also materializations of the families' unity with each other, continuing their life in the same, shared *ur*. This practice also ensures the necessary entangling between new family members: children of the new married couple, with the existing ones, and between new family members and the surroundings of the *ur*. These practices remake the felt unity of *sondam* and *ur* in Korte as well as re-making the *ur* itself.

Thereby, the system of marriage and residence determined who resided and who resides in Korte and Thiruppur. In other words: who was born and who lived in Korte and Thiruppur was not coincidental. Herein also lies an explicit expectation with regard to who ideally should reside here in the future; living in houses on their parental land, the next generation is supposed to continue to dwell and entangle their lifelines in the space which constitutes Korte and Thiruppur, remaking the *urs* in their dwelling. This create a situation where a specific pattern of genealogy is expected to be reproduced over generations (Trawick 1990, 121). Here the genealogy is, although limited in terms of generational historical knowledge (cf. Banks 1957, 174), known to each individual in the sense of knowing that they all are related to each other. While the ideal of cross-

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cousin marriage is not always followed in the case of Korte-relatives, I suggest that the same “feeling” of such a known pattern is felt when the marriages mostly take place within the *ur*, and thus among relatives, although not always between cross-cousins and relatives known in genealogy. It is the current generations of relatives with whom one lives, and the consciousness of them all being relatives, that is important and produces the experience of a strong emotional unity of close relatives in Korte and extended relatives in Thiruppur. The dynamics and tensions between concrete sensorial relationships and ideals of kinship, including *ur*, are acted out and mutually influence each other, ultimately giving an experience of close enmeshment with all relatives in Korte. Social rules, practices and preferences of caste, marriage and dowry connect the family to Korte and renew linkages within the Korte *ur-sondam* group, as well as with Thiruppur and between the families and the *ur* over generations.

### **The emotional value of *sondam* and *ur***

The practical and sensorial enmeshment of person, relatives and natal village described in the previous chapter is thereby made tighter and denser by the ideals and language inherent in the Dravidian kinship system. As mentioned in the Introduction, these ideals of kinship, marriage and family, are manifested in social practices that surround the person in Korte from young age. Life revolves around family, and the emphasis given to family in Jaffna in general is fortified by the strong cultural imperative that to get married and have children are the ultimate goals that secure a happy life. This is clearly conveyed to children from young age. Many times I have heard youth and children repeating the adults mantra that children, and thus also marriage, are most important in life. Kaviya, Selvi’s daughter, born in Oslo, sixteen years old at the time, told me that “when you have children, then the real life starts”.

The importance of marriage can also be seen in rituals. The marriage ritual is considered to be the most significant ritual and event during a person’s life cycle (Trawick 1990, 149). Also, funeral practices of persons who die young and unmarried are done differently than when the deceased have been married and lived a life as a spouse and parent. Then the usual practices of worshipping the dead person’s body with

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flowers and touching the body's feet in prayer during the funeral ritual are not performed. This follows from the belief that the soul can be reborn if these practices are avoided. And to be reborn is crucial, as Sasikala explained sitting outside her house in Korte, talking about the funeral of her son who was killed during the war in 2008, twenty-six years old and unmarried:

Because he is yet not married, he would be with lot of wishes, like have to marry, live with family, has to eat good food. He didn't enjoy all these. So, they like to take re-birth. So we won't offer flowers.

An unmarried and childless life is seen as an unfulfilled life; the soul is still left with desires. This implies that it is through marriage that both men and women become socially complete persons as adults. For a woman, only as a wife and a mother is her full potential revealed. In the marriage ritual when the husband ties the *thali*<sup>68</sup> around her neck, the woman is turned into a *Cumankali*, a married woman and a (potential) mother. The *cumankali* is seen as the most auspicious being in the Tamil universe. The inner power, *shakti*, that women possess, if controlled, brings the family prosperity in the form of health, wealth, and the power to save life and to alter events (Wadely 1980, see also Fuglerud 1999, 110).

For men, marriage indicates the start of his period as a householder, the second of the four ashrams in a Hindu's life described in the Manu-smriti and later classical Sanskrit texts. This second stage of life is considered to be the most important of the four ashrams. As a householder, it is the man's responsibility to earn a living and to support his family, implicit is that he also needs to produce children, and carry out his duties to family and society. From this logic it follows that men and women who remain unmarried are seen as socially less valued persons, as incomplete social beings. This view is mirrored in religious rituals. Traditionally, unmarried men and woman above marriageable age (30 for woman, 35 for men) cannot take a position as one of the ritual

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<sup>68</sup> A gold necklace that the (Hindu) groom ties around the wife's neck, comparable to the wedding ring in the West.



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actors. But also, married couples who remain childless are denied ritual positions as it is said to bring bad luck on the person at the centre of the ritual.<sup>69</sup>

The social importance and ideal of cross-cousin marriage and family in general is reinforced by the linguistic structure constituting Dravidian kinship terminology (Trawick 1990, 149). The individual only becomes fully part of this integrated system by marrying; it is by marriage that the person get in-laws, becomes a mother and so on (Trawick 1990, 149). Marriage is thus also regarded as *manam*, meaning “union” and “fragrance”, and seen as life itself (Trawick 1990, 39).

While marrying a cross-cousin is seldom fulfilled in Korte, it remains the ideal. This implies, as argued in the Introduction, an overall ideology of kinship in Tamil society: ideals and terminology of kinship influence people’s practices and relations of kinship to relatives, strangers and places. While some Korte-relatives today find the ideal of marrying a cross-cousin “too close”, rather favouring *ur*-marriages, this ideal remains strong. I have often heard Korte-relatives elevate marriages between cross-cousins as the most successful and happiest. Siva and Raddi, now living in London with their grown-up children, are the only married cross-cousins of their generation from Korte. They married in Jaffna in 1984, Siva’s mother being the sister of Raddi’s father. Both Siva and Raddi say open-heartedly that they are happily married and other family members of their generation often point out how successful their marriage is. The reason for their successful marriage is attributed to Siva and Raddi’s kin relation as cross-cousins. Balasingam, for example, asserted:

Siva and Raddi, you see how happy they are? Because they are cousins. They know each other, they are used to the same kind of living. So they understand each other. In that way they don’t get any problems. And if any problem, Raddi’s sisters will come and Siva’s brothers will come. Because they have the right to come. And Siva will listen to Raddi’s sisters. Because they are his cousins too and they have the right to come. To speak. So in that way they don’t get any problems, right?”

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<sup>69</sup> In the diaspora, this ritual rule has become more relaxed as the years have passed. On several occasions I have seen married, but childless men and women perform ritually important roles where they are emotionally close to the persons at the centre of the ritual.

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In Balasingam's, and other relatives' view, the reason for the happiness of the married couple is founded on their prior relation as cross-cousins. The cross-cousin relation implies that their cross-cousins are also their in-laws, and as such have rights and emotional connections that other in-laws would not have.

Balasingam himself lamented that he did not get this kind of marriage. Others of the pre-war generation also invest strong emotions in their children's marriage. Several times I have seen Tamil parents from Korte and other *urs* grieve over their children's choice of marriage when marrying outside the *ur* and thus *sondam*.<sup>70</sup> This implies that the children's marriage is not only about the child and person him- or herself, but also about the unity of *sondam* and *ur* of which the parents regard themselves as a part. This unity is threatened when they or their children marry outside this wholeness. The desired and idealized *ur-sondam* marriage shows, in my view, the great emotional value invested into these relationships by those who include themselves in this unity. Keeping the unity, or the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) together is regarded as the ideal, it is aspired to in thoughts and actions and it is grieved over when not achieved.

### *Emotions and meaning*

Catherine Lutz and Geoffrey White (1986, 427) argue that in order to understand the relation between emotion and cultures, we need to understand which social relations or existential meanings are emotionally at stake for its individuals. Growing up in Korte, dwelling mostly within Korte and Thiruppur among close and distant relatives, the person is from childhood included in the experience and discourse of the social importance of family; it is learned in language, seen and practiced in everyday and ritual life, and emphasised in the valorisation of cross-cousin marriage. I suggest that among the pre-war Korte-relatives, the overall emphasis, discourse and emotional desire that they all marry within "their people", and that marriage and children is "the good life", was experienced as a fundamental existential meaning.

To the Korte-relatives, the question of marriage, and thus a continued belonging to the unity of *ur-sondam*, through being enmeshed in *sondam* and *ur*, is a question every

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<sup>70</sup> I discuss this more in the Epilogue.

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person born into this unity needs to deal with, at least once, during their life. In this dissertation “the unity of *ur-sondam*” refers particularly to the closest and smallest level such as the Korte-*ur* and *sondam*, but also the extended *sondam* and *ur* of Thiruppur. This shows the fluidity between Korte-*sondam* and *ur* and Thiruppur-*sondam* and *ur*. To the Korte-relatives, the Korte *ur-sondam* unity is the emotional closest unity and what is most at stake for the Korte-relatives, but belonging to the Thiruppur *ur-sondam* unity is also significant.

In her chapter *Performing the World: Agency, Anticipation and Creativity*, Kirsten Hastrup (2007) argues that it is by including oneself in a wholeness that transcends the individual in space and time, that the self experiences meaningfulness. The *ur-sondam* unity, both within the sub-*ur* and close *sondam* of Korte, and the larger *ur* and extended *sondam* of Thiruppur, is something bigger than the individual: the unity forms a consciousness of a family history as well as a potential future in which this unity is continued. This unity thus provides a meaningful present, past and future. By involving themselves in the social “plot” or wholeness of the unity of relatives and their natal village (*ur-sondam* unity), the individual Korte-relatives are given and take part in a life form that provides the individual with meaning.

Hastrup furthermore argues that all such meaningful wholeness, or:

social fields, [...] from global communities to villages and families, depends on illusion to be real [...] The point is that by investing their own interests and actions in filling out the form, social agents make the community happen (Hastrup 2007, 198).

The point here is not that the social “plot” is an illusion as unreal, but as in Louis Althusser’s (2008 [1971]) understanding of ideology, the illusion that leads towards meaning is real because it is acted out by the subjects. Althusser (2008 [1971], 40) regards ideology to provide us (all) with an identity and socializing us into concrete life-worlds, by locating us on “the inside” of specific conceptions of the world from the day

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we are born – such as the Dravidian kinship system.<sup>71</sup> To Althusser, the existence of any ideology does not exist only in the mind, it is also what he calls “material”. This acting out of ideas by subjects makes an ideology material, and is what makes a particular ideology “work” or function. As such, the family as an ideology socialises and gives identity to its members and in turn, family member will act out the ideology on which the family is based in material practices. In this view, ideology is not false consciousness, a misconception of the world, nor is it part of outer reality as such; it is real because it reflects and shapes our understanding of our conditions of living, it is our understanding of our own placement in history.<sup>72</sup>

Investing their actions to fulfil the “plot” or ideology of the *ur-sondam* unity, family members uphold the unity of which they are already part. This investment, I suggest, is caused by the inherently strong emotional motivational force in the *ur-sondam* unity to strive towards the ideal life: The person only becomes part of this larger whole, giving life meaning, by complying with and acting out the *ur-sondam* marriage and by passing the ideal and practices on to the next generation.

Similarly, Arjun Appadurai (2013) focuses in his essay “The Future as Cultural Fact”, on the future inherent in such meaning. He argues that the “future is a part of how societies shape their practices” (Appadurai 2013, 292), and thus that we need to “understand how cultural systems, as combinations of norms, dispositions, practices and histories, frame the good life as a landscape of discernible ends and of practical paths to achieve these ends” (Appadurai 2013, 292). Appadurai (2013, 289) argues that this future is always accompanied by emotions, affect and sensations. As I have already pointed out, everyday life in Korte provided the individual with images of the ideal life to be achieved by marrying within *sondam* and *ur* and thus of practices likely to achieve

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<sup>71</sup> Althusser (2008 [1971], 19) uses the term Ideology State Apparatus (ISA) to refer to institutions that socializes us as human beings, and argues that ideology can be found in any institution that socialises us as human beings (Althusser 2008 [1971], 17). However, Althusser used the term to describe European industrial states, where the state controls the educational system, which he regards as one of the most important ideological apparatuses. This situation, and thus the term “ISA”, is not directly transferrable to Jaffna.

<sup>72</sup> I use ideology here as an analytical term referring to ideas that surrounds us, real in our thoughts and actions, rather than with regard to power or reciprocal hegemony as understood in Antonio Gramsci’s conception of political ideology (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Gramsci 1992).

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this goal. As such, when oneself or one's children marry outside this unity, it is experienced as emotionally troublesome.

Desiring and acting out the ideals of keeping *sondam* and *ur* together, family members remain part of the socially meaningful wholeness and moreover, maintain and contribute to upholding the ideal and confirming its value in a dynamic interaction between sensorial relations and meaning-making ideals and values of kinship. Born and socialized into a specific kin-group, the person's understanding and emotional valuation of kinship are fed by concrete actions and behaviours (cf. Meyer 2015, 162). In turn, family members act out kinship practices as part of their understandings, or ideologies, of kinship, which in turn acts upon their own conceptions of kinship and contributes to social understandings of kinship. Inherent in these dynamics, the individual's emotional desires and investment in the unity of relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) play a central part.

While I do not intent to delve into psychoanalysis, Trawick's note on how the French psychoanalytic semiotician Jacques Lacan's view of the incompleteness of the self serves as a metaphor for the "Tamil world-view", seem too good a fit not to mention here. Trawick (1990, 143) points out that Lacan's theory deals with the ways subjects produce meaning in social wholeness. His theory is formed with regard to the formation of the individual at the moment of the child's rupture from the mother. According to Trawick (1990, 144), Lacan's vision is that the individual is not formed through the process of integration, but through fragmentation. It is in this moment of rupture from the first wholeness into which we are born, that desire enters the self, and the self becomes a subject (Trawick 1990, 144). The subject acts out of its desire to become part of the unity that is lost.

In this view, the rupture is a constant part of human existence, always making the subject desire and thus also act to be part of a unity, a larger, meaningful wholeness. The rupture is always present as a potentially threatening empty and meaningless void. What drives humans then is desire to act in ordered ways that keeps the threat of meaninglessness at distance. The solution for the person thus becomes to act and behave so it becomes and remains part of the social wholeness (Trawick 1990, 140). Trawick (1990, 186) shows that her South Indian Tamil informants have a strong desire and

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expectation for continuation and harmony in their kinship relationships. She suggests that this continuation is enhanced by the idealization of cross-cousin relations, expressed in kinship terminology, creating a desire to fulfil the aesthetic symmetry of the terminological system – although this is never perfectly acted out.

While I find Trawick's (1990) analysis interesting, my view is that we need to recognize that the person in Jaffna Tamil society is born into the social wholeness of relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*). And if not "ruptured" from this wholeness in the Lacanian sense, the person seem to strive to be and remain part of this wholeness, both to *sondam* and *ur*, throughout life, including through their children. The cross-cousin marriage, then, remain a romantic ideal, orienting family members "inwards", seeking marriages for oneself and one's children that are as close as possible in terms of *sondam* and *ur*, providing dowry houses within the *ur*, restricting social life to the social unity of kin within the *ur* of Korte or Thiruppur. In these practices, close relatives are kept together within the sub-*ur* and *ur*, upholding this social unity.

I suggest that the unity or wholeness of *sondam* and *ur* is a form of, perhaps largely unconscious, resistance to the potential existential emptiness. This orientation is emotionally motivated, as it is "uncomfortable" to be married into a different *ur-sondam* unity like Balasingam, or see one's children being married into other *ur-sondam*-groups that are not like themselves (cf. Lutz and White 1986, 427). As Lacan and Hastrup (2007), Slavoj Žižek (1989) emphasises that the individual's wishes, hopes and fears about their position in society are what drives the human. Seeking meaning, or a wholeness that provides meaning, humans seek belonging in units that can provide such meaningfulness, and resist an empty or meaningless existence. In Korte, I suggest that the ideals and activities of kinship, including the aspect of *ur*, provides individual family members with such meaningfulness. Belonging to the social unity or enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* secures stability; it gives life meaning and direction, including meaningful activities and relationships (cf. Bourdieu 2000). This protects relatives from a threatening existential emptiness. Individual family members act out the stabilizing practices and thereby also contributes to compensate the emptiness that is basic to human existence; their practices uphold the ideology of the *ur-sondam* unity (cf. Hastrup 2007).

## **Dynamic interaction between ideals and practiced relationships**

In this chapter I have shown that the enmeshment between person, relatives (*sondam*) and the family's natal village (*ur*) described in the previous chapter is facilitated, upheld and intensified through ideals of marriage and caste which clearly separate relatives (*sondam*) from non-relatives (*sondam illai*) geographically, socially and terminologically. These ideals produced a situation in which those who were considered close relatives by blood or marriage lived within the borders of Korte, and extended relatives, lived within Thiruppur. Here kin-group, sub-caste and *ur* overlap. Furthermore, I have showed that within the unity of close relatives in Korte, emotions played a central role in re-labelling and re-defining kin and appropriate behaviour towards them. The ideals, rules and terminology of kinship, then, were flexible within the *ur-sondam* group, whereas ideals communicated through the language of kinship strictly separated strangers from the Korte-relatives and their natal village. It is within the dynamics and tensions between ideals and practices, conceptions of blood and actual relationships of love and terminologies and lived life that kinship as an enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) is experienced and understood, and provides the person with a meaningful life.

The ethnographic material discussed in this chapter thereby shows how the Korte-relatives live, remember and understand their lives based on ideas that are only partly a result of concrete sensorial practices. As such, the wholeness of *ur-sondam*, the ideals and terminology of Dravidian kinship must also be recognized as vital to the ways they remember and understand lived life in pre-war Korte to be an enmeshment between person, *sondam* and *ur*. It is the dynamics of actual and lived relationships and ideals that form this life, enmeshed in *sondam* and *ur*, as a meaningful life to the person. The importance of this dynamic underlines my argument in the Introduction and Chapter 1 that, in order to grasp a human's lived life, and Tamil kinship and meaning-making in particular, we need a perspective that considers the sensorial qualities of relationships and objects and how they connect to wider set of ideals or "worlds" (cf. Deleuze 2000).

In the next chapter, I consider how the daily life in Korte described in Chapter 1, and the ideals of marriage and caste described in this chapter, were drastically

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challenged when migration from Korte escalated in association with the worsening of war and ethnic conflict.



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## Chapter 3:

# Korte untwined

”Small boys and the Tigers were here. *Aiyo!* We worried so much...”  
(Parvathi)

In this chapter I present the migration stories of the Korte-relatives as they were told to me, both by migrants and by parents who stayed behind. All the stories show how family bonds are crucial in migration processes, resulting in an escalation of relatives migrating as the war in Sri Lanka intensified. I discuss how migration and war untwined the practices and activities of the physical and sensorial enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) described in the two previous chapters: ideal patterns of living and marriage were disrupted, Korte became a war zone, and moreover “strangers” moved into the *ur* of Korte as well as Thiruppur. Thus, all the established relationships and practices that held Korte’s particular enmeshment together became fewer and more difficult to maintain. The enmeshment unravelled, stretching out over great geographical distances. The questions I will explore in this chapter, therefore, concern the relationships between commitment to family and the person and between relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*). Before presenting the ethnography through which I investigate these questions, I set out a frame of interpretation, expanding on the emotional and moral commitment to family. The frame conceptualizes the choices made by family members who migrated and the parents who sent their children abroad.

## Commitment to family

As I showed in the two previous chapters, the Korte-person is emotionally attached to the unity of the *ur-sondam*, and has strong emotional incentives to maintain this unity. In his ethnography of Jaffna, Banks (1957) also notes that among Jaffna Tamils there is a strong moral and sentimental commitment to the family. Banks, moreover, points out that particularly among sons, this moral and sentimental commitment to family is manifested in their desire and obligation to help with the economic support of their nuclear family. This obligation is also affirmed in the *Thesawalami*, the historic literary account of “the customs of the land”, held by Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula. The *Thesawalamai* describes pre-colonial practice and the early changes brought by the coming of Western powers in 1706 (Fuglerud 1996, 205).<sup>73</sup> Here it is stated that a man has no right to self-acquired property until he marries (Banks 1957, 268), and he is not entitled to any of the father’s land until his parents’ death. All a son earns until his marriage must go into the common household economy of his parental family (Banks 1957, 263-4).<sup>74</sup>

Furthermore, the sons’ moral responsibility for his parental family’s well-being is particularly strong in regard to their sisters. Banks (1957, 86) points out that brothers feel responsibility for their sisters’ well-being, and specially for their marriage, manifested in their obligation to raise dowry for their sisters (see also Fuglerud 1999, 209). There is also a strong moral imperative among Tamils for brothers to marry only after their sisters have married, unless there is a significant age disparity or special circumstances (Banks 1957, 272, Fuglerud 1996, 209). This motivates brothers to get their sisters married, both in terms of their own contributions to their sister’s dowry and by discouraging opposition to a generous dowry for a sister (Banks 1957, 87-8).

Living in the safety and comfort of exile with access to foreign money during wartime, expectations towards the son and his own felt obligation towards his family and sister appear to have increased, and in today’s post-war situation when work and

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<sup>73</sup> These records were taken down on the order of Dutch Governor Simons and authorized by twelve native chiefs. In 1806 it was given full force law of under the British who succeeded the Dutch as colonial rulers (Fuglerud 1999, 205).

<sup>74</sup> Banks (1957, 298) however found that this rule was observed less if the son was a clerk or schoolmaster and lived far away from home, but in most cases he would send regular remittances back to his parental household.

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valuables are difficult to obtain in Sri Lanka, these expectations and felt obligations continue to some extent.

The need for money among Korte-relatives before the war implies poverty, and Jaffna as a place where these means could not be obtained. Although many Korte-relatives point to Sinhalese discrimination against Tamils as the reason for lack of opportunities in Jaffna, the emergence of these discourses of poverty give some balance to the idealized picture of pre-war life that the Korte-relatives hold in their memories (cf. Chapter 1). I now turn to their stories of migration and send-offs.

## Leaving – working for my family

### *Balasingam - 1972*

Balasingam (Kumarasamy) was the first among the siblings and cousins in Korte to migrate. He, and later Murali (Sittampalam) and Lakshmi (Balasundaram) migrated in order to help their families. In Balasingam's case, the early death of his father, made him see access to foreign money as a solution to his nuclear family's economic problems. I will let Balasingam present his story of migration and assistance for his family at length in his own words. His account shows how his obligation to his family motivated him to endure hardship and reach London.

In '72 I left. 1969 I lost my father. I was about twenty. And the rest of them, I've got five sisters and five brothers, they are all small: they all go to school. Myself and my [eldest] brother have no job. Only income is my father's widow pension. The way I said to you, we are all demanding. We lived, when my father was there, everything was there. After my father was lost, since then I walked barefoot, those days. That's the poverty... And then I thought – at that time everyone was joining the ship, a lot of people go at that time. And they bring money. Good money. Those days if I sent one pound it is eighteen rupees. That's *big* money. So I thought if I want to make eighteen rupees I have to work whole day very hard, as labourer or anything, but here, you could not make it double or tripple, but four, five times double money! So I thought “yes, why not?” [...] Because we were eleven. No

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*appa* [father], so I didn't want to see them without food, without clothes. I wanted to see them well, with good food and good clothes. So I thought I can use four, five years studying or I can go abroad. Not everyone have the chance to go abroad. But I had, so I took it. Then I can earn and send equal amount to my mum as a doctor's salary per month.

The death of Balasingam's father brought poverty to the family. Before their father died, they had no material worries. After his death "they were walking barefoot". Balasingam was the second eldest brother, and neither he nor his eldest brother had a job. Upon my question as to why Balasingam was the one to leave, and not his eldest brother, Balasingam replied; "He was just not the type to leave." At the time Balasingam's father passed away, Balasingam had five younger sisters, all unmarried. Balasingam's siblings needed education, food and other essentials and, in time, his sisters would need dowries for marriage. The family's small income was inadequate to meet these needs. In the *Thesawalami* it is stated that in cases where the father dies before his daughters marry, it is the (eldest) son's obligation to take responsibility for his sisters' marriage, including the dowry.

Crucial to Balasingam's story is also that his mother had mortgaged two of the family's three plots of land to supplement her widow pension. This was another matter Balasingam felt he needed to settle. Debt is felt heavily among Tamils. The *Thesawalami* also states that in cases where one or both the parents pass away, it is the sons who are legally responsible for the family's debts (Banks 1957, 264). There is also a Tamil proverb saying that debts, specifically land debts, and dowry should be settled at once: *ottiyum sidenumum pattiyal*. Furthermore, Balasingam's family would need the plots to give as dowry to the girls when their time came to marry.

Migrating to earn "big money" to send back to his family was Balasingam's motivation to leave Korte. Money was needed in order to settle the family's debts, secure education, obtain dowry and a reasonable standard of living. However, on presenting his idea to his mother, she said no. Balasingam had thought that his mother would help pay for his journey to India, from where he planned to seek work as a seaman. Determined to go, Balasingam sought out the money from a more affluent school friend. The friend gave him money for the flight ticket to India and 300 rupees

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with which he bought soap, coconut oil, tea and cinnamon. Once in India he sold these products for double the price. At that time, it was illegal to bring money into India, and selling these items was the only way Balasingam could support himself while he looked for a job on a ship.

Balasingam travelled from the airport in Chennai to Trinchy and from there to Goa. Three months passed here before he met a Greek captain who gave him work. However, as Balasingam did not have a seaman's passport, he boarded illegally. Finally Balasingam was able to send money back to his family, but less than he had expected:

Eighteen months I worked, that is my contract. But because I joined the ship illegal, so what happened? They just don't give the right money. I work as an oilman in the engine room, which is 100, 120 pounds those days for the oiler. The captain gave me 25 pounds per month. The rest he probably takes, right? But, anyway, I'm not complaining about that [laughing]. That 25 pounds is a *very big* money. Those days. That 25 pounds a month is those days one engineer or doctor's wages. So I just greet that, that twenty-five pounds that is how much it is worth. That's a *big* money, so I said "Thank you very much". So with that 25 pounds, what I do is, I asked my captain; "Can you send this money, my every month's wages to my mum?" So before I left, I opened one bank account. Those days nobody had a bank account, right? So I opened a joint account: my name and my mothers name in Jaffna. So I gave that account number to my captain; "This is the account number". So every month, that 25 pounds go to my mum, not for me.

Balasingam knew that 25 pounds<sup>75</sup> would make a good contribution to support his family back home and did not request the remaining three quarter of his salary. His story shows how he followed the tradition of taking responsibility for his family back home by working and sending his salary to them. For his own expenses, which he told me that he limited as much as possible, he worked overtime to get a little extra. He did not need much, he told me, as he would eat and drink free on the ship.

Balasingam's migration story did not end here. As his contract was about to end, and his contribution to his family back home still was needed, he told me that he wanted

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<sup>75</sup> In 1972, 25 pounds (GBP) was equivalent to 365 Sri Lankan rupees (LKR).

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to stay longer in Europe. He knew Europe was known for “good money”. But Balasingam had entered the ship illegally, and the captain would not let him resign. After having been through Asia and Latin-America, the ship came to Germany. Balasingam concluded that this was the place to leave the boat, as he did not know where the ship would go next. With the help of the chief engineer, he recovered his passport and left the ship without the captain’s knowledge.

Landing in Germany, Balasingam recalls that he had no place to go, no place to sleep and no money. After three days he was starved and tired, thinking as he said: “There is no way I’m going to survive this”. Balasingam almost handed himself over to the authorities to be sent back to Sri Lanka before a lucky encounter:

On the way [to the police] I’m walking, starving [...]. Then I saw one Asian man! One coloured man! [laughing]. Those days there are not many coloured people. Even here [London]. So I just cross the road, don’t check the light or anything, so I hold his hand and said “Please help me. This is the problem, please take me to the police or send me home”. He said “No, no, no, don’t be silly. Are you Tamil? I am Tamil as well. Don’t be worried”. Because he is Malaysian Tamil. So he is living in one room with five other friends, on campus. He is studying at Hamburg University. He said; “I’m going to work now, don’t worry, I take you to my room, you stay in my room, I come back after work. Don’t go anywhere”. Then he bought some food and I stayed until he came. He is the only one to look after this five people [...] Among them, they know my family story. I need the money. They are all keen to find a job for me. So somehow they find a job for me in a Chinese restaurant. So I got the job with accommodation, food and everything. So the wages go to my mum.

Once again Balasingam was able to send money to his family, and it is his story of his family and his commitment towards his family that motivated the other boys in the shared flat help him find a job. Balasingam found the situation of living illegally difficult, hiding from the police and in constant fear of being caught. After one and a half years he told me that he was “fed up” and moreover, his family was urging him to go to London:

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From home, they write; “Please *anna* [elder brother], if you can, go to England”. Because those days nobody is in Germany, Norway or anything. Sri Lanka Tamils, Jaffna Tamils all in England. So they want me to go to England. So, what to do?”

Balasingam followed his family’s advice and wish. Once again he had to negotiate travel without a visa. A friend in England sent him a one-way London–Colombo ticket, and some friends working in a passenger ship from Hamburg, Germany to Harwich, England took him on the ship. At British Immigration, Balasingam told the officer that the flight ticket from England to Colombo was cheaper than from Germany to Colombo, and more importantly that he needed to bring gifts back to his family: English fabricated shirts from Marks and Spencer. The officer believed him and gave him a seven-day visa.

Balasingam stayed illegally in London for nine years before he got his documents in order. First, he got a job making evening dresses for high-class stores including Harrods and Selfridges. He lost this job, however, due to absence caused by drinking. He then found a better-paid job at a petrol station, making 30-40 pounds a day.<sup>76</sup> “Big money” in Balasingam’s words, and a significant improvement on the 25 pounds a day he earned sewing. He continued to send money to help his family:

Meantime, in the other end back home, because the money I’m sending they are all better off. Because our lands, two lands we had, one is Sasikala’s [land now], and [the other is] Vijaya’s land, the one that my grandfather bought. So there were two lands, which my mother re-mortgaged to feed us [...] So by the time I was in the ship I send that money and that two houses we have taken back. Because we paid that money to the moneylender, with interest and everything. So the two houses, the two lands were free. So I was so happy.

It was the family’s need for money and Balasingam’s felt obligation to them that motivated him to leave Sri Lanka, join a ship, acquire a job in Germany and then look for better conditions and money in the UK. Being able to help his family, Balasingam said made him “so happy”. The desire and obligation to help his family is also what seems to motivate Balasingam to endure his difficult living conditions. By fulfilling his

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<sup>76</sup> In 1975 40 British pounds (GBP) was equivalent to 604 LKR and in 1980, 1.384 LKR. The change resulted from the high rate of inflation in Sri Lankan Rupees.



### *Underneath the margosa tree*

responsibilities to this family, Balasingam played his role as a good son well. Thanks to him, his siblings and mother have a better standard of living and the land-debts are settled. Regaining the dowry lands also secures the continuation of his family's life and future within Korte.

#### ***Murali – 1979***

Seven years after Balasingam had left Sri Lanka, his father's mother's sister's son, Murali, also migrated. Like Balasingam, Murali was the second eldest son of his family: the Sittampalams. His elder brother had already migrated to Dubai,<sup>77</sup> but with five sisters and no job in Jaffna, the family needed still more income, in particular to settle the sisters' marriages and dowries. One of Murali's friends who, some months before, had migrated to Germany, advised Murali to come. By this time Tamils had started to settle in Germany, a changed situation from when Balasingam was there. Murali took the opportunity. Leaving on December 10<sup>th</sup>, by December 28<sup>th</sup> he had a good-paying warehouse job, shifting TV's for a large company. At that time Murali was happy with this opportunity, and compared to Balasingam he had an easier time getting both a job and a visa. Sitting in his sister Puspha's house during one of his visits to Korte, Murali recalls:

In '79, December 10<sup>th</sup> I left. 1980 my eldest sister married. What did we need to marry? Gold, cash and house. First we gave that house [points at his childhood home] to my eldest sister's husband so she could marry. For that I sent money to my mother. Only 400 Mark I needed for house [rent] and food and little for drinking. 1.600 [Mark]<sup>78</sup> I sent direct to mother. We gave house and arranged all the legal papers for him [sister's husband-to-be] to be the owner. Also, 50.000 rupees in cash and gold. 50.000 rupees that time was a lot of money. And we had a big wedding. Afterwards I started to build this house to Puspha-*akka*. And we had a huuuuuge opening ceremony. [...]

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<sup>77</sup> He later returned to Sri Lanka to marry and then migrated with his wife to Canada.

<sup>78</sup> In December 1979, 1.600 Deutsche Mark was equivalent to 14.350 Sri Lankan rupees, or 415 GBP. This also shows the high inflation in Sri Lankan rupees between 1972 and 1979.

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At that time I was only thinking about making money. Most of it I just sent home. Only that 400 Mark I needed. The rest I sent straight away. After I left to Germany our family came a little up, up. And built these houses. [...] Still people are sending their children abroad to make money. The parents don't think, they just put the responsibility on the children. Why do they make eight children? Three, four is enough [shakes his head looking down at the floor].

Like Balasingam, Murali too sent most of his salary back to his family. Working long days of hard manual work in the factory, Murali was able to contribute a major share to his eldest sister's marriage and wedding. Later, he also contributed significant amounts to the building of a house for his sister Puspha. Later, the family also built two more houses, to Inthu and Thilaga, also from the money Murali sent from Germany. Both Balasingam's and Murali's families in Korte profited economically from their migration and work. Both were happy and proud of helping their families. Today however, Murali questions this practice of migration in order to remit. And from time-to-time he complains about all the struggles he faced for his family's economic well-being.

Describing the settlement and life of Sri Lankan Tamils in Norway in the early 1990's, Fuglerud (1996, 150-153) also states the strong obligation to support parents and siblings back home among young men. They would work long hours, eighteen and more, in fish factories in the North and attend to their families' living expenses and sisters' dowries, at the expense of their own settlement and marriage. Murali also married late, after his sisters. He then settled in Norway, where his wife, sister and brother had migrated to while he had been working in Germany.

#### *Lakshmi-aunty and the Folkehøyskole*

While Lakshmi (Balasundaram) was working at Jaffna Hospital, she received a letter from a former colleague who now worked as a nurse in Norway. The colleague wrote that there was a demand for nurses in Norway and that if Lakshmi was willing, there was a job offer for her at one of the nursing homes in Oslo. Lakshmi saw it as a good opportunity, in particular since they were eight siblings. Being the second eldest,

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Lakshmi thought that at least one of them should migrate. In December 1979 she left Korte and arrived Oslo.

A year later, Lakshmi sponsored the son of her eldest sister to enter the “Folkehøyskole” in Norway. The Folkehøyskole are one-year, private high schools. Lakshmi had found a loophole in the immigration system. After 1975, when Norway implemented an immigration ban, these schools continued to accept Third World students, when all other ways into Norway were closed (Fuglerud 1999). To be accepted as students, the young Tamils had to present a quite high economic guarantee for living costs. However, the Korte-relatives, as well as many other Tamils regarded the Folkehøyskole as the most secure and least costly way of escaping the civil war that was escalating at the time. The other only alternative was to arrange “refugee travel” through an agent. This was regarded as insecure, in particular for the girls, and had a less secure outcome than the enrolment at the Folkehøyskole (Fuglerud 1999).

Lakshmi continued to sponsor her young Korte-relatives. Each year she “took another batch”, as she called it. Her policy was to sponsor one person in each of the nuclear families in Korte, with the promise of a “repayment”: the sponsored youth had to help the rest of his or her (nuclear) family, either by taking more siblings to Norway or elsewhere abroad and/or helping the family in Korte financially. The loophole Lakshmi found in the Norwegian immigration system served many of the Korte-relatives well. Others, who Lakshmi had not yet been able to sponsor also used this pathway to migrate to Norway in the period between 1980 and 1989, obtaining financial support from siblings who had already migrated, just as Balasingam sponsored two of his sisters.<sup>79</sup> Once in Norway, the Folkehøyskole students could remain in Norway as long as they continued their studies. After 1983 the immigration authorities found it difficult to return Tamils to Sri Lanka, even if they dropped out of school, due to the civil war (Fuglerud 1999).

For those already abroad, helping their siblings to safety was also a way to secure more “helpers” to contribute to remittances. Alleviating his role as the sole financial

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<sup>79</sup> Many other Tamils, not just the Korte-relatives, migrated the same way through the Folkehøyskole, to Norway. To my knowledge, it was Lakshmi who found and opened this pathway to Norway to Tamils more widely. For many families, as among the Korte-relatives, this migration was sponsored through siblings or other family members who had already migrated.

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contributor to his nuclear family back home was also Balasingam's intention when he helped his sister Sita come to Norway:

I took the admission for Sita in Norway [to the "Folkehøyskole"]. Because if we were two, there are someone to help me to earn for the family. Then me and Sita took Vadena [also a sister] together. Then three; two helpers for me. Vadena was at the nursing college, Jaffna nursing college. As a nurse she would have salary, but not as much as here, and then I had one more helper to me.

With three children working abroad, their mother and the rest of their siblings back home were able to improve their standard of living further. And moreover, the two sisters abroad now had opportunities to study and secure well-paid work. This could not be obtained in Jaffna.

Nathan Sittampalam, still living in Korte, also saw the opportunity to escape the war through the Folkehøyskole. He asked his brother Murali, who was already in Germany, to help him to Norway. When Murali tells about the incident, he highlights Lakshmi-*aunty*'s<sup>80</sup> role in this:

It is Lakshmi-*aunty* who called for all of us to Norway. She left in 1979. She got a work permit as a nurse. After she brought everyone. She inscribed them to the Folkehøyskole. Until 1988 that was possible [...] Because people worked abroad, they could travel. It was at that time Nathan asked me for money to the Folkehøyskole. Everything was already taken care of for the inscription. He asked if I could give 15.000 Norwegian kroner. It was about 2.000 Mark that time.<sup>81</sup> So I said yes.

Many of the Korte-siblings came to Norway through the system of the Folkehøyskole. The way Murali gives credit to Lakshmi for the family's life in Norway in his account is not unusual: Lakshmi enjoys great respect among the Korte-relatives, both in Norway, London, Paris and Korte. Not only is she now in her mid-seventies, which in itself requires respect, but she is well-respected for helping the relatives to

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<sup>80</sup> Lakshmi is Murali's mother's sister's daughter and older than him. As such, Murali terms her *aunty*.

<sup>81</sup> 15.000 NOK was also about 49.000 LKR in 1984 the year Murali helped his brother to Norway.

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Norway, and thus also for contributing to improve the standard of living of those back in the village. She is considered the “godmother” of the Korte-relatives in Norway and is always invited to family parties and ceremonies in Oslo. Whenever there is a large function, the family hosting the party usually call upon her first to have their photograph taken with her.<sup>82</sup> When she celebrated her 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, all her siblings’ children and grandchildren gathered to celebrate with her and in the speeches they made for her, it was emphasized she had cared for them as if they were her own children and grandchildren.

#### *Selvi - coming as a student*

Convincing the then Korte-youths to leave for Norway was not difficult in the 1980’s. The situation in Jaffna and the rest of Sri Lanka had worsened; the war had escalated and made Jaffna an unsafe place, and opportunities for higher education were limited. University admission in Jaffna is regarded as the ultimate goal for a student. Before the war it was the key to a government job and the much-praised pension, securing personal and family economic wellbeing. After 1973, university admission became more difficult for Tamils due to a new law. Tamils now needed higher marks on their A/L-level exam, the final exam in primary education, to enter University whilst for Sinhalese students, the necessary marks were lowered (Fuglerud 1999, 32). The government regarded the law as a way to rectify what they believed was a result of disparities created under British colonial rule: the Tamils, who had benefitted from the British founded schools, were, on a national level, scoring higher on the A/L-exam.

It was this law that hindered Selvi from accessing a university education. Seeing no opportunities to educate herself further in Sri Lanka, Norway became an alternative. In 1985 she came through the Folkehøyskole as her brother Nathan had done the year before. Selvi tells about the incidents leading up to her own, and her brother’s migration to Norway:

In my childhood, I attended school until ’83. I did not enter the university because the openings for Tamils were less than for the Sinhalese. I had three or four points

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<sup>82</sup> I discuss the centrality of taking photographs during functions in Chapter 6.

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below the entry limit for Tamils, but I was thinking that I needed to continue my education. So my brother moved to Norway in 1983, mostly because of him being a boy and youth, and the movement [LTTE] started in '83 and the Sinhalese think that all youth are in the movement, so they started capturing and torturing. That's the reason my brother moved to Norway in '83. I remember him leaving. He wanted to tell his friends, but he did not return home – it was like six, seven or eight [p.m], and *amma* [mother] was very worried, we heard that a bomb attack just happened. We got really scared, and we couldn't go there to look for him either. He came home around eight o'clock, very afraid. He told something happened in town and he had to wait in another house while they were cleaning up the place. At that time we thought that it was good, that he was better that he left the country. After, in '83, or was it '84, I did not get university entry, and he [Nathan] applied the Folkehøyskolen [for Selvi]. I also asked my parents. They were a little worried that I also would join the movement [LTTE]. I thought it was better to leave the country, because I know the uncertainty here.

Selvi wanted to continue her studies, which she did in Norway. The insecurity in Sri Lanka and lack of educational opportunities made it easier to take the decision to leave, and also for the family to accept that they both left. Later, both Selvi and Nathan helped their other sister, Inthu, to migrate to Norway, and later also their sister Thilaga and her husband to move to Germany. After their father passed away, Selvi and Nathan also brought their now deceased mother to Norway.

Throughout the 1980's and 1990's, increased insecurity, as well as lack of education and work, drove many young adults to leave Sri Lanka, and parents to send their children abroad. From migrating to earn for one's family in the 1970's, migration from the early 80's became a way to safeguard one's life and the lives of one's loved ones, and to secure a future.

## Send-offs

### *Parvathi and Sanjeeven - 1982*

As recounted in the Introduction, Parvathi and Sanjeeven sent their three children abroad, one by one. Here I present their descriptions of the reasons for these crucial decisions, which included the fears of both parents and children that they would be recruited into the LTTE, killed or injured. Parvathi's and Sanjeeven's story captures the ambivalence of relief and happiness of being able to save their children and the sorrow and disappointment of their non-return to Korte.

Parvathi: The first one left in 1982, after he finished O/L-level.<sup>83</sup> All three of them passed O/L-level before they left. He got the school admission [Folkehøyskole] in Norway and went. Lakshmi [Parvathi's sister] got the admission from the school there.

Sanjeeven: We were very sad when he left. They were small, only sixteen years, that is small. We worried. He went in train to Colombo. At that time the train was in use. We sent them from the Jaffna station.

Parvathi: So sad.

Sanjeeven: When they came there [Norway] they joined the school to study. Then he bring his brother. He sponsored him. We were sad. But for studies... the situation was bad here. It started at that time.

Parvathi: The Tigers formed that period. And getting studies was difficult at that time. They [LTTE] caught the boys that period. Otherwise we would not send them. If they are here we would be happy now. [...] We thought they would come back in one or four years after they finished their studies. But the situation did not support them to come back. We told them to better stay there. If they come here they can't get the job based on their studies.

Sanjeeven: Because of the discrimination Tamil people can't find that job easily.

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<sup>83</sup> Ordinary Level. The last exam before entering secondary education.

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Parvathi: Second son went in '86. We sent the second one because still the problem [the war] was going on.

Sanjeeven: It was a much worse period.

Parvathi: Tigers went to the schools and forced them to join with them [...] We didn't like that [...] Our first son got the admission [to the Folkehøyskole] and brought the second one. We don't like them going to the Tigers. We were scared. And sometimes we cried. He wanted to go that time. Tigers.... Ahhhh... When Tigers were coming they were so scared. They asked them to join, so he wanted to go there. He was about sixteen, seventeen years at that time. [...] When we sent the second one we know: he will not be coming back. We didn't think the problem will end. So we wanted them to be there. They have *sondam* [relatives] there. *Sondam*: *periyamma*, *aunty*, [*ondavodda*] *anna*, [Relatives: mother's younger sister, aunt/elder female relative and elder male parallel-cousin] like those relations are there.

Sanjeeven: Since there were *sondam* [relatives] to support them, they were there... to support my two sons, Lakshmi-*akka* [elder sister]<sup>84</sup> was there. She looked after everything for our sons [...]

Parvathi: At that time we sent them it was vey difficult here. Big problem. Small boys and the Tigers were here. *Aiyo!*<sup>85</sup> We worried so much, how they eat, how they slept. They were so young. [...] They were safe there, so that way we are happy. Despite the situation here, we are happy because they are in a safe place. [...] After, our daughter went. She was studying here. She was scared to study here because of the Tigers. Then they brought her to London. They [the sons] sponsored and she worked there [...] They brought through agency. If they have any relatives in London they can go there. My brother's children [Balasingam, Kumar and another brother] were there. One is an accountant. He said he will take care of her. [...] At that time they had stopped the [school] admission to Norway, so they couldn't get the

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<sup>84</sup> Because Lakshmi is the elder sister of his wife, Sanjeeven also terms her *akka*.

<sup>85</sup> *Aiyo!* is an expression of pain, disappointment, frustration or surprise, used in a range of situations.



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admission for our daughter. It was in 1995 when the Indian army came. When the situation was little smooth and good [pauses]. When Indians came and tried to solve the problem, at that time the problem increased. So she was scared, she used to cry. So the brothers told us to send her, so her father took her to Colombo and sent her. [...]

Girl... To the girls, in that school they organized the drama about the war and if the Indian army saw that they will arrest them. She did dance. And the Indian army went to the schools and saw the video of that. They will get some details about them. If they have a doubt they will go to the house and they will have the enquiry. *Payam!* [frighten, scared, terrified] [...] At that time, they would put bombs to kill everyone in this area. If that bomb hits the house... We had a bunker. We were there together. We cried. If we hear the bomb coming, I took her and ran to the bunker. I was also afraid. [...] It was difficult to raise up the children at that time. She was still a small child that time. [...]

After we sent the children, we were a little happy, because even if we die, *paravaayillai* [it's not that that much of a problem/ it doesn't matter]. Ahhh... it was difficult for us. We were sad... when they will come back and live with us happily? [pauses]. When will this problem end?

Parvathi and Sanjeeven summarise fundamental aspects of how the political situation affected family life and their actions and emotions as parents. Their story shows how they, as parents, took decisions to try to do the best for their children in this unbearable situation. It also shows how later, and still today, they try to reconcile their relief at their children's safety with their grief at their children's non-return. Such mixed feelings are commonly heard among parents who remain living alone in Korte and Thiruppur, having sent their children to safety.

All the stories of migration show how the family is central to decisions and processes of migration as a consequence of political and economic factors (cf. Boyd 1989, Fuglerud 1999, Olwig 2007, Tharmalingam 2010, Åkesson 2004). Also, the stories show the importance of having family members abroad: Lakshmi and

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Balasingam were central to the Korte-relatives massive migration when life in Jaffna became dangerous, providing information, social and financial support in this process (cf. Bashi 2007, Boyd 1989, Fawcett 1989, Fuglerud 1999, Olwig 2007, Olwig and Gulløv 2003, Orellana et al. 2001). However, the extensive migration untwined Korte-life in the forms the relatives knew it: relatives left, houses became empty, strangers moved in and marriage patterns were ruptured.

#### **An empty Korte – untwining lines**

As Balasingam, Murali, Lakshmi, Nathan, Selvi, Puspha, Vadana, Sita and many other of the young Korte adults migrated, ever fewer Korte-relatives remained in their natal village, their *ur*. The same happened with the extended relatives in Thiruppur. Korte, as a place, and the life so warmly spoken about and remembered, changed drastically. Although Balasingam left many years before the extensive migration, he spoke about how migration and war had changed their life with a pained voice. Again he looked at the same map of Korte described in Chapter 1:

All of us used to live inside here. Then every boy left. All the sisters were left alone. So this Korte became no more. Some houses went empty. Some strangers moved in. I mean, they are Tamils, but not our people. So the Korte became powerless... they boys left and then the LTTE moved in. So you can imagine; 20, 30 [LTTE] boys here, in the house on the corner [pointing at Ranjini's house on the map]. So naturally some girls will fall in love with the boys and marry them [...] So like that it all went. The war started and LTTE came in and we were all separated in different corners; UK, Norway, France. And the strangers came in. Youngsters today they don't know how we used to live. They don't know about Korte. They don't know about the stronghold our family had. Only me, my brother, Sita [his sister] and some old people. They know.... They only know.

In his account Balasingam sketches (at least) four ways in which “Korte became no more”: the migration of the family members, the war, the strangers moving in and the

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ruptured and changed marriage pattern. I will here look at each of them separately, although they happened, to a considerable degree, simultaneously.

#### ***A Korte emptied out of kin***

It was the boys who mostly migrated first. Like Murali and Balasingam, they migrated to provide for their family, but also to escape recruitment to the LTTE or being suspected by the Sri Lankan Army of being LTTE-members. When the war did not end, the families started to send girls in the late 1980's. For the girls, education and marriage were also important in their decision to migrate, in part because most potential marriage partners were abroad. This led to continuously decreasing numbers of relatives remaining in their *ur*.

Taking Ingold's (2007a, 2011) perspective of every life as a thread of life, fewer lifelines remained in Korte to entangle with each other and the surroundings in order to daily make and re-make the tight enmeshment between the person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). The known, felt and lived place of Korte changed. The meeting points for family members became fewer and different, the experienced social density of the place declined, and thus also the density of the emotional unity of *sondam*: few family members remained to interact and to "build kinship" on a daily basis, thus sustaining this meaningful and valued life. News from and interaction with those who had migrated was limited to a weekly letter if the level of conflict admitted mail to and from Jaffna, and a rare phone call at Korte's one shared telephone at the junction. The daily interaction with relatives and their known *ur* of Korte, constituting the particular enmeshment that provided the good life, was lost. Rather the lifelines of the Korte-relatives were separated and stretched across large geographical distances between Korte, the UK, Norway, Germany, France and Canada.

Sangeetha (the daughter of Sasikala Kumarasamy) pointed out how today's absence of relatives in Korte makes Korte a different place than before:

Before, it was full of relations here. This whole lane was full of *amma*'s [mother's] sisters and brothers and *ondavodda* sisters and brothers. Now, everyone has left to Oslo and London, and Canada. All of our *sondam* [relatives] are in outside-

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countries now. Only few are here. Before it was good enjoyment here. Now I am alone here.

Sangeetha grew up in Korte and Vanni and, as such, she belongs to a generation of Korte-relatives who never knew Korte in peace-time. Balasingam stated several times that “the youngsters in Korte today, they don’t know Korte”. But Sangeetha, like me, had heard stories about life in Korte before migration many times. And just before Sangeetha made the statement above, her mother and Parvathi had been recalling the times when they used to gather underneath the margrosa tree.

Sangeetha referred to how Korte in the past, had been “full of relations”, compared to the present when “everyone has left”. The loss of social density resulting from the thinning out of Korte-relatives resulted in a change to the felt and sensed place of Korte as they knew it (or have been told it was). Korte does not “happen” anymore (cf. Casey 1996), at least not in the same way as before: there are no relatives or *sondam* to make Korte a place for enjoyment. Rather, Sangeetha experiences being alone. The surroundings remain the same, but the *feel* of Korte, as Selvi phrased it in Chapter 1, is gone. This underlines Selvi’s statement in Chapter 1, that only kin can make Korte happen: “if you are to *feel* the *ur*, you need [...] kin. This estrangement from Korte was intensified by strangers moving in, which I will soon return to after looking at Korte as a war-zone.

#### ***Korte becomes a no-gone zone***

Parallel to the family members’ migration, Korte became less and less habitable as abductions, gun-fights and shelling became more frequent. “The LTTE moved in” to Korte, as Balasingam recounted. They took residence in Ranjini’s house on the corner of the railway track and the lane leading towards the Amman-temple. Later they also made a barracks out of Parvathi’s sister’s mother-in-law’s house near to the A9. After 1995, the Sri Lankan Army also took over some of the houses. Lakshana, a distant Thiruppur-relative of the Korte-relatives, about nine, ten years old at the time, now 24, remembers how she, her parents, her two brothers and her baby sister used to lie awake at nights and listen to the shelling:

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At nights, we used to lay and listen where the bombs were going, in which direction. At that time the Tigers were out here, in front of Manthurai in the sea, and the Army was here at the Kachcheri.<sup>86</sup> So we used to listen if the bombs were going from the Kachcheri and that way, out to the sea, or coming from the sea and this way. I remember I was *so* scared. We could hear the sound in both directions. Wiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiish, wiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiish. It was very frightening. Luckily our house never got hit [by bombs].

Korte became a no-gone zone. The place so well-known, safe and familiar became more and more a place of terror and of death. Being in the midst of struggles between the Army and the Tigers, Korte also suffered physical destruction: the railway track and the small railway station were blown up, trees and houses were hit by shelling, houses lost roof and walls and got scars from bullet holes. What was of value in the houses; furniture, jewellery, photo albums, vessels, and door- and window frames, was torn out and removed by thieves, often government soldiers (see pictures 1 and 2 for examples of this destruction).

The war made Korte and Thiruppur, like the rest of Jaffna, an unsafe place for the relatives left behind, and destroyed their place physically. Jackson (2005) argues that the destruction of one's familiar material environment can be felt as losing a vital and intimate part of one's personal life, "something as ontologically essential to their identity as family and friends" (Jackson 2005, 15). Seeing and hearing the terrors of war and the physical destruction of Korte, either directly or through media,<sup>87</sup> I suggest, enhances the feel of a "Korte no more": their life world as they knew it was no longer the same.

Korte was physically destroyed from the outside by shelling and socially destroyed from the inside when relatives migrated and were no longer present to build kinship and practice Korte. Later when the bombs and shooting stilled, strangers also moved in to Korte, contributing to the untwining of the felt and known *ur*, and thus the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*.

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<sup>86</sup> The district secretariat, situated between Korte and Jaffna town on the A9.

<sup>87</sup> Pictures and stories of terror, death and destruction reached the Korte-relatives in the diaspora with high intensity, through the LTTE's own media and news service.

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#### *“I don’t know any faces”*

During the ceasefire from 2002 onwards,<sup>88</sup> some of the Korte-relatives who had gone to Vanni, Colombo or India, like Parvathi and Sanjeeven and Sasikala’s family, came back. They repaired their houses; plugged the bullet holes, put on new roofs, reconstructed broken walls, put back doors and window frames, re-dug the well, cleared over-grown gardens of bushes and high grass and bought new furniture. Some migrants, such as Inthu and Thilaga, also sent money to have the same work done for their houses. Few of those who had settled in Europe and Canada came back to live in Korte, however. The same was true among those who had migrated from the larger area of Thiruppur. Some houses remained destroyed and empty, whilst those abroad that had their houses repaired rented them out to strangers. In this, they were motivated as much by having someone to care for the house and prevent the Army or LTTE from occupying or looting it again, as by the income from the rent.

It was these strangers Inthu found when she visited Korte after many years, during the ceasefire. Many times in Paris, and also on the day we spent together in Korte on my first short visit to Jaffna in 2011, Inthu told me about these strangers and how she felt that Korte, like Thiruppur, was no longer her place:

When I walk in the street, I see people. But I don’t know their faces. I don’t know who they are. They are all strangers. They stop me and ask “who are you?”! It is *I* who should be asking *them*: “who are *you*?” I grew up here, this is my place, but there are not many of our people left.

Experiencing questioning by strangers regarding her right to be in her *ur*, the place in which she had been born and had grown up, Inthu was hurt. She had known all the faces and equally, her face had been known to everyone. Now *she* was the stranger. The physical Korte and Thiruppur had been partly rebuilt and re-inhabited, but few relatives were there to entwine their lifelines and remake it as the Korte Inthu had known. As Sangeetha pointed out, there are few relatives left to make Korte a place of enjoyment.

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<sup>88</sup> The Sri Lankan government formally withdrew from the ceasefire on January 2<sup>nd</sup> 2008. However from late 2005 the conflict escalated again and from July 2006 the government undertook several military offensives against the LTTE.

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Rather, the strangers that they remembered as having been kept strictly outside the geographical borders of Korte, had moved inside, and made Korte an unfamiliar place.

Today, the Sri Lankan military still occupies peoples' land and houses in Jaffna, in particular in the area around Kopay and Palaly. The occupation forces people to live in *urs* other than their own, making them into such "strangers". In the eyes of the Korte-relatives, little, if anything is known about these strangers, who belong to different families (*sondam*), natal villages (*urs*) and castes (*sadi*). As Balasingam told: "You can't trust strangers, you don't know about their past, about their this and that."

This insecurity regarding the other, I suggest, is the other side of the predictability in the Dravidian kinship pattern described in the previous chapter. In my view, the felt necessity to know a persons' past underlines the emphasis given to the consciousness of *sondam* within Korte, as well as Thiruppur. When someone is *sondam*, you know that the person is your relative through generations, though the exact genealogy may not always be remembered. Each person in one generation is a part of the larger totality of *sondam* and carrier of relationships to the larger structure. And within this, each person knows how to relate to all the others as it is decided by their kinship relations, which is a result of the past, and manifested in kinship terms. With strangers this past is unknown. Strangers can thus not be completely known and related to in a correct manner, even as friends. This is because, lacking complete information about their past, of their "this and that", the quality of the relationships will not be the same as those with one's own relatives, one's *sondam*.

This scepticism toward the other, the unknown, is also reinforced by the tense situation resulting from years of conflict and war. During this period anyone could be a potential informer either to the government Army or one of the Tamil resistance groups, or people might simply denounce others to either side. Yet, even Aishwarya, the daughter of Manar, Balasundaram's son, born and brought up in Norway, expressed the same scepticism when talking about a potential marriage partner. She says that she does not want to marry a relative, *sondam*, but that still, marrying someone who is not a relative or perhaps a Tamil from London or any other place scares her because "We don't know anything about them. We don't know who they are and how they are. We can't know". Strangers or *sondam-illai*, in Korte, as much as in London or Oslo,

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represent something insecure, someone who cannot be completely known due to the lack of kin bonds.

Some of the strangers who have moved to Korte have stayed for some years, others remain only for a short while. They are seen by the Korte-relatives as taking little part in the daily life of Korte: “They don’t move with our people” as Parvathi said one day when we heard the husband and wife in the rented house next door quarrelling loudly. As described in the Introduction, the strangers mostly keep to themselves inside the houses when not out at work or visiting. Some of these “strange” housewives will exchange words about today’s cooking with neighbouring Korte-relatives if they meet outside their gates but they do not involve themselves in any further relations. This non-involvement is mutual: the remaining Korte-relatives do not invite the strangers inside their gardens or houses, nor do the strangers invite the Korte-relatives. Living side by side, they are not living together. They do not entangle their lifelines together and the strangers do not contribute to the place-making of Korte as an *ur*.

The separation of Korte-relatives and strangers shows that for the Korte-relatives, only certain lifelines can contribute to the mutual constitutive enmeshment of which the person is a part. This is contrary to the picture presented by Ingold’s (2007a, 2011) conception of the open meshwork. The co-habitation, support and unity of the remembered life in Korte cannot be formed just by living in the same place. For this to happen, people’s past must be known, and they need to be part of the same genealogical history. They need to be relatives, *sondam*, and carriers of the *sondam*’s relationships for generations. Lifelines in Jaffna, then, are not endlessly open, but are constrained by a border that closes off any potential meshwork. The Korte-relatives do not entangle their lifelines passively with all the lifelines they encounter along their paths in their surroundings. Rather, they only entwine their lifeline and enmesh their own being with other Korte-relatives, and extended relatives in Thiruppur, despite co-habiting within the same physical borders of Korte with non-relatives. Thus bonds of *sondam* and a common genealogical past are more important than co-habitation. This again shows how practical interaction with others is affected by the ideals of kinship inherent in the Dravidian kinship.



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The presence of strangers in Korte represents the entry of the unknown and potentially threatening. Within Tamil cosmology, there is a tension between *akam*, inside, and *puram*, outside. Ramanujan (1985, 262) shows that in ancient Cankam-poetry,<sup>89</sup> *akam* comprises inside, house, kin, family, settlement and the moral codes that conserve these. *Puram* on the other hand comprises outside, non-kin and uninhabited areas. While *akam* is the desired ideal, *puram* is feared, threatening disaster and unhappiness. The dichotomy between *akam* and *puram* is also present in rituals where the aim is to establish and maintain social and divine order (Fuglerud 1999, 78, Pfaffenberger 1982).

The strangers are this non-kin, associated with the threatening outside, coming to inhabit their houses and inhabited area. What used to be outside their protected Korte, has now moved inside. The strangers are in Mary Douglas' (1966) term, "matter out of place", a threatening anomaly. They are non-relatives, *sondam-illai*, but living in their family place, their *ur* and *sonde idam*, which normally would also imply being *sondam*. The anomaly of the strangers is threatening as they make the known but already partially lost place of Korte less known by their residence in the *ur*. And when these strangers demand to know who Inthu is, this alienation is reinforced. Not only do the faces of the strangers in Korte make Korte less recognisable as the *ur* of the Korte-relatives, but also by claiming some right to their *ur*, the strangers alienate Korte even more.

For the Korte-relatives, their borders of their *sondam* and their *ur*, or family place (*sonde idam*) are challenged. By keeping the strangers at a safe distance and not interacting with them, the Korte-relatives who still live in Korte seek to attempt to avoid the anomaly the strangers represent. I suggest that this distance-keeping is an attempt to maintain the purity of their *ur* and also their *sondam*. The Korte-relatives deny the strangers the opportunity to become part of the unity of *sondam*. Yet, the strangers still change the character of the place with their presence.

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<sup>89</sup> Cankam poetry refers to poetry written during the initial development of Tamil culture and literary traditions, dated to the first four centuries of the Christian era. During these centuries, called the Cankam or Sangam age, a poetic academy supposedly flourished, maintained by the kings of the Pantiya dynasty. Source: Dublinasky, accessed 01.11.2014, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195399318/obo-9780195399318-0116.xml>.

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#### *“You should have been my son-in-law”*

The war, the subsequent increase in migration and the entrance of strangers to Korte made the continuation of marriage within the *ur* and the ideal of the cross-cousin marriage challenging to maintain. The lack of young men in Korte, Thiruppur and Arayalai in general, and elsewhere in Jaffna, made it difficult to find suitable husbands for the girls when they reached marriageable age. Those who were supposed to occupy preferential kinship categories for marriage were no longer there: potential husbands were either abroad, engaged in the LTTE or had died in the war. Inthu is one of those who married late, at the age of 34, due to lack of suitable marriage partners in Korte and Ariyalai in general. She explains: “It was late, but there were no bridegrooms in Jaffna at that time. All were dead in the war. So *amma* and *appa* did not find any bridegroom. It was very difficult”. Inthu only married after her siblings took her to Norway. Her family found a distant Thiruppur-relative who had already migrated, and had lived in Paris for some years.

As described in the previous chapter, Balasingam lamented that he did not have an *ur*-marriage and expressed concerns regarding how the idealized cross-cousin marriage pattern in general was ruptured. He pointed out with sorrow that had it not been for the migration and the entrance of LTTE-cadres and other strangers to their *ur*:

[W]e would all have married between us, between the cousins. Because my dad had four [married] brothers and four [married] sisters, so there were cuisines in all ages. I would have married Kamal, then Kumar would marry Sothi, like that. Kamal’s father, whenever he sees me he cries and says “You should have been my son-in-law”. But it went another way. Kumar also would have liked to marry Sothi, but she found a boy from a different place.

The old man’s sadness at not having his daughter married to Balasingam exemplifies regret and emotional pain for a marriage that was not realized. Instead of marrying her cross-cousin, Balasingam, Kamal married a “stranger”, a *sondam-illai*; one of the LTTE-soldiers that had been in the camp in Korte. This was not how it should have been. Sadness is expressed over the ideal cross-cousin marriage that was lost: a marriage that would have secured the ideal repetition of the kinship pattern

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through the next generation.<sup>90</sup> Although Kamal's husband was finally accepted by her family, her elderly father's pain shows that a marriage outside the *ur-sondam* group is not emotionally the same as if a marriage is realized within this unity. Balasingam himself also lamented that he never married Kamal. The old man's grief underlines my claim, made in the previous chapter, that the cross-cousin ideal is of personal emotional value for the Korte-relatives because it is seen to reproduce the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) and the good life this enmeshment provided.

That Kamal's husband was a former LTTE-soldier may also reinforce the feeling that things did not go as the Korte-relatives hoped and desired. LTTE was an organization led by men from the fishing caste and it is said that more boys from lower castes than upper castes were recruited. Therefore, LTTE was, in large part, a low-caste organization, and, perhaps as a result, LTTE officially opposed the caste system. To the Korte-relatives, LTTE may activate connotations associated with people of low-caste, and in particular the fishing caste. As pointed out in Chapter 1, the Korte-relatives distance themselves from this caste, regarding them as harsh and dirty people.

As a result of marrying a stranger, the generational continuity of the *sondam* within the *ur* of Korte is not upheld. The marriage pattern, the genealogy and the kinship terminology do have some flexibility and ability to absorb strangers and make them kin, but if too many marry out of the *ur-sondam* and sub-caste group, as well as the main caste group, this continuity becomes extreme fragile. For each such "outside marriage" that occurs, the implicit expectation of the kinship ideology that the *sondam* will continue is broken. And with too many "outside marriages", the self-reproducing

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<sup>90</sup> Although not being able to say this with security, it might seem that such close cross-cousin marriages are more desired by the males of the family than the females. Kamal and Sothi themselves fought for marriages with others than their cross-cousins and close kin. In her article on gender and kinship in Tamil Nadu, India, Kapadia (1994, 1995) discuss how kinship relations are ambivalent for woman. Because women are, in most contexts, ranked lower than men, a marriage with close kin can create hierarchy between close kin that are socially equal. However, a key distinction between kinship in Tamil Jaffna and Tamil India, is that in Tamil Nadu land is always held by the men and women's dowries never include land (Kapadia 1995). As previously shown, the opposite is true in Jaffna. This does not imply that marriage within kin and *ur* are necessarily preferred by other female Korte-relatives as will be discussed later in this dissertation. Kapdia (1995, 54) describes how woman regard close-kin marriage as favourable because it secures the woman relatively higher status than in marriages with strangers. Marrying close kin also secures the woman support in case of disagreements with the husband as her parents and sisters live nearby and thus can protect her, give shelter and intervene. This is the same advantage of marrying a cross-cousin or close cousin pointed out by Balasingam in the previous chapter.

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pattern with all its “*sikkel-sikkel*” – mixing of the relatives within Korte and Thiruppur - will ultimately not be reproduced at all.

Moreover and importantly, marrying strangers and migrating does not secure the continuation of the *sondam* within their *ur*: in their *sonde idam*. “Outside marriages” not only change the kinship pattern, but it will also change their family place. The increased practice of marrying outside *sondam* and *ur* adds to the already significant emptying out of kin in Korte and brings more strangers into the *ur*. The practices of maintaining the entwinement of Korte-person, Korte-relatives and Korte: of person, *sondam* and *ur*, becomes increasingly difficult and the basis for their good and meaningful life is thus challenged.

#### A Korte untwined

The practices of living together, marrying and settling within their natal village that had kept *ur* and *sondam* together for generations in Korte and Thiruppur were lost as many of the extended family migrated and LTTE-cadres and other strangers moved in. Driven by the desire to uphold the wholeness of the *ur-sondam* (cf. Hastrup 2007), or the enmeshment of the person with relatives (*sondam*) and the family’s natal village (*ur*), migration was initiated to improve the families’ standard of living in Korte and to safeguard the lives of loved ones. The hope was maintained that the migrants would return to Korte and Thiruppur, and that close and extended relatives would continue to live together in the family’s natal village, their *ur*, re-gaining a sense of the social unity and meaningful life they had previously experienced. This hope shows how the future acts on the present; we plan and act out of anticipation (Hastrup 2007). But their intentions and plans for the future were disrupted by forces beyond their control: the war lasted longer than expected, and many - to Parvathi and Sanjeeven’s sorrow - did not come back to the *ur* to live with them. Moreover, Kamal did not marry Balasingam, like many others of the pre-war Korte youth did not marry *sondam*, nor did they have an *ur*-marriage within Ariyalai.

The migration that was initiated to help family members changed their life drastically: the tightly-knit enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* was stretched over

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large geographical distances. The practical and sensorial enmeshment unravelled and with it their meaningful way of life. The relatives were separated and the felt and known place of Korte was lost and reduced to mere space as there were insufficient kin left to practice Korte as their felt *ur*. This process of unravelling the meaningful enmeshment or the wholeness of the person, *sondam* and *ur* can be described by Anthony Giddens' (1990, 1991) term: "disembedding". By disembedding, Giddens refers to the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990, 21). Giddens here mentions the dissolving of traditional tightly united societies into modern societies as one example of such disembedding. When the practiced or physical enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* unravelled, all the persons were "concretely" lifted out of their social relations, including their relationships to the surrounding *ur*. With insufficient relatives left to practically produce the Korte they had known, relatives and *ur* could no longer enmesh with each other on a daily basis and maintain what they perceived as a good and meaningful life.

While the practiced relationships that kept the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* together in Korte unravelled, the thoughts and ideals of *ur-sondam*, manifested in language and ideals, having surrounded them since childhood, is not untwined in the same way. Rather, I suggest the migration and separation of family members and *ur* enhances the *ideal* of the person's enmeshment in the unity of *sondam* and *ur* and the need to be part of a larger wholeness. This ideal also motivates action to maintain these kinship relationships as far as possible. In the next chapter, I look into one practice aimed at maintaining the enmeshment of the *ur-sondam* unity by sending and receiving money and gifts whilst, in Chapter 5, I will further explore the personal emotional consequences the physical untwining of the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* had on the family members.

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**Picture 1: Remains of concrete, peppered with bullet holes. Jaffna, 2012**



**Picture 2: House left behind, damaged and overgrown by trees and plants. Jaffna, 2012**

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## Chapter 4:

# Affective money and gifts

Jeevan and I are sitting outside the house where he lives with his mother Puspha (Sittampalam before marriage) and sister Renuka in Korte. To the backdrop of heavy rain drumming on roofs and palm leaves before hitting the soil, Jeevan has been telling me about his childhood and youth. I ask him how his mother's siblings, all except one, living abroad, have been present in his life and what he feel for them:

I met Selvi-*ita*<sup>91</sup> once only. And teacher [Inthu], ahhh four times, three times. Nathan two times. I never meet Thilaga. I only meet once, you know the one how lives in Canada? I only met him once. And who else? That's all. And I saw often my mother's sister who passed away. I saw her often, like when she tried to get her son out of 'Lanka, to send him abroad. That time she came to Vavuniya and my father helped her to go to Colombo.

He falls silent for a while before he continues:

They are in my heart and always I remember them. And I ehhh... give them respect and I give them everything I could. Because in my body they feed me. Every month they are sending us money and we were eating because of them. Since I was born they have been giving money. It is part of my body so ehmm I remember them and I feel thanks for them.

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<sup>91</sup> Contraction of Selvi and *sitti*, short of *sittamma*, meaning mother's younger sister and litterarly "little mother".



### *Underneath the margosa tree*

Jeevan's statement powerfully describes the centrality of money and gifts in relationships between Korte-relatives living geographically distant from each other, which will be the focus of this chapter. Except for his mother's eldest sister who lived in Jaffna, Jeevan's has only met his mother's own siblings a few times when they have come for visits to Sri Lanka from Norway, France and Canada. But the monthly cash they send, turned into food and consumed, profoundly affects Jeevan's relationship to them: they are part of his body.

In this chapter I explore the centrality of exchange and performance of money and gifts of saris, skirts and gold to maintain and negotiate kinship bonds across distance. The chapter shows how Korte-relatives turn to the use of money and gifts to practice their kinship relations, exemplifying the desire to maintain the unity of kin and to act out the ideals of kinship in a situation where the physical practices and activities that "built kinship" when they lived closely together are difficult to undertake. Today, family members depends on the exchange of money and gifts over geographical distances to show intimacy, love and care for each other. I explore this topic from the perspective of both giver and receiver, highlighting how money, often converted into food and other goods, and gifts, can create emotions of closeness, co-presence and belonging, but also emotions of ambivalence, shame, disappointment and absence between family members.

### **Remittances; morality or relationships**

Ever since the Korte-relatives started to migrate, those living abroad have sent large sums of money back to their families in Korte, in particular to parents and siblings. In the previous chapter, Murali and Balasingam told that they sent money to cover living expenses for their natal families and their sisters' dowries. In Korte, the standard of living rose, exemplified by the appearance of refrigerators in Korte-homes. As Balasingam explained: "(S)lowly, slowly *amma* built up, my family came into a better position. She had food for all the children, refrigerator and my brothers could buy motorcycles and pushbikes." As the sisters got married and were settled with dowries, and more siblings established their lives abroad, demands from Korte for such large

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sums from abroad reduced. Yet, some living expenses for a sister or two, and for aging parents in Korte are still common today and from time-to-time, larger contributions are needed for relatives' health expenses, a funeral or dowry for a sister's daughter. Moreover, the end of war in 2009 has made travel and postal and bank services more accessible, resulting in an increased exchange of gifts of food, clothes and gold jewellery in a two-way flow *between* the relatives living in Korte and abroad.

Remittances by migrants to their home countries has attracted much interest from academics (Hernandez and Coutin 2006, Gamburg 2004, Cohen 2011). In his dissertation on Tamil and Somali immigrants in Norway, Sarvendra Tharmalingham (2010, 70) states that collective life and extended family tradition among Tamils motivates migrants to remit money to family members back home. However, the literature on remittances among Tamils, and remittances in general, has seldom looked on remittances from the perspectives of both senders and receivers (for some exceptions see Baldassar 2007, 2008, Åkkeson 2009). Furthermore, the study of remittances has, to a large degree, been concerned with questions of family and local economy rather than on the ways remittances affect relationships between givers and receivers (Cohen 2011, Gamburg 2004, Hernandez and Coutin 2006, Tharmalingam 2010, McKey 2007)

In Jaffna, among groups including university-educated, NGO's and elderly people, there is a similar focus on remittances from abroad related to household and local economies and to changes in society. In this discourse, the concern is that money from abroad is not only covering livelihood expenses, but also spent on smartphones, beer, narcotics and motorbikes. This is perceived to forge a youth culture of drinking, enjoyment and sexual relationships in early age - behaviour that is regarded as unheard of in the days before and during the war. As many families in Jaffna cannot afford to buy smartphones, motorbikes or spend money on beer, such ways of spending money are derided by some as "foolish". Connected with a high rate of unemployment, in particular among young boys, access to foreign money is seen by many as the reason why young men have high expectations of their level of income, and prefer to live off their relatives' money rather than working themselves (e.g. Point Pedro Institute of Development 2011). In this discourse, access to foreign money is thus seen as contributing to the loss of traditional values in Jaffna society. Here, the ideal of the

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hard-working Jaffna-man is seen to be diminishing, while an increase in the use of smartphones is correlated with an increase in narcotics use and a decrease in sexual chastity. Access to money from abroad is thus associated with moral decline. This in turn can contribute to the idealization of the past when money in such large sums as well as motorbikes, smartphones and other consumer goods were not available.

Access to foreign money and “modern goods” certainly makes the Jaffna life appear different now than before. Questioning how remittances affect household, and thus also local economies and morality, and searches for how remittances can be “better” used, does not lead to an understanding of why these practices are upheld, despite their apparent unintended consequences (cf. McKey 2007). Rather, I suggest that we need to acknowledge remittances and exchange of gifts as practices of moral and emotional commitment and desire to maintain the unity and attachment of the family. Therefore, the central question is how the money and gifts that are sent and received affect the relatives’ emotions, and thus the relationships between family members living in different places.

### **The emotional affect of money and gifts**

In order to explore how money and gifts of saris, skirts and gold affect the relationships between the relatives involved, in this chapter I apply a perspective that recognizes objects as central to our experience and understanding of the world (Damsholt, Mordhorst, and Simonsen 2009, Ingold 2007a, b, 2008, 2011, Kapferer and Hobart 2005). Putting objects at the centre of analysis has also been done in anthropological study of gifts (Malinowski 1984 [1922], Mauss 1954). While these studies fruitfully shows how gifts link giver and receiver, I also want to explore here the affect of such objects on social relationships. I focus on the *performance* of objects or materiality and how such performance brings forth the power that lies in human engagement with objects (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005): it is when humans perform objects or “things”, that its force and potency are revealed; its inherent sensorial qualities of smell, touch, view, taste and sound come into play and affect the humans (Kapferer and Hobart 2005). Thereby, not only the human subject is affective: objects, environment and

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spaces engage and affect the human, mediating emotions in the person (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2009, Thrift 2000, 2004, 2008). Affects triggered by objects and environments are in turn interpreted cognitively and socially within human thought (Navaro-Yashin 2009, Thrift 2000, 2004, 2008). Emotions give associations to other objects, thoughts and actions, in a particular “worldliness” (Deleuze 2000). I suggest that giving and receiving money and gifts between family members, the revealed sensorial qualities of these “things” (or those things into which money is converted) are associated with family bonds between those who give and those who receive, and with the ideal of kinship: the maintenance of the unity and relationships of *sondam*, and thus also *ur*.

More recently, anthropologist and sociologist have considered how remittances as well as letters, phone calls and visits are important to maintaining emotional closeness between migrant family members and those “back home” (Baldassar 2007, 2008, McKey 2007, Svašek 2008, Conradson and McKay 2007, Skrbiš 2008, Svašek and Skrbiš 2007). However, as the empirical data and argument are laid out, I show how money and objects are not only able to produce emotions, oftentimes intense, of emotional closeness and co-presence between giver and receiver, but also how such objects produce emotions of ambiguity, shame and distance. I argue that there is a need to recognize both positive and negative emotions in order to grasp the complex ways money and gifts affect the emotional relationship between family members living in different places.

### **They are in my body**

In the introduction to this chapter, Jeevan stated that he experiences his mothers’ sibling as part of his body. Jeevan was born in 1987, after his mother’s siblings migrated and he spent most his youth and childhood in Vavuniya, due to the war in Jaffna. Thus he has never lived in the same place together with his mother’s siblings and has only met them a few times. The answer to the intense affect of the money sent and received lies in understanding the power of money, or more specifically, the power of the food the money is converted to, as an affective object (cf. Deleuze 2000, Navaro-Yashin 2009, Thrift 2004, 2008). Receiving the money from his mother’s siblings, Jeevan’s natal

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family in Sri Lanka converted or materialized this money mostly into food. By viewing, smelling, touching (Tamils eat with the hand), chewing, tasting and swallowing the food every day throughout his life, the food's sensorial qualities of smell, taste and substance are revealed to Jeevan (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005). The food is more than merely food. Through converted money, his relatives have given the food to him. Their affection of care for him is materialized into food and by performing and thus sensing the food, their affection is revealed to Jeevan. They become present to him in his own performance of the food, causing an affect in him of feeling emotional closeness to, and unity with, his mother's siblings: they are part of his body.

Discussing co-presence among Italian transnational family members, Loretta Baldassar (2008) points out that co-presence can be achieved indirectly through objects, or "proxy". Through objects that can be sensed; touched, smelled, tasted, seen and heard, the absent giver become physical, or materially manifested. The objects serve "as an abstraction of an imagined presence" (Baldassar 2008, 264). Through the food, the siblings of Jeevan's mother become present, and by daily eating this food, Jeevan becomes caught up in their lifelines through time across distance. Selvi's and the other siblings' action of sending money leads to a material outcome in which the non-human object works as an abstraction of the physically absent senders which again mediates emotions in the self of the receiver (Navaro-Yashin 2009). Intimacy is created from a distance (Svašek 2008, 220).

This intense affect is reinforced by the particular nurturing quality of the mediating object: food. Through the action of eating and digesting, the food is transformed, building blood, flesh and marrow, physically becoming part of Jeevan's body. This aspect of nurturing becomes particularly important due to the centrality of food in Tamil life. As already noted in Chapter 1, food is a strong mediator of relationships. More generally, Marshall Sahlins (2011, 14) has pointed to the centrality of food and nurturing to kinship. Giving food, assuring that the other eats, are ways to participate in each other's life. Moreover, such life-giving is reciprocal, as the life-force in such gifts compels a return from the receiver, often in the form of respect, very visible in Jeevan's case.

Through the acts of remitting and eating, family members become co-present, becoming part of each other experientially, despite the geographical distance. This

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distant co-presence could be described as imagined or “thin” co-presence as opposed to the “thick” co-presence described by Boden and Molotch (1994). In thick co-presence, one is physically present to the other, involved in rich, multi-layered conversations, including facial gestures, body language, voice intonation, turn-taking in conversation and the ability to touch, see and embrace each other (cf. Chapter 1. See also Urry (2002, 259) for the importance of “thick” co-presence). The presence of the siblings of Jeevan’s mother through the food does not facilitate a physical co-presence of the relatives involved, but in the performance of remitting and eating, they become present to each other through the materiality of food. As such they are “thinly” co-present; physical absent from each other, where intimacy and co-presence of the absent family member is expressed through giving and felt through receiving money, food and other objects, although the family members themselves are not physical present and in touch.

### *Sending money: (re-)creating emotional closeness*

Among Puspha’s siblings living abroad, Selvi has sent money most frequently, and still does so today. She started sending money in 1986, the year she got a job in Norway. Initially, she remitted only sporadically, but ever since Jeevan’s sister Renuka fell ill in 1993, never fully recovering, Selvi has been sending about 20,000 rupees every month. Selvi wanted Puspha to quit her job and stay home so she could take care of Renuka, who needed help for most daily tasks. Selvi offered to send money monthly to cover expenses for food for the family and medicine for Renuka. This was her way of showing love and care when she was unable to be there and help her sister when assistance was needed. Among Tamils, sisters often share responsibility for children. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, Tamils regard the kin bond between a sister and her sister’s child to be the same as between birth mother and child due to the special closeness between sisters. This close bond is also reflected in kinship terminology. A sister will call her sister’s children daughter and son, *mahal* and *mahen*, the same terms she uses for her own children. Likewise, a mother’s sister is termed “big mother” or

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“little mother”, *periyamma* and *sittamma*, depending on whether they are older or younger than one’s birth mother.<sup>92</sup>

When Puspha passed away in July 2012, Selvi and the other siblings in Norway decided to apply for family reunification with Renuka due to her medical condition. They thought it was better for her to stay with them in Oslo, taking turns between the families of Selvi, Murali, Nathan and Thilaga, rather than for her to continue living with her brother in Jaffna. Jeevan also strongly desired to be freed from responsibility for his sister, aspiring to the freedom to travel to Dubai to earn money there. Together, the four siblings in Oslo decided that Selvi was the most suitable to apply for family reunification: she had had a steady job and income for nearly thirty years in Norway, her mortgage was paid off, and most importantly, she had been sending money regularly to Puspha and thus also to Renuka and Jeevan for more than twenty years.

In her application to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration, the siblings emphasized the regularity of Selvi’s remittances to Puspha’s family. To stress the argument, Selvi attached the bank notes of her transactions to Puspha for the past year. In the application they also added the documents stating Renuka’s medical condition and explained the importance of the near kin bond between a sister and her sister’s child to Tamils. Almost a year past until the reply from the Directorate arrived in Selvi’s mailbox. The letter stated what the siblings had expected but feared: denial.

Taking to Selvi a few days later, Selvi was devastated and very upset:

In the letter they say that Renuka and me don’t have a close relationship. They say that because I only visited her once, she is not close attached to me. But I have sent money for the past twenty years! I have taken care of that family! And I have called, often I call. And before that I wrote letters. Plus, I’m her *sittamma* [little mother]! [...] They don’t understand. Because of the war I couldn’t visit. If there hadn’t been the war, or the problems, I would have visited more often. Or I wouldn’t have come here in the first place.

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<sup>92</sup> The practice among Tamil (South Indian) woman to share responsibility for siblings’ children is also described by Cecilia Busby (1997) and Trawick (1990).

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Selvi was in tears, crushed that she was not believed to have a close relationship with Renuka. According to the Norwegian state, closeness between the two of them had to be proven through frequent physical interaction.<sup>93</sup> But to Selvi, the money she sent every month for more than the past twenty years was strong evidence of their attachment to each other. It was through this money she acted out her care and love for Renuka. As such, the money sent was not merely money, but because the receivers were her sister and sister's children, the money expressed her desire to be there and share responsibility and love for Renuka. To Selvi, as well as to Jeevan, these practices of imagined co-presence, materialized in food, compensate to some extent for the loss of the daily entanglement of their lifelines which would have been forged by co-habitation and physical co-presence, if not for war and migration. Then, Selvi and Jeevan's mother Puspha would most probably have been residing in proximity. Moreover, Selvi was upset that the directorate had not taken into account the close relationship that Tamils consider to exist between a sister's child and its mother's sister, which she had explained in the application. To Selvi, Jeevan and Renuka were as her own children.

The geographical proximity inherent in the structures of marriage and dowry and the emotional closeness inherent in the Dravidian kinship structure and terminology implies a close and daily relationship between relatives such as Selvi and Puspha's children. In their context of living dispersed, the daily entangling has been stretched out across great geographical distance, leaving feeding and eating at distance to mediate their co-presence. Through the money, turned into food, Selvi still becomes a vital part of Jeevan and Renuka. This is stated in Jeevan's experience of Selvi and his mother's other siblings being part of his body, and Selvi's experience of having cared for and nurtured Jeevan and Renuka since they were small children. Despite not being able to entwine their lifelines on a daily basis and only having met once, a strong bond of kinship has developed between them throughout the years.

Later that month, Selvi and her siblings appealed the case to the directorate, but without success. To the family members, the remittances both express and construct intimacy between them and Puspha's children and cannot be regarded, as the directorate

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<sup>93</sup> The facts that Jeevan was taking care of Renuka in Sri Lanka and that Renuka was over eighteen years old, the age of majority in Norway, also made the application difficult.



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saw them, as merely economic transactions (McKey 2007, 176). To Selvi, the bank notes, the materialization of the sent money, stated her strongly felt emotional bond to Renuka. The continuous sending of money, month after month, year after year, regularly maintained and re-created her emotional closeness to her sister and her sister's children.

### **Objects of intimacy**

The money that is sent and turned into food mediates emotional intimacy between relatives. Giving or sending food or other objects directly is also seen as an important indicator of the quality of a relationship among the Korte-relatives. In late November, Parvathi and Sanjeeven still had large amounts of canned and dried food in their storage room next to the kitchen: soups, boxes of tinned fish, jams with no added sugar, low-sugar oatmeal biscuits, were neatly piled up on the shelves. All the food had been bought in Oslo and brought by their two sons when they came to visit during July. Their daughter Sothi had also contributed significantly. One night as we are sitting on the patio during one of the many power-cuts in Thiruppur, Parvathi suddenly demanded to know the expiry date on a box of porridge brought by their children. In the pitch-dark she went inside and brought out a flashlight. Seeing the flashlight, Sanjeeven said to me: "This flashlight is from your country. Our eldest son brought it when he came." Parvathi ads:

Our boys brought *soooo* many things when they came. We don't ask "bring this, bring that". We are not like that. But they bring. They are good boys. Not all [children] are like that. Our eldest son brought vitamins when he came last year. The other one brought sugar and milk for diabetics. And he brought soups and food that Sothi had bought and given to him to take with him to us.

Parvathi smiles. She looks satisfied by the thought of her children taking care of them by bringing them vitamins, special food and other things. Sanjeeven, like many other Tamils, has diabetes and should therefore not be eating food with high sugar and cholesterol levels, which was about all he had cravings for. By sending food to their

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parents, as Sothi did, or bringing food with them when visiting as the two sons did, the children maintain the relation with their parents, even after they have left. The food serves here as objects indirectly giving co-presence between the parents and their children (cf. Baldassar 2008, 264). Taking out the food, holding it, preparing it and finally eating it, the objects are sensed, making their absent children present in their life in Korte (cf. Baldassar 2008, 264) and re-making emotional attachment.

The amount of food brought lasts for several months, and is aimed to last until next summer when their youngest son is scheduled to visit again. As such Parvathi and Sanjeeven have a reservoir of their children's co-presence. As they daily bring out some of the food to cook and eat, they entwine their lifeline regularly with their children's lifelines, thus maintaining their relationship. By touching, smelling, preparing and eating this food, Parvathi and Sanjeeven feel emotional closeness to their children: remembering them and experiencing their children's care and love for them, though from a distance. The food thereby becomes objects of abstraction in which Parvathi and Sanjeeven imagine their children's presence (cf. Baldassar 2008, 264). The inherent sensorial qualities of the food act upon the relationship between the giver and the receiver (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005). Sending and eating food become ways to maintain some emotional closeness across distance, and maintain some sense of unity with their children.

### *Golden signs of family bonds*

One evening while we had tea in Parvathi and Sanjeeven's garden, Parvathi asked for news about Amirtha, as I had just told that I had spent the morning with her. Amirtha is a distant relative of theirs, living just the other side of the A9. She had once lived on the junction, opposite Parvathi's and Sanjeeven's house. Parvathi was particularly interested in Amirtha's economic situation, knowing that she had some difficulties at that time and wanted to seek help from relatives abroad. Parvathi thought that Amirtha's husband had relatives living in Canada, but responding to her request for news, I explained that it was not Amirtha's husband's relatives that reside in Canada, but Amirtha's own female cross-cousin. Parvathi sighed and said: "Oh, oh. Amirtha's father's younger sister's daughter. They left when they were young, so they don't have

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much contact, but now they have some.” Prompting her to elaborate more, I said “yes, it is difficult to maintain family bonds when living far apart”. Parvathi continued:

Our children, they look well after us. They call and ask “Have you eaten?”, “Have you eaten good food?”. So they take good care of us.<sup>94</sup> We know our children, and our children’s children [...] When our youngest son’s son visited this summer we bought him a bracelet. 57.000 [rupees].<sup>95</sup> To the other [grandchildren] we have given before. To our eldest son’s daughter’s puberty ceremony we sent one Lak [100.000 rupees] and they chose. Afterwards, she called and told “many thanks for the necklace you sent”. For Sothi’s son we gave a chain when they did the *annaprasana* [ritual when the baby has had its first tooth and is given solid food for the first time] and for his [10<sup>th</sup>] birthday we gave a ring, 27.000 [rupees]. He said, “Oh, *amappa*, *amamma* [maternal grandmother, maternal grandfather] you have lots of money” [laughing]. And for the eldest son’s daughter we have also given a necklace. So only our youngest son’s son hadn’t received. So now all grandchildren have got gold from us. That is a memory.

Parvathi points to phone calls and gift giving between herself and her children and grandchildren in response to my comment that it is difficult to maintain relationships when family members live far apart. Parvathi states that she feels well looked after by her children and that she also cares for them through these practices. The practices of giving and receiving phone calls, food and gold are crucial to sustain the intimacy in their family.

Parvathi consciously uses gold jewellery as permanent objects to show her love for her grandchildren. The gold becomes objects of intimacy and co-presence through which her grandchildren will remember her and her husband. In particular, the everlasting quality of gold signifies enduring relationships between grandparents and the grandchildren. Their grandchildren are born in Norway and have only visited Parvathi and Sanjeeven for a few short periods when on vacation in Jaffna. In this case, they not only maintain, but also create relationships with their grandchildren by giving

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<sup>94</sup> This statement also shows the importance of food to relationships in Jaffna.

<sup>95</sup> 57.000 Sri Lankan Rupees was equal to 273 British Pounds in the summer of 2012.

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gold. Parvathi and Sanjeeven have never co-habited with their grandchildren and neither have they had the opportunity to interact daily with them over long periods, as they had with their children before they migrated. Therefore, gold jewellery, as objects of love and affection toward their grandchildren, become crucial in their ongoing relationships. They depend on these objects to become co-present to their grandchildren (cf. Baldassar 2008).

Marcel Mauss (1954) also points out how gifts are important in producing positive feelings between the persons involved in the transaction. Gifts from grandparents to grandchildren do not raise expectations of reciprocity in terms of repaying with “equal coin”. Sahlins (1974) has also termed such giving when little is expected in return, at least in the short term, as generalized reciprocity. In generalized reciprocity, an unreturned gift does not cause a break-off of the relationship, or mean that the giver stops giving. In such cases, gift-giving, as Sahlins (2011) points out in a later article, is a way for people to participate in each other’s life.

Whilst such gift-giving is done without expectation of equivalent return, what may be expected and given in return for such gifts between closely related kin is affection. Parvathi emphasized that her granddaughter had called her from Oslo after the puberty ceremony when they had given her the gold necklace. Her granddaughter had expressed her appreciation of the gift, and thereby also appreciated her grandparents’ affective action. The goal of producing a positive feeling is confirmed to Parvathi when her granddaughter called and expressed her appreciation. This makes Parvathi satisfied, and closeness is (re-)produced between the two of them.

In Oslo, Parvathi’s and Sanjeeven’s grandchildren wear their gold jewellery mainly to Tamil functions. In the puberty ceremony for Selvi’s daughter (described in Chapter 6), Parvathi’s and Sanjeeven’s youngest son’s daughter, Thushanthi, was wearing much of her gold jewellery, including a necklace. Responding to my compliment on her dress and jewellery, Thushanthi raised the necklace with her hand, showed it to me and told me: “I got this from my *amamma* and *amappa* in Jaffna. I like to wear it, it kind of shows my identity”. Wearing the necklace, Thushanthi thinks of her grandparents: they take part in her life, although from distance and through objects. For her, as for her grandparents, the object embodies her grandparents; it is an object of abstraction in

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which the grandparents' presence is imagined when worn and interacted with (cf. Baldassar 2008, 264). Thus, the necklace has meaning to Thushanthy because it is her grandparents that have gifted it to her. The necklace and her grandparents are part of her "identity". The gift and object of the necklace indicate closeness between the three of them. However, it simultaneously signifies a degree of distance; the necklace from her grandparents is with her, but they are not physically present in person.

Giving and sending gifts, either food or gold to her children and grandchildren, is Parvathi's way of maintaining her relationships with them across distance. The objects give "memory" she says. The objects can travel with her children and grandchildren back to Norway, and make her present in her children's and grandchildren's lives although they are not living physically together. The feelings attached to the objects that are given between family members, when wearing or consuming them, witness that these practices of remitting money or gift-giving should not be seen merely as economic transactions, but as mediators of emotional family bonds. However, not only positive emotions are attached to such affective objects and remittances.

## Gifts of ambivalence

### *The shame of receiving*

Jeevan recognizes that his mother's siblings abroad have made his life good with their remittances. He is "built" on that money as he says. But today, being twenty-five years old during my year in Jaffna, grown up and finished with his education, he finds himself in a situation where he still depends on receiving money from his *sittamma* Selvi for his living. This makes him very uncomfortable:

I don't like [receiving money] after I get kind of age, after twenty-five, twenty-six or something. I feel ashamed for myself, because I get money from them. But I can't find myself way to get any earnings, because I couldn't go [for work] [...] Still I belong to them. Waiting for their money to get from the ATM. That's the only way I feel bad, I feel shame. I use others' money for my purpose. For all needs I use others' money. If I need any razor, I use their money to shave my hair. That's

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the way I feel bad. I wanna' earn myself but now I couldn't do this. [...] They make my life good. But now I feel shame. Because this is not the age getting things from others. This age you have to earn yourself. When you have energy, when you have... I couldn't go for job. This is sometimes why I feel sick, I feel... it is like tied up my hands, to do nothing.

Jeevan feels “ashamed”, “bad”, “shame”, “sick”, and “tied up his hands”. The money, materialized into food and even razor blades, provokes many negative emotions in him. Thus the same object: materialized money produces in Jeevan both affects of attachment to his mother's siblings, as well as strong negative emotions. As outlined in Chapter 3, among Jaffna Tamils there is a strong moral expectation for men to take economic responsibility for the family. In the first phase, a man is expected to earn money after he finishes education and contribute to his natal family. When he marries this responsibility shifts to his new family.

Not being able to earn even money for his own living expenses, makes the same objects that produce sensations of belonging and attachment to his family also provoke negative emotions in Jeevan. Receiving money makes him aware that he has not accomplished what is expected from him. Getting a job in Jaffna is difficult. Unemployment is about 30 percent for men in Jaffna (Sri Lankan Ministry of Finance and Planning 2012) and an even higher unemployment rate is reported among young men all over Sri Lanka, with double the average rate in Jaffna (Point Pedro Institute of Development 2011). Moreover, Jeevan does not want just any job, but a job that entails respect, with a salary no less than 17.000-20.000 rupees a month, which is quite high, and difficult to obtain. Taking a lower-status job, which would be easier to get, working six days a week for a much lower salary he said was “not worth it”. Furthermore, since both his mother and sister were sick and in need of attention and care, Jeevan saw it as his obligation and “job” to stay home and take care of them, in particular after his father passed away. Thus getting and keeping paid work would prove difficult.

Staying home to take care of his mother and sister was Jeevan' own “choice”, or the only way he could see that they could be cared for when his father was dead and all his mother's siblings were abroad. Nevertheless, taking care of them conflicted with his own expectations of earning money. He feels ashamed, and says that the situation

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creates tense feelings of being “owned” and “tied”. Following one set of rules and expectations he complies with family obligations. But the result is that he does not comply with his own, and broader social expectations of earning. By sending money so that he can continue to stay home and take care of his mother and sister, Jeevan’s relatives abroad make him feel shame by making him receive the money.

Jeevan’s experience of shame seems to stem from the fact that he cannot return their gift properly in a Maussian sense. Understanding that a gift given needs to be reciprocated, after years of receiving money, he is unable to make return, and is thus unable to move from the role of a child to that of an adult male provider. As in the North American potlatch discussed by Mauss (1954), the receiver is shamed when they are given a greater amount of gifts than they can ever repay. Here, the failure to return thus means losing in the competition for honor. Yet, a gift cannot be declined, as this would imply a rejection of a relationship (Mauss 1954). Thus, as long as his relatives give, Jeevan is obliged to receive and thereby to continue to stay at home to take care of his mother and sister. Likewise, his mother’s sibling’s abroad are compelled to give as the close kin bond between them and Puspha and her children means that Puspha and her children have some right to the property of those abroad (cf. Mauss 1954). Compelled to keep receiving without making return, Jeevan feels ashamed.

Anthropologists working on the topic of shame have pointed out that it entails a feeling of failure, disgrace and weakness in the self, derived from the self’s acts and behaviour in social interaction (Kilborne 1992, Simon 2005, Wikan 1984). The feeling of shame thus arises when one knows that one’s actions are not approved by others, when one fails to be the person one ought to be, and thus also expects oneself to be. “Who we ought to be” and the shame arising when we fail to be so, is as Unni Wikan (1984) argues, contextual. Jeevan is aware of his own failure, not only in not reciprocating the gift but also in not living up to the expectations of him as a man to earn for his family, or at least for his own expenses. He feels “ashamed for himself” when he depends upon this family’s remittances. The received money from abroad thus simultaneously signifies his attachment to his relatives, and his inability to be a dignified man.

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Selvi and Jeevan's mother's other siblings do express their gratitude towards Jeevan for taking care of his mother and sister. The few Korte-relatives living in Korte from time-to-time also express their sympathy for his situation. However, they also think that Jeevan should work, not only to earn but also for his own sake so that he "does not stay home all day". Several times the family arranged for a caretaker so that Jeevan could take a job. But the caretakers never lasted for long and Jeevan continued to be selective about the jobs he wanted.

Some of the relatives also expressed judgments of Jeevan's (lack of) actions, confirming Jeevan's shame. When Parvathi and Sanjeeven, or Vijaya and Sasikala living in Korte and other relatives living in Thiruppur, such as Amirtha, discussed the situation of Jeevan, and Renuka, particularly after their mother died, several were of the opinion that Jeevan should have done better. He had been given opportunities by his relatives abroad: money for private tutoring and good schools. He had also studied for a time at an engineering college in Malaysia after finishing his basic education, but had dropped out, finding the studies too difficult. He knew that his parents and relatives had high expectation for him and that he had disappointed them.

The shame Jeevan felt also affected his behaviour when moving around in Korte – something he limited as much as he could. Jeevan told me that he did not like to go outside much. He preferred to stay at home watching movies or on the computer. His relatives living in Korte frequently commented that he was always looking down when he passed on his bicycle, or walking. He hid his face, not even looking up to greet when he passed them, they said. This confirmed their suspicion that Jeevan wanted to avoid them. Benjamin Kilborn (1992, 231) states that the word shame derives from the Indeo-European root "skam" or "skem", meaning "to hide". Trying to avoid situations where he knows others are watching him, seeing his disgrace, he seeks to avoid meeting their gaze, to hide, which only confirms his own experience of shame (cf. Kilborne 1992, 231).

Selvi also felt that Jeevan was avoiding her, in particular preventing her from seeing him. After Selvi and her brother Nathan sent the money to set up Internet in Jeevan's home, Selvi asked Jeevan many times to "come to Skype" so that she could see Puspha, Jeevan and Renuka. When Jeevan finally complied, to Selvi's disappointment, he stayed



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out of the camera-shot. Instead he showed Selvi his mother and his sister. Only after Selvi had requested to see him several times, did he show himself. In Selvi's words: "He did not look into the camera, he was looking down all the time. As if he wants to hide something from me." Jeevan "hides" by limiting his visibility in Korte and Thiruppur; looking at the ground when passing his relatives and staying out of the camera-shot when Skyping with those in Norway. He avoids being seen, seeking to diminish his disgrace (cf. Kilborne 1992, 231).

Jeevan's shame is dominated by his experience of failing in the system of giving and receiving money. He is not able to convince himself, nor others, that what he gives, in terms of time and dedication to his mother and sister, is itself a gift – and perhaps even more valuable than the money the siblings abroad send. It is because they left that Jeevan is in this situation. If they still lived in Korte, the duties of taking care of his sister and mother would most probably had gone to one of his mother's sisters, Selvi, Thilaga or Inthu. Doing the right thing, by taking care of the family, implies that he fails in the expectations of earning. The two systems of taking care of family duties and earning money conflict. Had Jeevan been a daughter, I suggest that the situation would have been acceptable both to Jeevan and others. To a daughter or female relative there is not the same expectation of earning. After Jeevan's mother died, Jeevan remained in the same situation, since his sister still needed to be looked after Selvi's attempt to bring Renuka to Norway failed. To Jeevan, the affect of food, converted from his relative's remittances, thereby produce sensations that awoke both positive feelings of attachment and belonging to his relatives and negative feelings of aversion, shame and embarrassment. The negative feelings motivate him to actively distance himself from his relatives, affecting his relationship to them.

#### ***A wardrobe full of love***

Sangeetha, now living with just her father and mother in Korte after her siblings went abroad, has, like Jeevan, ambivalent feelings towards the gifts she receives from her siblings and other relatives living abroad. Sangeetha is aware that she has "everything". She lives in a nicely decorated and furnished house thanks to her brother in Sweden, she

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goes to a good school, eats good food, has plenty of nice clothes, and for her latest birthday her sister in London sent her a Blackberry.

Sangeetha does appreciate such gifts, in particular the Blackberry which enables her to communicate and stay more frequently in touch with her siblings. Almost daily she sends and receives free text messages, photos and free calls through apps on the phone such as Whatsapp, Viber and Skype. But, whenever family is coming to visit, both Sangeetha and her mother are bothered by all the gifts they bring, especially the clothes. When Vijaya, the sister of Sangeetha's mother, living next door to Sangeetha was expecting a visit from one of her daughter's friends from Malaysia,<sup>96</sup> the following conversation took place between Vijaya, Sangeetha and Sangeetha's mother Sasikala:

Vijaya: I'm sending a packet for her. Vicks, *mixture*,<sup>97</sup> *murrukku*<sup>98</sup>, flour. She said she didn't need anything but I'm sending it to her. She asked what I want, what Sangeetha wants, what Sasikala wants. But they told "nothing". Me too, I said "I don't need anything".

Sasikala: I have everything. Saris and underskirts, too many!

Vijaya: Me too, too much! Last time my sister came and she brought me underskirts in all the colours, fifteen of them. Blue, red, purple, pink, orange, green. Everything. We don't need more.

Sangeetha: I have skirts from all over the world. London, Paris, Norway, Canada, Malaysia, Sweden...

Sangeetha let her words hang in the air. The three of them were resigned to all the gifts their family would send or bring them from abroad. Sometimes they also expressed their annoyance at these gifts. They kept telling their relatives they did not need anything. Still they would bring saris, skirts and more expensive gifts for them when

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<sup>96</sup> Vijaya's daughter lives in Malaysia having married a Tamil residing there, a relative of Vijaya's brother's wife living in Germany.

<sup>97</sup> Spicy snack made of peanuts, fried gram dal, cashew nuts, thin deep-fried "noodles" and made of rice and gram flour, all mixed with red chili powder and, salt and curry leaves.

<sup>98</sup> Semi-spicy deep-fried snack made of lentil- and rice flour, mostly shaped into a coil.

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they visited, or as now; send through others who visited. Likewise, Vijaya also sends a packet of food to her daughter although her daughter had told Vijaya not to. Both those who remain in Korte and those who have left keeps giving gifts to each other although the other says nothing is needed.

Giving gifts when they are not needed, in contrast to covering basic needs as in the case of Jeevan's family,<sup>99</sup> is, I suggest, what makes such a gift a strong token of affection and love. It is not needed and thus to give such gifts is not a family duty, but rather communicates affection. Discussing transnational kinship bonds between Italian migrants to Australia and their parents "back home", Baldassar (2008) shows how objects, such as cards or letters, sent between parents at home and their migrant children often have no practical value or no information about the sender. However, the objects are valuable in themselves as a "visible sign of enduring relationships" (Baldassar 2008, 258). Thus to stop giving gifts, although, like the many saris, they are "useless", would indicate a reduction of relations between giving and receiving family members. Yet, for Sangeetha, Vijaya and Sasikala, receiving so many clothes that they pile up in their wardrobes is frustrating. But to refuse to receive is not an option, as it would signify refusal of the givers and their relationship (cf. Mauss 1954).

Similarly, like Vijaya, family members living in Korte say they know what those living abroad are missing from life in Jaffna, or cannot get hold of where they live, such as Vicks and particular types of flour and snack.<sup>100</sup> Giving gifts of endless skirts, underskirts, sari blouses, food and Vicks are "useless", but the material objects are expression of emotions of love and care for the other. The actions of giving and receiving are recognitions of their relationship. Thus to stop giving or receiving is not an option. Rather, the Korte-relatives seems to have a felt urge and need to undertake this gift-giving every time there is a possibility to do so. Whenever I travelled between Korte and Oslo, Parvathi and Sanjeeven always sent *mixture* to their children in Oslo, although they knew their children could make it, or buy it in Tamil shops in Oslo. Selvi would also send nail polish, chocolate, a digital photo camera and clothes to Jeevan and

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<sup>99</sup> Jeevan's nuclear family is the only remaining family in Korte I am aware of that still depends on money from abroad for their basic needs.

<sup>100</sup> Vick and types of particular flour made and used in Jaffna is mostly available in Tamil shops in the diaspora. However, both those in Korte and abroad will claim that food items bought abroad does not always taste the same.

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Renuka. In similar ways when someone in the family travelled, others in the family would ask the other to bring something for them to their relatives. The act of giving, of showing emotional care for the other, is more important than what is actually needed. The gifts solidify their relationship.

Sangeetha also expressed sadness related to the gifts she received: indeed did she have many nice skirts to wear, but they did not make her happy. She was alone, no sisters or cousin-sisters to talk with in the evenings or to go to Jaffna town with. While Parvathi and Selvi's generation had a whole "gang" of sisters and cousin-sisters to gather with in the evenings, or to watch movies with at the community centre, Sangeetha is alone. Sangeetha seldom, if ever, goes outside except for school and tuition classes. In the evenings, after finishing homework, and sometimes helping her mother with the housework, she will sit and watch TV by herself. She felt particularly alone after her brothers and sister all went abroad, leaving her with just her parents.

One evening as Sangeetha and I were sitting on the door still in her house in Korte, she brought out her notebook. She showed me a poem, written in English: on two lines on an empty white background, except for the grey, feebly printed lines, she had expressed her feelings:

I am a lonely girl.

No one is here to be with me.

She had written the poem during the first year after her sister and brothers had gone abroad. The skirts piling up in Sangeetha's wardrobe are signs of her relationship with her sister in London, her cousin-sisters in Norway, another cousin-sister in Malaysia and several cousin-sisters in London. But they are also strong reminders of the loneliness she experiences. By sensing the skirts, when worn, touched, felt and seen, decorating Sangeetha's body, she remembers that particular person that gave it to her. As such co-presence is achieved through the object (cf. Baldassar 2008), but it simultaneously expresses the absence of her relatives. The material objects the family

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members depend on to show love and belonging produces sensations of co-presence and distance at the same time. They hold the presence of those absent others. I argue that such feelings of absence, mixed with co-presence and belonging, are crucial to understand how gifts and objects of “proxy”, as Baldassar (2008) calls them, work in relationships between distant family members. Gifted objects do not merely elicit positive feelings of love, care and co-presence, but also negative feelings of loneliness and frustration.

#### ***Roasted chicken and the ambiguity of giving***

Balasingam, Sangeetha’s mother’s brother, visited Korte in 2011 for the first time after the war had ended. Now the idea of “uselessness” of the gift was shifted between giver and receiver. Sangeetha had expressed her desire to try roasted chicken, a dish she had heard about from her sister and cousin-sisters in London. In order to have such a meal prepared, they needed an oven which is not common to have in Jaffna houses. Taking about the incident, Balasingam said:

I didn’t see my family for many years. So when I go there I look after that they have everything. You know last time I was there Sangeetha wanted to try roasted chicken. So I went to town and I spent 25.800 rupees on the oven. It is useless. Why she wants the roasted chicken when she can have all the food there? I’m coming to Sri Lanka to eat all the good food there. But I can’t tell that. Because it’s Sangeetha that is wishing that. You know, she is very loving to me. She jumps up on my back and says “*mama*” [mother’s brother]. The other ones [sisters’ children] are not that affective, but she is. And because she has that wish I must do that, I feel. But she doesn’t think about that for 25.800 rupees, twenty families in Vanni [the area where the last part of the war was fought] can eat for a week, at least! The Jaffna people don’t think like that. But I did that. Because I also have some bad consciousness. So I did it, I didn’t say anything.

Since it is Sangeetha’s wish, Balasingam is not able to refuse her, although he thinks it is unwise to spend the money in this way. To refuse to give when asked would have been a missed opportunity to participate in Sangeetha’s life (cf. Sahlins 2011). Or

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as Mauss (1954, 21) has put it, refusing to give would have been an act of neglect, a denial of their relation. Sangeetha's affection towards Balasingam makes it even harder for him to refuse her wish. Through the act of buying and giving Sangeetha the meal of the roasted chicken, Balasingam returns his affection to Sangeetha. He wants to see to "that they have everything", ending up giving more than he really wants to and remaining with a feeling that his relatives in Korte and he have different views of how money should be spent.

Sangeetha being Balasingam's sister's daughter, Balasingam traditionally has particular obligations of help towards Sangeetha (cf. Banks 1960). The oven and the meal in itself are significant in that the two objects reconfirm the durability of their relationship. It is a question of love and care rather than a question of economy (cf. McKey 2007). This is also why Balasingam does buy the oven despite thinking it is "useless" and an unwise investment of money. The action is a recognition of their relationship, and maybe exactly because it is "useless" Sangeetha can experience having her affection for her *mama*, mother's brother, returned. However the "uselessness" of the oven, and the price, which rather could have fed twenty families in Vanni, made Balasingam ambivalent towards the request of the gift and actually buying and giving the gift.

The ambiguity of giving and receiving gifts thus exist both among the receiving and giving relatives. However, the option to not give or not receive is never considered. To refuse to give or receive or give back again would be a negation of their relationship, a withdrawal from their relationship (cf. Mauss 1954). Here it is love, affection and objects conveying these emotions and relationships that are given and received. Saying no to gifts of skirts and saris is therefore not a possibility although neither Sangeetha, nor her mother, have any more room in their wardrobes. And Balasingam cannot refuse his sister's daughter's wish of the roasted chicken.

### *Unmet expectation of return*

In addition to providing economic support to her sister Puspha and her family, Selvi, together with her husband Balraj, also contributes significantly to the household economy of her mother-in-law. Selvi's mother-in-law lives with her own daughter, her

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daughter's husband and their three children about ten minutes' walk from Korte. It was Selvi and her husband that had bought the land and built a new house for them there when they found their house in Manturai too small.<sup>101</sup> Every month Selvi and Balraj also send money for the household, this money is not needed to cover basic needs, as both Selvi's sister-in-law and the sister-in-law's husband have well-paid jobs.

When the son of Selvi's husband's brother, living in Oslo, turned eighteen in May 2012, Selvi's mother-in-law came to take part in the celebration and stay for some weeks. During her stay, Selvi's sister-in-law and husband back in Jaffna requested a large-sized flat-screen TV. Selvi told me: "We thought we could give it to them. They want that and we have it here. So I thought OK. My mother-in-law can buy it in the airport in Colombo."<sup>102</sup>

Selvi's mother-in-law returned to Jaffna in mid-June, at the time when the health of Puspha, Selvi's sister, worsened. Talking to Selvi on Skype from Jaffna in early July, she asked me if I knew if her mother- or sister-in-law had been to see Puspha. I told her that they had not. With disappointment and a bit of anger in her voice, Selvi said:

I asked her to go see my sister. And bring some food for her some times. She said "Ok, ok, I will", but she never does. I get a little bit angry with her, because she could do that for me. I have done so much for her and her family. We send money, and last time when she came we also bought that TV for them.

Selvi has requested her mother-in-law to see to her sister from time to time and to bring some home-cooked food.<sup>103</sup> As I discussed in Chapter 2, in-laws are considered as family and when someone in the family is sick, it is expected that other family members visit and bring food. Selvi's mother-in-law did not fulfil Selvi's expectations, which disappointed her.<sup>104</sup> Moreover, Selvi's disappointment increased due to the money and

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<sup>101</sup> In the Epilogue I comment upon the marriage between Selvi from Korte and her husband from Manturai.

<sup>102</sup> Exiting the airport in Colombo, after passing through immigration, there are several stores selling flat-screen TVs, refrigerators and other electrical equipment for the home.

<sup>103</sup> At that time, Puspha's family were striving to obtain a caretaker that also would cook. The caretakers they found did not cook "nicely" according to Puspha and she was craving delicious food. Again the centrality of food and relations is emphasised.

<sup>104</sup> It could be that Selvi's mother-in-law felt somewhat uncomfortable going to Korte as it is not her *ur*, but they had also resided in one of the three houses of Selvi's sisters in Korte during the war.

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other gifts she and her husband provided to her mother- and sister-in-law. In contrast to the situation of giving money to her sister and her children, Selvi materializes her love and care for her mother-in-law through the gift, but it is not unconditional; she expects something in return. The relationship between Selvi and her mother-in-law is more distant than that between her and her sister, or between Parvathi and her granddaughter. This may be why Selvi expects her gifts to her in-laws to be returned, rather than seeing them as a generalized reciprocity in which obligation to reciprocate is weak (Sahlins 1972, 194).

A few weeks later Puspha passed away. Selvi's mother-in-law had still not visited Puspha while she was alive, despite living close to Korte. Selvi's relationship with her mother-in-law grew cold, and in December the same year Selvi still did not want to talk to her:

I don't want to take the phone [when she calls]. I feel hurt, kind off. I asked her to see my sister, but she didn't. If she didn't want to see Puspha, she could have done it for me [...] I feel a bit angry with her, so I think it is better to avoid taking the phone.

In Selvi's experience, her mother-in-law does not return the love and care for her which Selvi shows her mother-in-law. She experiences that her mother-in-law does not recognize what she does for her. The years of sending money and giving expensive gifts, such as the flat-screen TV, I suggest enhance Selvi's expectations of return. The gifts and the money spent are "luxury items" and not necessities. Being the giver, Selvi has put a part of herself into the gift, in the form of work to obtain the money and the affection and love of giving the gift. Hurt by her mother-in-law's neglect, Selvi stopped talking to her. Her mother-in-law could have "afforded" to repay the gift: she had money and the ability to buy and make food, and lived close to Puspha. However the mother-in-law often complained about how busy the three grandchildren kept her. Moreover, the mother-in-law may have considered her relation to Selvi as closer than Selvi did, so that she did not feel the same obligation of return as Selvi expected. The gift, and the inherent, but unequal understandings of the expectation of return of the gift, affected their relationship.



## **Emotional objects of closeness and distance**

In this chapter I have shown how practices of sending money to family members in Korte and exchanging gifts of food, skirts, saris, gold and other items are emotional work. Such objects, when worn, eaten, seen, touched, felt and when gifted elicit emotions of co-presence, love and affection, but also feelings of longing for those absent, disappointment at a gift not returned, shame of receiving or ambivalence towards the exchange of “useless” gifts. Family members give of themselves and become, or seek to become, involved in each other’s life. Money and objects given and received are means of participating in each other’s lives despite great geographical distances: a way of maintaining and negotiating kinship bonds (cf. Sahlins 2011). Therefore, these practices cannot be regarded as mere economic transactions. Nor, however, are the emotions they provoke purely positive experiences of co-presence as argued by several writers (cf. Baldassar 2007, 2008, McKey 2007, Svašek 2008, Conradson and McKay 2007, Skrbiš 2008, Svašek and Skrbiš 2007). Rather, the elicitation of mixed emotions including closeness and distance, presence and absence, love and neglect, attachment and shame, are crucial to grasping how objects sent and received affect relationships in a dispersed family.

Using money and gifts to maintain and negotiate kinship bonds across distance shows how kinship not only consist of actual here-and-now relationships, but also of ideals, thoughts and feelings of these relationships. Despite the unravelling of the daily practiced relationships which produced the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and their family place (*ur*), the Korte-relatives ideal of this enmeshment has not unravelled in the same way. The ideal of maintaining kinship bonds and being involved in each other’s lives motivates them to act out this ideal in concrete and tangible practices as best they can. Money, turned into food, skirts and saris mediates the distance between them.

The Korte-relatives quest to maintain and negotiate kinship bonds despite being unable to “build kinship” through daily interaction shows that it is not only immediate sensorial relationships that are central to how we understand and act in our world as Ingold (2000, 2007a, b, 2011) argues, but ideals and thoughts of how things ought to be. Living dispersed, the Korte-relatives’ ideals of kinship fuel new practices and ways of

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maintaining kinship bonds. However, sending and receiving money and gifts does not re-create the same dense qualities of the social life they remember as characterising pre-war life in Korte. In the next chapter I proceed to explore how some Korte-relatives experience a lack of effective practices and activities to re-create meaning in their life after migration. Experiences of time become heavily felt when aloneness and emptiness mark the present.

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### “Timepass” - experiences of loss and being

Only the kettle can be heard in Balasingam’s two-bedroom apartment in London. His wife, and grown up daughter have already left for work.<sup>105</sup> Handing me a big cup of milk tea, he sits down in the chair in front of the window which faces the street. A red double-decker bus passes, the clock on the wall between the souvenir from Malaysia and a picture of his sister’s daughter ticks gently. The silent life is in stark contrast to the life in Jaffna of which he has talked during the four days I have been visiting his family in London. Now retired, at the age of 68, he finds it lonely and boring to stay home alone: “I have no one to talk to about all these things I think about”. These “things” meant his life since he had left Korte. And he often stated that he “felt empty”.

Similarly, Inthu, living in Paris, felt alone. Taking the metro home after visiting her husband’s relatives on the other side of Paris she said: “I’m alone. Only Elisabeth [a Tamil friend] and this family [that we just visited]. Not more. My timepass are them, and the two magazines I read”. Being alone, having few activities or people with which to engage during their everyday life, time and being is felt as empty and needs to be passed. Parvathi, Puspha and Jeevan in Korte also often expressed such feelings of emptiness, “aleness” and a search for “timepass” in their everyday life. Family members who migrated *and* family members who remained in Korte, including the post-war Korte-generation, therefore express the same type of emotions.

Emotions of loss, emptiness and sorrow along with a search for timepass and longing for the past are at the heart of this chapter. I have listened and recorded a countless number of stories, both among Korte-relatives and other Tamils, in which

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<sup>105</sup> The daughter of Balasingam’s wife’s sister. She has been living with them since she immigrated illegally and Balasingam calls her daughter or sometimes adopted daughter.

utterings and experiences of “aloneness”, emptiness and search for “timepass” is stressed. By retelling some of the Korte-relatives’ stories, I show that such emotions and the need to “timepass” arise in moments or periods of life when their strivings to make daily life meaningful are not experienced as successful. I argue that crucial to these expressed emotions of aloneness and emptiness and the felt rupture from their former life is their experience of time; the discrepancy between what is anticipated and desired and what is possible give rise to time as a boring period of waiting (Bourdieu 2000, 209). Time needs to be passed.

### **“Timepass” and lack of meaning**

During my time in Jaffna, and among Tamils in the diaspora, I have often heard the expressive Indian English word “timepass” (cf. Fuller 2011), meaning “killing time” or activities to achieve this (Fuller 2011, Srinivas 1998). It first surfaced in academic research in the 1990’s in India, particularly in descriptions of youth culture (Abraham 2002, Fuller 2011, Nisbett 2007, Srinivas 1998). Reviewing the use of the word, Christopher Fuller (2011) pins down the coinage of the word to the 1990s, in an Indian city. Among the Tamils I know, people of all ages use the word, from Sangeetha in her late teens, to Inthu in her mid-fifties and Parvathi in her mid-seventies. It is often expressed along with the phrase *bored addikkathu*, literally “to be hit by boredom”, also using an English verb in a Tamil phrase.

In my view, applying the English word “timepass” or passing time to describe an activity in which one seeks to avoid being “bored” and “empty” illustrates the rupture from everyday life before and after migration: the daily life before “everyone left” is remembered to be a life in the family’s natal village (*ur*) where there was always something to do and someone to do it with: gathering underneath the margosa tree, waving to the trains, visiting, or going to the temple (cf. Chapter 1). The experience of aloneness and boredom is a new experience, one that the Tamil language lacks words to describe. The empty time is experienced as daunting or boring, and needs to be filled with “timepass”.

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The rupture of everyday life in Korte by war and migration can be viewed as what Veena Das (1995) has termed a “critical event”: a moment when one’s everyday life is disrupted, and one’s local world is destroyed. A critical event forces people to reconceptualize their lives in order to find meaning (cf. Finnström 2008, 216). With his concepts of *conatus* and *illusio*, Bourdieu (2000) shows how the importance of experiencing meaning in our daily lives is connected to our experience of time. He terms the state of finding life meaningful, or being in a state of well-being, as *conatus*. An orientation towards meaningfulness is what gives life purpose and direction, and meaning is determined by our habitus. As such, meaning is actively produced in the practices that people sense give their lives meaning (Bourdieu 2000, see also Jackson 2005, xxii). Bourdieu (2000) called the drive to perform practices that produce meaning, *illusio*, which indicates what motivates us in our anticipation of gaining such meaningfulness in the future; this, in turn, depends on our habitus. This connection between a habitus moulded in the past and our anticipation of the future implies that when the field in which our habitus developed is shattered, the need to re-create meaning becomes particularly intensified. A discrepancy arises between our expectations, hopes and desires, and what is practicable in our surroundings, wherever we may be (Bourdieu 2000, 208-9).

Finding it difficult to re-orient our anticipations of meaningful action, or to find new meaningful practices and relations in which to engage, we experience a loss of *illusio* and time is felt. Time is experienced as waiting, as boring; the future is felt to be too slow in coming, and give rise to dissatisfaction with the present and a longing for the past (Bourdieu 2000, 209). This condition is opposed to situations when the human experience is to be in a state of *illusio*, feeling life meaningful. Time passes unnoticed, as we do not experience a radical difference between present and past. The experience of empty time, when there is little or no *illusio* to engage us in meaningful activities, is the most painful of all lacks, since it indicates a lack of future (Bourdieu 2000, 208, 224). It is in such moments that the Korte-relatives do “timepass”, searching to “kill” this daunting time.

In Bourdieu’s view, it is the lack of future that makes the present tedious. As such, the future acts upon the present. This view of time seems to be inspired by Heidegger’s

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(1996) perspective on temporality within which past, present and future are not separated sequences. Rather experiences of past and future always affect the present. To Heidegger (1996, 229), time is being.<sup>106</sup> As such, the absence of a meaningful future might result in an experience of meaninglessness or “emptiness”, as Balasingam expressed this feeling, in the present, threatening the person’s well-being. In this chapter I approach time as experiences of past, present and future folded into each other, in which the experience of the future is crucial to sense life as meaningful.

Experiencing the future emptied of possibilities, the *illusio* is absent and “timepass” is the only thing left to do. However, “timepasses” are only temporary escapes and may easily turn to remembrance of the past. Bourdieu (2000) also points out that in moments when meaningfulness is not experienced or when *illusio* is experienced as absent, a longing for the desired meaningful past arises together with a discontent with the present: “we recall this past to stop its too rapid flight” (Pascal, *Pensées*, 172 quoted in Bourdieu 2000, 209). Thus, it is changes, particularly severe ones, in the field in which our habitus developed that causes dissatisfaction with the present and a yearning for the past, and such memories arise. Just as Nora (1989) argues (cf. Chapter 1), memories come into being at times of rupture: it is when a life form drastically changes that we turn to memories of the past. In this chapter I develop this argument further by showing that people pay particular attention to memories when they are having difficulties adjusting and reorienting themselves to the present: in the case of the Korte-relatives, to find new meaning after the major changes war and migration imposed on their everyday lives. I suggest that the rupture from past social life in Korte, combined with anxieties about the meaning of the present and an uncertain future, produces a need among the Korte-relatives to remember and protect their past way of life, which gave them identity (cf. Nora 1989, 13).

In this need to remember, it seems that the Korte-relatives memories are, as argued by Nora (1989), transformed by a passage of time: memories become more like static representations that strategically highlight and select moments of the past. Memory informs our interpretations of “what are in light of what are no longer” (Nora 1989, 18).

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<sup>106</sup> To Heidegger (1996, 229), being is a being-towards-death. Death provides us with an orientation towards the future; to find meaning or what it means to be an authentic human being, before our certain death. In the moment of death, time comes to its ending. As such, being is time.

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Such static and frozen memories are in contrast to mere memories that are part of daily life, open to dialectic remembering and forgetting and malleable to form the past that suit us in the present (Nora 1989, 8). Freezing and highlighting moments of the former life in their natal village, I show how the Korte-relatives idealize the past and confirm the emptiness and aloneness of the present. These static memories, I suggest, together with the strong emotional ideals and expectations inherent in their notions of kinship, make re-orientation to their new situation more problematic.

### Emptiness, aloneness and timepass in London, Korte and Paris

#### *Balasingam (London): "Inside you are empty"*

Balasingam often talked about how life had changed, from living all together in Korte to living separately. His wife had heard the stories so many times that she was rather fed up with it, something of which Balasingam was well aware, but as he said: "I can't help it, I always think of this so I need to talk about it. But my wife is tired of my talk".<sup>107</sup> As he talked, Balasingam used the word empty several times, but he was unable to explain why he felt this emptiness so strongly. It was not until he drew the map of Korte (cf. Chapter 1), looking at it while talking about how life had been there, that he realized what caused this feeling:

When we talk about this, I understand why I feel empty. Because I miss all this. I miss many people. We are safe, we have money, I have a good life here, but still, inside you are empty. You can trust this people, who lived with me. You can't trust strangers, you don't know about their past, about their this and that [...] So why I feel empty...? You asked me why I feel empty. I had all of this [pauses, looks into the air]. Being together, the unity [...] But we lost the way we lived. Inside we are

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<sup>107</sup> There may be many reasons why Balasingam's wife is fed up with Balasingam's talk about what he misses and how he feels empty, and why she does not voice such utterances herself. One may be that she is not from Korte (cf. Chapter 2). In her natal village, more castes resided than in Korte and Thiruppur. Moreover, being a Vellalar, the dominant caste in Jaffna, her natal *ur* had other residence groups with which to intermarry. As a result, she may not have been used to the same tight unity of *ur-sondam* as the Korte-relatives.



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not happy [...] Why we have to live in this sad way? I'm living comfortable. I have a house, I have a good sofa, bed, everything. Yes, I got everything. "Then why are you sad?", you may ask. Because of this story.

Balasingam's short account points to many of the common themes recounted by Korte-relatives: of the rupture of migration and war, loss of the life and unity they had, being strangers in a new place and the painful "inside" emotions of sadness and emptiness. Tamils often speak about their "inside" feelings. In particular they will separate what they feel inside from what they will publicly show or say. Balasingam stated his emotion of "feeling empty" in English. I have also heard people in Korte and Jaffna using the English word when speaking Tamil. Tamils living in Oslo have also expressed emotions of feeling empty, "tom", in Norwegian. The Tamil word is *verum*, meaning empty or void, and *verumai* the adjective form used to describe the feeling. Stating the feeling of empty in English or *verum* in Tamil, indicates a sad, melancholic and undesirable state of emptiness, or a void inside oneself that derives from feeling a lack of something.

While migration and war stand as a profound rupture, it is a rupture of a particular kind: These social and political events disrupted all the relations into which the Korte-relatives had been socialized and on which they had learned to rely. These were the relations which constituted their daily life, and their meaningful world. In Chapter 3, I argued that to understand the relations between culture, or its "inhabitants" and emotions, one needs to know what is at stake (Lutz and White 1986). For the Korte-relatives, being part of the enmeshment with their relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) is what gave existential meaning to their lives, and being part of this unity was desired and striven for. The loss of such significant relationships and activities, living separated from kin and natal village, and finding no similar structures of belonging in the present, may therefore be experienced emotionally as a threat or danger to their identity or personhood.

In London, Balasingam does not live among kin, and, therefore, does not find the support from his neighbours amid a life of doing things together, with which his past life in Korte provided him. Moreover the absence of the dense unity of neighbouring close relatives in Korte, and more distant ones in Thiruppur, provided by their marriage

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pattern, gives life in London a different character. Balasingam's own migration, along with the migration of his other relatives, as well as the effects of war, has torn apart the social fabric of his past life, his habitus; the world he knew and of which he was part, resulting in the painful experience of emptiness, of which he speaks.

Living in London, Balasingam is no longer able to engage himself in the activities that he remember to have produced the "good life", or *conatus*, in the past. Bourdieu (2000, 142) stresses the principle of practical engagement in order to comprehend and make sense of the world. It is when we are pre-occupied by the world in which we actively intervene, that an immediate relationship of involvement gives meaning to the world. Living in London, Paris, Oslo or Korte today, the Korte-relatives cannot see each other, talk face to face, share food, visit or share physical presence with their siblings, cousin-siblings and other relatives on a daily basis. For that to happen, Balasingam stated that; "I need to hire a jet plane", referring to the geographical distance that separates them.

Having few such activities in which to involve themselves, to perform their accustomed roles: their habitus, *illusio* fails to appear (Bourdieu 2000). The investment that Balasingam has learned to make, in the sociality of relatives and his natal village, is no longer possible to achieve, as the conditions for this habitus have been shattered. In such moments, the drive to undertake actions that otherwise would have helped him experience life as meaningful is weakened, and a dissatisfaction with the present surfaces (cf. Bourdieu 2000, 209). I suggest that the anticipations and expectations of the future inherent in their notions and ideals of the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) enhances the dissatisfaction with the present: their relatives were supposed to marry each other and continue to live in their natal village (*ur*). Now there are few such activities in which to involve oneself.

The experience of emptiness in the present suggests that while sensorial practices of the sociality which brought forth the particular enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* unravelled, the conception of this wholeness remains as a cognitive ideal. The discrepancy of what is desired and what is achievable makes the present empty. The future of the Korte-person is connected to the future of the *ur-sondam* unity. Like Bourdieu, Paul Connerton (1989, 12) argues that the "individual's consciousness of

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time is to a large degree an awareness of society's continuity, or more exactly the image of continuity the society creates". The uncertain future of the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* shapes the future of the family members. In moments where Korte-relatives find little or no *illusio* to grip them, the uncertain future of the *ur-sondam* unity offers little hope for their own future, resulting in the present being experienced as empty. This empty present is contrasted to the past, which they experienced to have been an everyday life characterized by meaningfulness when enmeshed in these relationships and activities. Past and future, then, impose upon the present (cf. Heidegger 1996).

The uncertain future and lack of *illusio* that are experienced at moments in life, profoundly affects Balasingam's sense of time. Heidegger (1996, 304) emphasises that the future is dominant in our experience of time and our self-understanding. If being is time (cf. Heidegger 1996), empty time is as such an empty being or at least an experience, at moments, of an empty being. To Bourdieu (2000, 208, 224) it is exactly such empty time that is the most threatening and painful absence since it indicates a lack of future. Without a clear future of enmeshment in the *ur-sondam* unity to direct their anticipations and expectations in everyday life, being, for the Korte-relatives, may be experienced as threatened, producing strong emotions. Here, the rupture that threatens the future unity of the *ur-sondam* may be viewed as metaphorically related to the Lacanian view presented in Chapter 2 within which ruptures from such a wholeness are regarded as producing a potentially threatening empty and meaningless void.

The experience of an uncertain future, making the present painfully empty, is one way in which migration, war and the continued situation of living apart from one's former habitus is experienced as a rupture and as emotionally troublesome. While Balasingam emphasised his sadness and feeling of being empty, others, such as Parvathi and Inthu, talked about how they seek for timepasses when feeling alone and empty.

***Parvathi (Korte) and Inthu (Paris): "This is my timepass"***

Recall the story of Parvathi in the opening paragraph to the Introduction of this dissertation. Parvathi stayed behind in Korte when most of her relatives, including her own children, migrated and settled abroad. Parvathi often stated that "We are alone

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here”, *inge nage tannie irrikinam*, referring to herself and her husband: “My relations, almost everyone are in Norway [...] or London, or Canada [...] and France.” For Parvathi, like others who remained in Korte, there are few relatives around to talk with or visit and no children or grandchildren that need to be looked after in daily life. And like Balasingam, Parvathi does not involve herself much with her new neighbours, the “strangers”.

Parvathi, like Balasingam, therefore has few activities or relationships in which to involve herself, at least not in the way she remembers having been occupied in the past, with gatherings, visits and other activities with her relatives. Even the few relatives who are left, Parvathi does not see often. From time-to-time Vijaya and Sasikala, the daughters of her eldest brother, stop by, and on Fridays she passes their houses on the way to the temple. After Parvathi and Puspha, being ill, had a quarrel, Parvathi stopped visiting her. The actions that once daily created a consciousness of being part of the *ur-sondam* unity, that gave everyday life the character of *illusio* and meaning (cf. Bourdieu 2000), are long gone.

Being alone, or *tannie* as Parvathi says with sadness in Tamil, marks the present. To be alone is not a desired state for a Tamil. One is supposed to be among relatives or “one’s own” (cf. Daniel 1989). Living with only her husband and few other relatives around, Parvathi feels alone. And Parvathi does not always find the company she desires in her husband either: “he doesn’t like to talk” Parvathi proclaims. Being mostly alone, Parvathi prefers to sit underneath the coconut trees in her garden with a view of the street. This has become her “timepass” she says. Here she watches through the bars of the gate to see if someone passes. This is what entertains her and occupies her time: *vuduppo pakelam*, “we watch gossip” she used to say.

Timepass, as a means of dealing with aloneness, also characterizes the everyday life of Inthu in Paris, described in the introduction to this chapter. Inthu moved from Oslo to Paris after she married to live with her husband. They remained childless and now live in a spacious one-bedroom government apartment outside Paris. Her husband works six days a week in the kitchen of a French restaurant, Wednesdays or Thursdays being his day off, whilst Inthu now works cleaning in a furniture store in the centre of Paris before opening hours Monday to Saturday. This situation leaves Inthu mostly to herself.

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When I visited Inthu in Paris again in January 2012 we went to see her husbands' mother's brother and his family, also distant Thiruppur-relatives. They live approximately one hour away by metro from Inthu's place. On the way back to Inthu's apartment, we stopped at La Chapelle, popularly called "petit Jaffna" as it has become a Tamil commercial centre.<sup>108</sup> When we came out of the metro station, Inthu found her way to her regular Tamil grocery shop where she bought curry leaves, fish, drumsticks and the red small onions used in curries before she picked up her two twice-weekly Indian Tamil magazines in a kiosk.<sup>109</sup> Inthu has been reading these two magazines since she was fifteen years old and living in Korte. The first time I visited Inthu in Paris in the autumn of 2009, the magazines were laying on her coffee table in her apartment, and she explained that: "I have had these sent to me since I came to Norway. All my life I read this, since I was a young girl there [in Korte]." Now the magazines are easily accessible in any city where Tamils have established shops. After picking up the magazines, we took the metro back to Inthu's apartment. She held the magazines in her hands, resting on her lap, and said:

I'm alone. Only Elisabeth [a Tamil friend] and this family [that we just visited]. Not more. My timepass are them, and the two magazines I read, and to watch movies. Not more. I feel alone. I'm thinking that no one should be a refugee [...]

Inthu trails off, before she resumes: "Only those two families and the magazines. That is my timepass."

Like Parvathi, Inthu is feeling alone, *tannie*, and trying to fill her time. She only has a few relatives and one friend to visit in Paris. But since they live far away from Inthu she only sees them approximately once a month. The other Thiruppur-relatives in Paris

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<sup>108</sup> In La Chapelle Tamils have opened shops, selling every ingredient needed to cook the many Tamil curries. Together with Tamil restaurants, sari shops, beauty parlours, barber shops, kiosks selling newspapers and Indian Tamil movies, and tailors that stitches sari blouses and *panjabis* these Tamil shops occupy the whole area from La Chapelle to Garde du Nord. There are many such "little Jaffnas" around the world in cities that are the homes of large Tamil populations. In her research on Tamil migration, Thirangama (2011) found that the first "Little Jaffna" or *Sinna-Yalpannam* in Tamil, was a 1920s enclave in Kuala Lumpur established by Tamils who arrived there from the 1870s, many brought by British civil servants. Coming as young single men, they soon brought their families or if unmarried, married Jaffna women, set up enclaves and developed the Tamil commercial centre (Thirangama 2011).

<sup>109</sup> Drumstick, or *murungakai* in Tamil, is a long, slender and green vegetable with triangular seed-pods.

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also live in suburbs over an hour's travel from Inthus apartment.<sup>110</sup> Though living within the same city they live far from each other compared to the closeness they were used to in Korte and Thiruppur. The geographical distance precludes daily meeting points or daily meaningful activities which could provide the experience of *illusio*.

Sometimes Inthu also meets other relatives when there is a puberty ceremony, a wedding or a funeral in Paris among Ariyalai-people and occasionally, for her siblings' and their children's' birthday parties and puberty ceremonies, Inthu and her husband go to Oslo and stay two weeks. But these are not daily activities. Like Balasingam and Parvathi, Inthu does not have many activities in which to engage herself, nothing that "grips" her (cf. Bourdieu 2000) and few relatives with which to entangle her lifeline in her everyday life. Like Parvathi, Inthu feels alone, seeking refuge in movies and magazines to pass the time.

To live away from Korte was not something Inthu had wanted, but the situation in Sri Lanka forced her to leave and remain abroad, as she explained:

I started to work as a teacher [...] in Mulleittivu. That was in '84. The army came to our quarters, and they searched everywhere [for LTTE cadres]. When I came home on leave for New Year, I told to my family what had happened.<sup>111</sup> They said "Stop, stop! Leave the job." *Amma* and *appa* didn't let me go back. I was very sad. I wrote to Murali and Selvi. They decided I should come [to Norway]. So I came. I thought I only should stay there until the war stopped. But after I finished the school [the "Folkehøyskole" in Norway], it was more and more war. So it was difficult to go back. Then I got married and I came here [to Paris], and then we stayed.

The life Inthu finds herself living in Paris, and Parvathi in Korte is not how life should be, being very different from the life they had been socialized into and had learned to rely on. They feel alone, comparing their situation to the way they had lived among relatives, and the way they had pictured themselves living in the future. Inthu should have returned to Korte, as should Parvathi's children and their other relatives. Or they should never have left in the first place. Instead of watching the street outside the

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<sup>110</sup> Only one other Korte-relative lives in Paris; Balasingam's brother who Inthu only sees for family rituals. The rest are distant Thiruppur-relatives or merely "*ur-akhal*", i.e. people from Ariyalai.

<sup>111</sup> Tamil New Year, *Thai Pongal*, is celebrated on January 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup>.

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gate or reading magazines by themselves, they should have been involved in meaningful everyday practices together with relatives. And in these practices they would daily have reproduced the kin- and caste-group living continuously in their village (*ur*) and thus re-made Korte as their place. As such their daily practices would have upheld the sociality that gave life meaning; the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*).

According to Bourdieu (2000), the free time that appears when there is a discrepancy between what is anticipated from our habitus and what actually is, is experienced as “dead time, purposeless and meaningless” (Bourdieu 2000, 222). Finding themselves mostly alone with little to engage them, time is experienced as empty, boring, waiting. The loss of relations and activities is emotionally felt as opposed to their experience of past life as “busy”, so that they did not notice time passing (Bourdieu 2000, 224). Dead, or empty time needs to be “killed” (Bourdieu 2000, 224) as it is “the most painful of wants” (Bourdieu 2000, 226). This is what they seek to do in their timepass. However, doing timepass to kill this meaningless time does not seem to sooth Parvathi or Inthu much. They both express a sadness or melancholy when they state that what they do is timepass.

Except for Craig Jeffrey’s (2010) ethnography of educated unemployed young men and their timepass in North-India, previous work on timepass has tended to emphasize leisure and pleasurable distraction (Abraham 2002, Nisbett 2007, Srinivas 1998, cf. Jeffrey 2010, 80 ). Usually based on research in metropolitan India, timepass in these accounts connotes a welcomed period of rest, and oftentimes activities done in groups of friends or with a person of the opposite sex. Among the young men with whom Jeffrey (2010) worked, he found that they rather spoke of timepass in a forlorn and melancholic manner, in which it was contrasted to serious and meaningful use of time (Jeffrey 2010, 80). Thus to find timepass was regarded as necessary in order to avoid surplus time when they were unable to find meaningful ways of engaging in the world.

To Parvathi and Inthu, being alone and unoccupied is not a joyful situation of surplus time, of “finally getting some time to myself”. Rather it is a daunting feeling. Being alone most of the time, experiencing few purposeful or meaningful activities and relationships in which to engage themselves, they seek to find something that can

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occupy their time. However, watching the street through the gate as Parvathi does or reading Tamil magazines as Inthu does, are inadequate flights from meaningless boredom. These are activities they do mainly alone, involving few relatives or others, which do not “grip” them in the same way their previous life gripped them.

Rather, watching the empty street outside often seems to leave Parvathi’s mind to wander, remembering life before, recalling all those who left and how life should have been. Falling silent and looking thoughtful, the timepass leaves her in-between a remembered past of meaningfulness and an empty present caused by the uncertainties of the future: what will happen to her, living so far from her children, cousin-siblings and their children? Who will take care of her in a few years when she will need help? And what will happen to their family’s natal village and her relatives when everyone lives abroad? Likewise, Inthu does not find much satisfaction in reading magazines or watching movies.

The timepass of the Korte-relatives thereby seems to not merely “kill time”, but it highlights the rupture from the past and strengthens the feeling of the present as meaningless. It leaves them in a temporal structure between an uncertain future and a past that is not left behind. The search for timepass, to find meaningful activities in order to reorient themselves is, therefore, not experienced as successful.

### *Empty- and aloneness despite surrounding communities*

After living between twenty, thirty years in their “new” surroundings, Inthu in Paris, Parvathi in Korte and Balasingam in London feel alone, *tannie*, and empty, despite the fact that in Paris, as well as in London and in Korte and moreover Jaffna today, there exist Tamil communities. Similar to the “petit Jaffna” in La Chapelle in Paris there are Tamil shops, organizations and temples in London, particularly in the area of Ealing and Wembley. And in Korte, other Tamils, have moved in, but are seen as strangers. These communities do not seem to offer the Korte-relatives similar meanings to those they describe in the past, and interaction with them does not occupy or grip them in the same manner, or change their state of feeling empty and alone.

The experience of feeling empty and alone, despite a surrounding community of people and places, confirms my arguments in Chapters 1 and 2; that pre-war Korte-



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relatives are enmeshed in their relationships with their family and their place (*sondam* and *ur*), and are not simply part of an open meshwork (cf. Ingold 2007a, 2011). Experiencing their own lifeline as entangled with the lifelines of their relatives and their surroundings, the stretching out of these relationships left their own lifelines with few entanglements. Their own lifelines becomes less dense and emotions of emptiness and aloneness enter instead. If our immediate and concrete surroundings, including other persons, are central to our experience of the world, as Ingold (2007a, 2011) argues, one could assume that Balasingam, Parvathi and Inthu would equally entwine their lifeline with their new surroundings, and new people, in their new places of London and Paris, as well as the new Korte and Thiruppur. Then they would not notice the rupture of their way of life caused by war and migration to such a great extent. But their accounts show that they do experience such a rupture. In particular their accounts capture how, as discussed in Chapter 2, the strangers surrounding them in London, Paris and Korte do not give them a consciousness of common *sondam* as life in Korte and Thriuppur did (cf. Banks 1957, 174). What is at stake for them is to be enmeshed in relationships with their relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). This has to do with more than the access to physical and sensorial relationships and entwinings. Human understanding of a world of possible entwinings with persons and surroundings is conditioned by conceptions and ideals of how life is and should continue to be (cf. Deleuze 2000).

The effects of living disconnected from the social structure of which one used to be part, and should still inhabit, are related to the tension between *akam*, inside, and *puram*, outside in Tamil cosmology, (cf. Chapter 3; also Ramanujan 1985, 262).<sup>112</sup> Discussing the lives of Tamil migrants in Norway in the 1990's, Fuglerud (1996) points out that when breaking or moving out of reach of rituals securing the order that maintains *akam* "a person is susceptible to *tosam*, deep afflicting disorders of the body's natural order" (1996, 78). As Fuglerud (1996, 78) stresses, it is the social character of *tosam* that needs to be emphasised. It is not a question of the relation between the person and divine forces alone: by living outside the social context in which the cosmological principles are embedded, characterised by inside, house, kin, family, settlement and moral codes conserving *akam*, one may inflict *tosam* upon oneself.

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<sup>112</sup> This cosmology can be seen in old Cankam-poetry and rituals, as described in Chapter 3, p. 118.

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In his analysis of suicide among Indian Tamil internal migrants in Sri Lanka, Daniel (1989) has captured the experience of putting oneself outside the social structures maintaining *akam*. He has termed this *tanimai tosam*, “aloneness disorder”, claiming that the experience of “aloneness” is a “dark” and culture-specific state of being:

Paradoxically, “aloneness” is not being alone in the strict sense. It is being disconnected from other human beings with whom one ought to be connected. The corollary of such disconnectedness is finding oneself in the company of undesirable entities, abnormal persons and powers. The social bonds and one’s bondedness with the social prevents the intrusion into society and the socialized self of such “alien” persons and powers (Daniel 1989, 78).

Living in London or Paris, or remaining in Korte, not finding structures of belonging and direction such as those that life in pre-war Korte provided, emotions and experiences of feeling empty and alone arise in the present. As the stories above show, Korte-relatives do not feel alone because there are no other people, or even no other Tamils around, but because they are not living with and frequently interacting with large numbers of family. Fuglerud (1996, 78-79) also points to Daniel’s analysis of this particular kind of “aloneness” when analysing Tamil exile life. He states that such vulnerability of the disconnected individual is an underlying theme of exile life. To be disconnected from a unity that provided wellbeing and meaning is emotionally felt as a threatening emptiness and aloneness. These are undesired situations and emotions.

While the practical and sensorial wholeness of the *ur-sondam* has dissolved, it still remains as a cognitive map of what is expected or desired to the Korte-relatives. The failure of today’s reality to match that map results in undesired emotions of emptiness, aloneness and boredom which Korte-relatives seek to avoid through timepass. Yet, the lack of a dense unity of *sondam* seems to leave some Korte-relatives with fewer incentives to visit the relatives they actually can visit and physically be with: Inthu finds it difficult to see her relatives more than once a month due to the distances in Paris. For the same reason, Balasingam does not visit his two brothers and one sister in London often, and Parvathi and Puspha have not sorted out their disagreement so they can be part of each other’s lives again. This brings me to the last story I want to include in this

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chapter, concerning Puspha and her son Jeevan. The story highlights how the social rupture of life gives little *illusio* to make an extra effort to maintain and repair difficult relationships even among the relatives who live close by each other in Korte.

***Puspha and Jeevan (Korte): "Relations here in Jaffna suck"***

Nowhere, more than in the house where Puspha lived with her two children, did I feel the "aloneness" and absence of relatives in Korte more pressing. Until her death in July 2012, Puspha was the only one of the Sittampalam-siblings left in Korte. However, Puspha, her husband and children had lived in Vavuniya from 1989 - 2009. When the war worsened and Korte became a war zone, Puspha's husband, a government civil servant, had asked for a transfer away from Jaffna. They only returned to Korte in December 2009, after discovering that Puspha had a chronic disease and that treatment was only available at the hospitals in Jaffna or Colombo. Puspha's siblings abroad had urged the family to move back "home" to Korte because they had a house and relatives there.

Upon my first brief visit to Jaffna in 2011, Puspha was very ill and hospitalized. I knew that some of her relatives, including Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya, lived a few houses down the road on each side. Since Puspha was sick, and her children were by themselves, I expected that someone would visit whilst I was there. But the tradition of unity and support, in particular in bad times of which I had heard so much talk, failed to materialize: no one appeared that evening, and no one brought food to the house.

Puspha recovered sufficiently to return home later that month in 2011. When I settled in Jaffna in 2012, I discovered that the lack of visits that day in 2011 was not an isolated instance. During my time in Jaffna, only once did my visit to Puspha's house coincide with another visit; of a former colleague of Puspha. Puspha and her children were mostly by themselves, and as I was about to learn, feeling alone. In particular the son, Jeevan, felt alone and weighed down with responsibility, especially after his father passed away just a few months after they had moved to Korte.

One day, early in February, when I visited their house, Puspha had one of her better days and was talking about her life and her family. At that time, her brother Murali was also visiting from Oslo, but he had gone to Kataragama for a few days and they were by

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themselves again.<sup>113</sup> Her sister, Inthu, phoned to talk to Murali, and as Murali was away, Puspha and Inthu talked for a while. After hanging up, Puspha seemed tired. She sighed and lent back in her chair. Jeevan looked at his mother and then fixed his eyes in the red painted floor, and said:

Now I don't feel that there is anyone to care for us. We are all alone here. There are no relations coming to see us or to help us. Relations here in Jaffna sucks [...] My sister, my mother, it is so much responsibility. Sometimes I just want to bang my head into the wall. My mother is like almost gone sometimes, and she is also asking and yelling. I feel so alone.

There is frustration and sadness in Jeevan's words. To be alone in this delicate situation makes life difficult and lonely for the family. Such aloneness, in particular when relatives are aging, is seen through Korte, Thiruppur and neighbouring *urs*. Old people live by themselves, with few or none to care for them since their children and most of their other relatives live abroad.

When Murali returned from Kataragama he also pointed to the lack of visits to Puspha's house: "Here, there is no-one who visits. Selvi has many [in-law] relatives here, my wife has many relatives. But there is no one who visits". As the in-law families of one's sisters and brothers also are considered as one's own family, Murali would expect both his own and Selvi's in-laws living in Jaffna (as discussed in the previous chapter) to visit Puspha. Like Selvi's in-laws, Murali's in-laws also live near to Korte, about fifteen minutes' walk in the opposite direction. When I asked Murali why he thinks their in-laws do not visit he just answered "I don't know", taking his hand to the forehead, and shaking his head as in despair. In a conversation later that year, Murali said that he thought his and Selvi's in-laws should come and see Puspha out of respect to him and Selvi, if not often, at least once a month. However they did not.

Puspha's siblings abroad, Jeevan, and I myself, would have expected Puspha to count on their relatives in Korte and Thiruppur for everyday support and help, as well as on their in-law families living near Korte. But help and support in the forms of visit and food seldom appeared. Murali used to talk with Puspha and cook for her when he

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<sup>113</sup> Kataragama is a tourist and pilgrim site in the south of Sri Lanka.

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visited, but this was only for a few weeks at time. Sometimes they were able to hire people to cook and clean for them, but social support from relatives living close by was missing. Moreover, Puspha made little effort to repair the disagreement she had had with Parvathi. Admittedly, she was not in a condition to walk over to Parvathi's house. However, she could have called.

Although some relatives are left in Korte, the relationships they had before migration and war are not maintained in the same way, particularly when they become challenging, as in the case of Puspha and Parvathi. It seemed that their rift in their relationship also had affected Puspha's relationships with Sasikala and Vijaya. Sasikala and Vijaya are closer in terms of genealogy as well as socially to Parvathi than Puspha. While Puspha had lived in Vavuniya for twenty years, Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya had lived together in Korte for many years. Their closer relationship to Parvathi, and the disagreement between Parvathi and Puspha seemed to be the reason why Sasikala and Vijaya also did not visit Puspha. Had there been many other relatives in their *ur*, Puspha would still have received other visitors or relatives would have intervened to repair the rift between Puspha and Parvathi. I suggest that the small number of relatives left in Korte leaves the family members feeling less motivation or *illusio*, and perhaps less motivated to assume responsibility for upholding difficult bonds: there are supposed to be many relatives living together to share such burdens.

While Puspha did not receive many visits from her relatives living in Korte, nor distant relatives in Thiruppur, Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya also interacted with each other infrequently, despite being on good terms and enjoying each other's company when they did visit. Similarly, Balasingam seldom sees his sibling in London, nor Inthu her relatives in Paris. Having fewer relatives living close together makes the experience of unity of the *sondam* weaker and more fragile. The easy daily accessibility to everyday activities involving each other is lacking. When relatives do visit each other, they seem to appreciate each other's company; talking, cooking and eating together, particularly when attending functions, which will be discussed in the next chapter. And when migrant Korte-relatives return to visit Korte, intense engagement between the relatives is seen: the migrants take great interest in family life and bring gifts, as described in the previous chapter. Similarly, when receiving visits, in Korte, Paris or

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Oslo, they do their utmost to feed visiting relatives with their favourite dishes. But as I will show in the following chapter, these visits only come together after extensive planning and last for only brief periods of time. They no longer happen “naturally” in daily life as before, but require extra effort.

It is this loss of an overall state of *illusio* in which meaningful activities and relationships were easily accessible and just happened, that seems to inflict damage upon contemporary relationships. In such conditions, it takes extra effort to involve oneself in activities because one is not motivated in the same way as before. Bewildered by the absence of an everyday life in *illusio*, enmeshed in relations with relatives and their village, moments of their lives are tinted with experiences of aloneness, pain, meaninglessness and despair. The political and social processes of war and migration thereby inflict themselves upon personal emotions and experiences of everyday being.

### **Between an uncertain future and a past not left behind**

The Korte-relatives’ description of feelings of emptiness, aloneness and the need for timepass, are also ways of expressing and sharing their pain. Das (1996, 88) has argued that by putting the experience of loss in everyday life into words, the loss becomes “public” and as such acknowledged and recognized. In this process, the life for those in mourning, who are struggling to cope with losses beyond their control, becomes bearable. Balasingam’s endless talk about his emptiness and how his life had changed might be seen as just such a need to put words to his pain in order to come to terms with it. However, I suggest that the repeated harping on feelings of emptiness or aloneness may also be a way to avoid stating what really troubles them. The words describing these emotions and experiences cover up the brutal rupture that was inflicted upon them, over which they had no control. The general insecurity and difficulties of living and earning in Jaffna, the terror of shelling, gun-fights and abductions inflicted by both government and LTTE forces, dispersed and separated them from their loved-ones. For nearly 30 years, they witnessed or heard about torture, disappearances, and people being killed. I suggest that the Korte-relatives repeatedly address their inner, melancholic emotions because it is too painful to put words to the actual happenings that caused the

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rupture and these feeling. Doing so would force them to confront these experiences again, reliving the horrors that struck their way of life.

The collapse of their society and way of living is their sorrow, as is the shattered future of which they dreamed: the future should have been as the past; living together in their natal village and, as such, living a meaningful everyday life. In those moments when re-orientation is not experienced as successful, the Korte-relatives attend to the idealized past, as Parvathi often does while doing her timepass of watching the street outside the gate. Nora (1989) points out that it is in the process of such great losses and changes to their way of life that people experience a need to remember in an attempt to protect what is lost: the “fear of a rapid and final disappearance [combined] with anxiety about the meaning of the present and uncertainty about the future” (Nora 1989, 13) makes people feel responsible for remembering.

In the processes of remembering, what was a *milieux de mémoire*, environment of memory, where memory is carried in tradition and costumes, lived and acted out, is transformed by a passage through time: selected moments of the past are strategically highlighted, rendering the past as static representations (Nora 1989). By remembering, holding on to representations of the way of life in which they used to be included, the Korte-relatives protect what defined them; who they are in light of what they no longer are. They depend on these reproduced and “frozen” representations to understand who they are, having something to hold onto after the critical rupture of war and migration. Thereby, a situation arises in which the less memory is experienced collectively in daily practices, the more is the need for the individual to remember (Nora 1989, 16). The paradox is that, while longing for the days of social unity, it takes more effort to actually seek such togetherness than relatives are prepared to make, as the relationship between Parvathi and Puspha shows. Balasingam seems to find himself in a similar situation.

#### *Holding on to memories*

Balasingam went further than most of the Korte-relatives in order to remember the unity of family in their natal village. After settling in London, he often drank. He told me that he liked to drink when he got back from work in order to remember:

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When I was drinking the memories came back. I would drink, sit back [he leans backwards in the beige sofa, fold his arms in the back of the his head and fix the eyes in the white painted ceiling] and the memories of that time would come. I could remember many things. How we lived there. I would just sit back and think of those times. It was kind of relaxing, to escape.

During his first years in London there were no other relatives living there, but rather than seeking new relationships and activities in which to engage whilst living in London, Balasingam preferred to escape a meaningless present by drinking in order to remember the past. He felt alone, but also desired such moments of being alone in order to remember the unity. After he married, he continued to drink.<sup>114</sup> He withdraws himself from possible relationships so that he can remember. With no other way to experience unity in real life, he seeks to remember. He becomes, as Nora (1989, 16) terms it a “memory-individual”: feeling responsible for remembering the society that is lost. The alcohol helped him remember, to reach his destination of the unity of the relatives in their natal village, at least for a while.

Among the Korte-relatives, as well as other Tamils, expression of experiencing moments of emptiness and being alone are common from time to time, as is the recall of the idealized past described in Chapter 1. I suggest that recalling memories of this past, remembering who one is in the light of who one no longer is, can be a way to protect their self-understanding (cf. Connerton 1989, 22, Nora 1989). This can be vital when finding it difficult to reorient themselves to their new reality and re-create meaning. Yet, holding on to and frequently recalling the static memories of how life and oneself used to be seems to make the process of finding new meaning more problematic. It illuminates and reconfirms the discontinuity of their life (cf. Nora 1989, 16) and strengthens their long for the past (cf. Bourdieu 2000).

Today Balasingam has stopped drinking: “I realized I was making too much problem to Esuary [his wife] and my daughter so it was better for the family if I quit

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<sup>114</sup> Although Balasingam’s was married, his aloneness might be reinforced by the fact that his anticipation of marrying within the *sondam* and *ur* was frustrated by the rupture. Instead he married a “stranger” and found himself living with someone with whom he ought not be connected (Daniel 1989).



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drinking”. However he continues to feel empty, cherishing and idealizing memories of the past as his other relatives do.

***Walking memories: stories of houses and family members***

While the alcohol helped Balasingam to remember, the relatives remaining in Korte or visiting Korte are vividly reminded of the past when moving around in the landscape. On their walks or rides on bicycles on the way to the temple, the community well or the library, or upon visits to other families, Parvathi, Sasikala or Murali and Inthu and others visiting from abroad, pointed out houses, empty lands and ruins, explaining who used to live in these houses.

One Saturday morning as we were going to the temple to do a small *puja*, or prayer ritual, Parvathi pointed out the house in which she grew up, now rented out to strangers. Further down the lane, passing the Sittampalam family’s house, she said “this is where Selvi and Inthu used to live. We use to run here to wave to the Colombo train. Now they are all gone”. Passing the houses where her cousin-sisters used to live makes Parvathi remember the past and compare it to the different present. The houses are material confirmations of memories of past life and witnesses to what no longer is, confirming the experienced rupture of their life.

On another walk, Siva, the son of Parvathi’s sister who visited from London, accompanied her. On the very same lane on which Parvathi and her husband live, before reaching the childhood home of the Sittampalam-siblings, Siva stopped in front of a rusted red gate. Behind it was a small brick house with a plastic roof. Some women in worn out saris were cooking over a fireplace in the open space. He looked at them and said to Parvathi and me:

This is where we used to live, when I was a small boy. It was my mother’s house. We moved [abroad] after my father was shot. Now it is just this land and we allow these people to stay here. This full lane here, we all used to live here.

Seeing strangers, internally displaced Tamils, inhabiting their land and making their food here are strong reminders of the past and of living in unity with relatives. Now watching the land from the gate, being in Korte with Parvathi and just a few other

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relatives is in stark contrast to the life Siva remembers having lived here with his family. Listening to Siva, seeing him in front of the gate where she used to see him as a small boy, also seem to move Parvathi. She looked at Siva and sadly stated: “that time is finished”.

Empty lands, overgrown gardens and ruins of houses were equally reminders of the past and of family members. When Murali visited Jaffna in February 2012, he stayed with Puspha, but was in the process of planning to construct the house for himself and his wife on his wife’s dowry land. He wanted to show me the plot and the location, a few minutes cycle ride from Korte. Cycling from Puspha’s house and on the way out of Korte, before crossing the A9, Murali pointed to a plot of land with an overgrown garden and a few ruins: “That is the house of my father’s relatives. They left a long time ago. The whole family is in France. We used to be close.”

Pointing out such ruins, houses or empty lands together with the memory of who had lived there, was done constantly when the relatives moved around in Korte and Thiruppur. The relatives living in or visiting Korte thereby “read” the landscape in terms of what once has been, interpreting and understanding their surroundings in terms of history (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2009). Landscapes are, therefore, not neutral arenas, merely bringing forth experiences, thoughts and memories in the people who live and interact with them. Rather, the experiences and memories of the relatives, in relation to the perceived surroundings, are assemblages of the landscape and their own historical, social and remembered interpretation of that landscape.

Living within the geographical landscape of physical and concrete memories of their past life, or visiting and seeing these memories, may emphasise the experience of rupture and discontinuity between present and past lives, and the paucity of hope to regain this life in the future. The lands, houses or ruins, together with the surroundings of flower- and fruit trees and palmyra trees so characteristic of Jaffna (see also Thiranagama 2011, 146), the heat, the humidity and smells, vividly brings forth the past. Thiranagama (2007, 135-136) also points out the importance of such sensory access to past life. Living in camps in Puttalam, the internally displaced Muslims with whom she worked lived in a landscape similar to that of the *urs* they had lost in the North. This

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brought forth a different experience of loss than that of those externally displaced: it resided in their very everyday life and doings (Thiranagama 2007, 135).

Visiting or living in the landscape of the present Korte and Thiruppur, the physical landscape is similar and dissimilar, known and strange. The meaningful past and the empty present touch upon each other, but yet are worlds apart. Loss, for those still residing in Korte, is inherent in everyday life, whilst for those living abroad, it is vividly brought back to life upon their visits. Thus living or visiting in Korte, the past is always present, emphasizing the differences between past and present and as such enhancing the experience of rupture, lack of future and lack of meaning.

### **Rupture, time and strive for meaning**

War and migration disrupted the Korte-relatives way of living and their social structures along with the expectations and anticipations of how life would and should be in the future. In this chapter I have discussed how the Korte-relatives' utterances of feeling empty and alone and their struggle to find timepass, bear witness to a discomfort with the present stemming from the loss of *illusio*. In their striving to re-orient themselves and find meaning after the critical events of war and migration were inflicted upon their lives, not all activities are experienced as meaningful. No longer enmeshed in relationships and activities with their *sondam* and *ur* on a daily basis, painful, undesired emotions of emptiness and aloneness arise. This experience of time and being as meaningless can last for brief moments, days or longer periods of life, such as Balasingam's first years in London, or Inthu's or Parvathi's daily life in Paris and Korte respectively.

Dissatisfaction with their current lives moreover leads to a longing for the past and negation of the present (Bourdieu 2000, 209). As Nora (1989) also argues, it is in moments when a social life form is destroyed that memories come into being and we humans tend to give them attention and importance. Doing timepass when feeling alone or empty does not give rise to a new *illusio*, but rather confirms a sense of an absent future, leading to a turn to the perceived meaningful past. To remember the past in moments or periods when the present is experienced as daunting protects their

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conception of themselves through consideration of what they have lost. This attention to the past, however, reconfirms and highlights the discontinuity of their life. As memories become frozen idealizations of the past, the experiences of the past become less malleable, making it more difficult for memories to be fitted to the present (Nora 1989). This, I suggest, makes re-orientation: finding new meaningful activities and relationships in which to engage, more problematic for the relatives.

The strength of the emotional ideal of the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*, I suggest, emphasises the difference between past and present, leading to the present being experienced as dissatisfying. Moreover this ideal makes re-orientation towards new and meaningful relationships difficult, as the Korte-relatives' kinship ideology prescribes how life should be and how it should continue: relatives should marry relatives and continue to live and interact with each other within their natal village. In their new life and situation this is difficult at best. Experiencing their striving to make daily life meaningful as difficult or largely unsuccessful, the past becomes dominant in their understandings of themselves in the present, vital to their being. The "trauma" of being ripped out of their social relations and expected life-cycle is encapsulated and affirmed in their memories. Their present, or their being, becomes a temporality in which past, present and future fold into each other. In these moments they find themselves between an uncertain future and a past that is not yet left behind.

In Chapters 8 and 9 I will discuss how the obsession with the past among migrant relatives, as well as other diasporic Tamils, is not only enhanced but also turned toward the future by their support of LTTE and engagement in the organizations' activities and rituals. Before that, however, in the next chapter I turn to discuss how the necessity to remember and to find meaningful moments and activities leads relatives to invest much time, money and emotion into life-cycle rituals. In these rituals, the activities of staging, recording and "memorizing" family unity take centre stage. However, absence, separation and geographical and social distance are apparent along with family closeness and co-presence.

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# Ritualized ambivalence: media and memory

It is an early morning in mid-August in Selvi's home in Oslo. The year is 2011. Selvi's daughter Kaviya is dressed in a yellow half-sari<sup>115</sup>, and her whole collection of earrings, necklaces, *ucchipaddam*<sup>116</sup> and bracelets. Her long, black hair is braided and her face neatly coloured by make-up. Kaviya looks constantly at the watch above the mirror in the hall. When it passes the magical time of nine a.m. she says: "Nine! The *video-karen* should be here by now!" Kaviya has been up since six a.m. in order to get ready for the *video-karen*, the videographer, as well as the *paddam-karen*, the photographer, to record the day of her puberty ceremony (*samathiya veedu*).

Today is the big day Kaviya and her family have planned and waited for since her first menstrual period the previous year. Her mother's and father's siblings, her cousin-siblings, her paternal grandmother and more distant relatives have flown in from Canada, Sri Lanka, France, UK and Germany to be present today. Importantly, a whole media team has been hired to record and document the family event on video and in photographs. Together with Kaviya, the close relatives or *ende sondam* will pose in front of the cameras, to immortalize the moment in a DVD and photo album. These will be given to Kaviya's close relatives who did not have the opportunity to be present, mostly those living in Jaffna, including her mother's sister Puspha and her children. In Jaffna, they will be screened and commented upon. The families arranging such family rituals will also keep a copy for themselves for "memory", viewing them to recall the event for their own pleasure.

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<sup>115</sup> The half-sari is a two-piece sari. It comprises a full-length skirt, a blouse and a half-length sari. The half-length sari is draped in a similar way as the full-length sari: tucked into the front of the skirt, wrapped around the waist and draped over the opposite shoulder.

<sup>116</sup> Long adornment fixed in the hair and hanging down in the middle of the forehead, ending in a larger ornament a little above the middle of the eyebrows.

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

A striking feature in every Jaffna Tamil ritual event, including puberty ceremonies, weddings, funerals and birthday celebrations, is this extensive focus on production and consumption of images in the form of photographs and videos. The production and consumption of this visual culture together with the obsessive necessity of remembering is the focus of this chapter. Regardless of whether the family event takes place in Oslo, Paris, London, Toronto or Jaffna, Tamil families invest much effort in terms of time and money in order to “pull off” such events and for the events to be recorded and memorized in images.<sup>117</sup> In weddings and puberty ceremonies, the numbers of both professionally hired and private amateur videographers and photographers can be two-digit. Moreover, different sized flash lamps, umbrella reflectors and softboxes are numerous; making up an almost impenetrable “wall” in front of the place, normally a stage, where the ritual actions are performed.

The price for such packages of professional videography and photography, including the scenery decoration, DVDs and photo albums, is in Norway about 30.000 Norwegian kroners (NOK), a little more than 2.900 GBP or 656.000 LKR.<sup>118</sup> The ritual needs careful planning which usually starts a year beforehand. It is important that close relatives and as many extended relatives as possible are present both to perform their ritual roles, and crucially, to appear in the photographs and the film. Those living elsewhere, therefore, need to plan their vacations, book flights, and if coming from Sri Lanka, secure a visa.

Almost every Tamil family, regardless of their economic situation, seeks to assemble such grandiose rituals, some even taking out private loans in order to cover the expenses. The total price of these arrangements is in Norway seldom less than 100.000 NOK or 9.900 GBP for a puberty ceremony, and 130.000 NOK or 12.900 GBP for a

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<sup>117</sup> Increasingly common in such family rituals is live audio-visual transmission of the ritual through the Internet, provided by software such as Skype, to absent family members. I discuss the use of such live audio-visual media in a mourning and funeral ritual in the next chapter.

<sup>118</sup> In cities such as London, Paris and Toronto higher number of Tamil media teams make competition stronger and prices lower than in Norway. The price difference can be between 200 and 400 GBP. The exchange rate is based on currencies in May 2014.

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wedding.<sup>119</sup> These amounts cover expenses for venues, clothes and jewellery for the girl or the wedding couple, decorations, invitations and food and drinks for the four to six hundred guests. Some families compete with each other in staging lavish ceremonies. Some seek to have as many guests as possible, and some have gone to the length of renting a helicopter to deliver the girl to the venue.<sup>120</sup>

### Media, memory and meaning-making

The use of videography and photography and the production and consumption of videos and photo albums in family rituals has become a “popular culture” that every Tamil takes for granted. The intense focus on documenting and registering these events of family togetherness and unity on film and in photographs, I suggest, is a result of the rupture of life in Korte and Thiruppur as discussed in the previous chapter. The days of coming together, meeting and seeing each other on a daily basis are long gone, but longed for, cherished in their memories and retained as a desired ideal. As such, the life in Korte is no longer a *milieux de mémoire*, an environment or site of memory where memory is carried in tradition and costumes, lived and acted out in daily practices (Nora 1989). Having little opportunities to take part in activities that uphold family unity in their everyday life, I suggest that the necessity to fix and view these rarer moments of ritual family unity arises (cf. Nora 1989).

In this chapter, I suggest that gathering as many relatives as possible and having the moment memorialized in images can be a way in which Korte-relatives seek to re-connect themselves with their extended family (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). Re-connecting to these meaningful belongings can be central to maintaining a sense of emotional stability and thus experiencing life as meaningful. I argue that in this process,

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<sup>119</sup> This sum excludes dowry, which adds at least another 100.000 NOK. Moreover, these are minimum prices depending upon the family having close bonds to service providers. If a grandparent travels from Sri Lanka for the ceremony, at least another 15.000 NOK are needed for visa, insurance and ticket. The family hosting the ritual only pays for the airline tickets of close *sondam* living in Jaffna, such as a parent or sibling of the girl's or couple's parents. Those living elsewhere in the diaspora pay for their own tickets.

<sup>120</sup> This lavish competitive spending can be regarded as processes of gift giving and shaming (Bourdieu 1990, 23-24): the families have participated in other (nuclear) family's rituals, and now they reciprocate the shame of receiving by seeking to outspend those other families.



### *Underneath the margosa tree*

the ritual event and the produced photographs and DVDs becomes *lieux de mémoire*; events and objects that represent strategic highlights and selected moments of the past life that no longer happens naturally as they did when Korte was a *milieux de mémoire* (cf. Nora 1989). Coming together and re-living the sociality they remember as having characterized their past life before the rupture, and fixing these moments in images, solidifies the unity of the group. These moments of gathering and re-connecting with many of those in the *ur-sondam* group can thereby be understood as moments where meaning is re-created.

The cases of life-cycle ceremonies examined here, however, will show that video-images and photographs mediate presence, closeness and unity along with experiences of absence, separation and geographic and social distance. As such, the rituals does not only serve to unify the family as a group as a mean to maintain kinship (cf. Durkheim 1995 [1912], Turner 1957). But, like money and gifts, the rituals bring forth mixed emotions of co-presence and absence, closeness and distance. The obsession with recording and memorializing family rituals through visual media also separates family members. Desired and undesired emotions of being connected and disconnected with *sondam* and their past lives in the *ur* arise simultaneously. I will argue that visual production and consumption, as attempts to re-create meaning, bring forth a sense, difficult to put into words, of living as a dispersed family within which feelings of absence and presence mix.

This chapter analyses the production and use of photographs and video images during Kaviya's puberty ceremony in Oslo and Parvathi's and Sanjeeven's viewing of a similar production of their granddaughter's puberty ceremony. Before I lay out this ethnography, I will first present a theoretical frame of interpretation, expanding on the affect and the sensorial dimension of images and the weight put on the action of seeing in Hindu culture.

### **Images as affecting objects**

How humans produce visual material, and moreover what we see and how we interpret the visual is vital to how we exist as humans in the world (Morphy and Banks 1997).

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This view is part of an expanded concept of visual anthropology, which not only includes the anthropologist's production of visual ethnographic material, but recognizes people's own audio-visual production as important to our studies. Inherent in this perspective is a shift from the focus on the visual as representations, i.e. image as text, towards a focus on visual practices and meaning; how people engage meaningfully with the visual (Morphy and Banks 1999). As such, this view corresponds with the recent turn to material culture; placing objects at the centre of our analysis, wherein things such as photographs and videos in themselves have meaning (Damsholt and Simonsen 2009, Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007, Ingold 2000, 2007b, Latour 2005b).

In line with "the material turn" and the view of Howard Morphy and Marcus Banks (1997), Tamara West (2014) points out that theory concerning the photographic image and memory has paradoxically marginalized the visual. The visual has been seen as pure representations in "terms of what has been, rather than what *is*" (West 2014, 177, italics in original). West (2014) argues that the concern with photography as merely representation of the past derives from Roland Barthes' (1981) concept of the "punctum": the emotive quality of the photograph that touches the viewer personally. As the photograph portrays past events with past or departed friends and family, studies of photographs and memory have seen the photograph as "containing" experiences of loss and past time. In this view, the photograph represents something lost that can never be regained: an event, a person, a particular stage of life, and so on.

However, the empirical cases in this chapter will show that emotive quality, or the punctum, of the images brings forth experiences of family events, family unity and co-presence being stretched through time and space along with experiences of absence and distance. In line with the "material turn", then, I agree with Morphy and Banks (1997) and West (2014) that we also have to take into account what images *are* in addition to what is present in their content. Photography, or the visual, is also "a part of the constantly malleable construction of everyday life" (West 2014, 178). Visual media is a medium or space in which people interact. As photographs are produced, viewed, held and talked about, the photograph creates experiences and feelings here and now.

***The sensational and emotional power of images and the importance of seeing***

By discussing the experiences and emotional effect of images in the here-and-now, I maintain the perspective on materiality and emotions introduced in Chapter 4. In particular I follow up on the perspective on affects and objects, which recognizes that objects and places affect human subjects (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2009, Deleuze 2000). In line with this view, Elisabeth Edwards (1992, 2012) and Christopher Pinney (2001, 2004) have argued that images cannot be understood as merely neutral objects affected by humans. To the same extent as other material objects (cf. Damsholt and Simonsen 2009, Ingold 2007a, 2011, Kapferer and Hobart 2005), images must be seen as powerful and as affecting humans and their social relations. Human interaction with images provokes embodied responses and affects (Edwards 2012, 222).

In order to capture the emotive or affective quality of images and the visual, I follow Birgit Meyer's (2010) and Pinney's (2001, 2004) approaches to aesthetics. They argue for an understanding of aesthetics in terms of Aristotle's broad notion of *aesthesis* which emphasizes that our understanding of the world comes through our five senses as an inseparable whole (Meyer 2010, 743). In this view, seeing is understood to connect with other senses in the body and produce emotions. The eye is, according to Pinney (2004, 193), "an organ of tactility, an organ that connects with others". Images, in interaction with persons, produce aesthetics, appealing to our whole sensing body, evoking emotions in the human subject (see also MacDougall 1992, Pink 2006). As such, images are part of human action and our multi-sensorial perception. I thereby understand aesthetics as a relational quality produced in the interaction between human and material objects. This perspective on aesthetics takes into account the whole range of sensations humans gain in mutual interaction with images, both by vision and through other embodied engagement (cf. Bruland 2013, 2015, Forthcoming). Images are not only representations of the past, but part of our construction and experience of life, and our construction of ourselves to ourselves and to others.

In the context of recording and viewing family events, I suggest that the multi-sensorial quality of the visual is enhanced by the stress in Hindu religious practice on visual images (cf. Pinney 2004). A key concept here is *darsan*, "to see and be seen" by the deity. To stand in front of the images of the deities, to see and be seen by the deity,

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reveals the visual understanding of the image and the blessing (Eck 1985). The devotee is affected by the image and at the same time affects the image to reveal a greater religious experience that in turn affects the devotee. This view of *darsan* builds upon an understanding of the act of seeing itself as extrusive, where seeing is “a medium through which seer and seen come into contact, and, in a sense, blend and mix” (Babb 1981, 400). Thereby, experiencing the visual and perceiving images aesthetically bring the seeing body into a multi-sensorial engagement with what is seen.

While seeing images of family members captured during family rituals are different in character than seeing images of deities, I suggest that seeing, rendering multi-sensorial experiences achievable has a special importance among Jaffna Tamils. Another example of the importance of the visual is the use of photographs of persons during marriage negotiations. In this process, pictures of the candidates are exchanged between the two potential marriage partners. Both parties use the picture in the process of deciding whether or not the candidate is a suitable husband or wife. The photographs are circulated around the close family, and they are all asked “what do you think of him/her?”, eliciting answers such as: “I think he has a nice character”, or “he looks rough”. Seeing the image is understood as central to perceiving the candidate’s personality. Trawick (1990, 95) also points out that the significance of the first meeting of potential spouses in Tamil literature. She notes that in one version of the Tamil Ramayana, Rama and Sita first meet and fall in love through their eyes. Trawick (1990, 95) describes it as a kind of *darsan*; a powerful emotional encounter where souls are said to mix through the eyes.

I suggest that the act of seeing among Jaffna Tamils must be recognized as important to their perception of the world, within which the act of viewing engages them with what is seen. The visual media with which family members engage form part of the practices and multi-sensorial perceptions through which they experience and understand their world.

### **Production and use of images: Kaviya's *samathiya veedu***

In order for family rituals to take place today, extensive time and planning is needed. This is in contrast to the situation when all of them lived in Korte and it was possible to call together the family and make the needed preparations at a few days' notice. In pre-war Korte, the news of a girl's "coming of age" spread rapidly from house to house. Within a few hours, the girl's close relatives (*ende sondam*) gathered at her house to undertake the cleansing ritual by the well. Her relatives bathed the girl as they blessed her with water and milk. Importantly the ritual is led by the girl's *mama* and *mami*, her mother's eldest brother and his wife, indicating the moral and economic responsibility the eldest brother has for his sister and her children (cf. Chapter 3). This cleansing ritual of the puberty rite is followed by a period of seclusion. In the past, in Korte and Thiruppur, and to some extent today, the girl spent about a week in seclusion at home, often limited to one room of the house, after which the family took her to the temple on an auspicious day.<sup>121</sup>

In Korte and Thiruppur in the past, it was upon returning from the temple that the puberty ceremony or *samathiya veedu* was celebrated as a rite of integration. All the close relatives would gather in the house in commensality and celebrations. The girl was dressed in a sari for the first time and, honouring her maturity, her close relatives would adorn her with jewellery and gifts whilst extended relatives brought smaller gifts. In this ritual of integration, the girl is protected, made pure and her energy is controlled. When a girl has "become big" Jaffna Tamils consider the girl to have reached maturity, or "full womanhood", giving her enhanced status. She now holds feminine energy and female generative power. This energy needs to be controlled due to its sacred and dangerous nature which also makes her more vulnerable to impurity (Pfaffenberger 1982, Wadely 1980). Decades ago, the puberty ceremony was also a way to announce the girl's matrimonial availability.

Living geographically dispersed, gathering the family at short notice to undertake the necessary rituals is difficult. The Saturday evening in August 2010 when Kaviya experienced her first period, instead of the news spreading from house to house, Selvi

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<sup>121</sup> Puberty rituals, as well as weddings are arranged at auspicious days and times (cf. Mauss 1954).

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phoned all her siblings, cousin-siblings and elder relatives and informed them that “Kaviya has become a big girl!” Selvi dialled Canada, Paris, Sri Lanka, UK and made local calls to Oslo. Her husband, Balraj, being from a different village than Korte also called his relatives living in Oslo, Sri Lanka, Germany and UK. About two hours later, Selvi’s and Balraj’s siblings in Oslo and their wives and children gathered in their house, comprising four nuclear families all together. As Selvi’s eldest brother lives in Canada, the tradition of the girl’s *mama* and *mami* blessing Kaviya first had to be approached in a different way. Murali, Selvi’s second eldest brother living in Oslo was also unavailable as he was away on vacation. Thus, it fell upon Selvi’s youngest brother, Nathan, and his wife to be the first to bathe and bless Kaviya in the family’s shower cabinet. Kaviya’s period of seclusion was shortened and after four days she went back to school. They did not visit the temple, and no coming-out ceremony took place. Rather, they began planning for the ceremony, her *samathiya veedu*, to be held in August the following year, when the cleansing bathing-ritual would also be redone with the proper relatives present.<sup>122</sup>

### *Planning images of family unity*

The course of the rituals related to Kaviya’s first menstruation is adjusted in terms of time due to the absence of those relatives that need to be present. In order to get the ritual “right”, to recreate the family event to be as similar as possible to the ways these events were celebrated when living together in Korte, all of Kaviya’s close relatives (*ende sondam*) needed to be gathered, particularly her mother’s eldest brother and his wife (her *mama* and *mami*). Although Kaviya’s father is not from Korte, I suggest that the presence of his relatives was also necessary in order to recreate the familiar experience of having many present. Rituals always include the sibling groups of both parents and, as Selvi stated in Chapter 1, you need many relatives to feel the *ur*. Unable to recreate the ritual in the *ur*, nor gather all the relatives of the *ur*, the practices of gathering close and extended relatives, as well as inviting many other non-relatives as guest today, may be a way to compensate for these absences. Gathering large numbers

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<sup>122</sup> This is also the case for girls in Jaffna today, as their family members are mostly living outside Sri Lanka.

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

does not, in itself, recreate the unity of the *sondam*, but it indicates an aspiration to a sense of community, an attempt to recreate the ritual experience as it “should have been” of being many together.

As Nora (1989, 12) points out, when societies no longer are *milieux de mémoire*, much planning and organization goes into celebrations that make archives of what no longer is. Restoring a social unity akin to that of the *ur-sondam* which was once an inherent quality of daily life and just “happened naturally”, now takes effort (cf. Nora 1989). The obsession with documenting the family event similarly creates an archive of the family being together and united, something which, today, only happens at such rituals. While non-relatives also are photographed in these events, it is the girl, her parents and close relatives that are the focus of the ritual events and the photo album and video that record them. The production of videos and photographs for the photo album is thus also given much attention in the family’s planning for the ritual. Only Tamil media teams are used, and the girl’s family selects teams that enjoy favourable reputations.<sup>123</sup> The decoration of the hall, clothes, jewellery, guests, food and drinks are all planned and selected with an eye to their appearance in the videography and photography.

Before New Year the same year, Kaviya’s family had already booked a hall and a team to decorate it, booked videographers and photographers, ordered the invitation cards and announced the date of the ceremony to close and distant relatives enabling those living far away to arrange for leave from school or work and book airline tickets. During the following months of winter, spring and early summer, other arrangements were made: clothes and jewellery were purchased for Kaviya and Selvi, a woman was hired to do Kaviya’s makeup, hairdressing and wardrobe on the day of the ritual, and food, drinks and gift packages were ordered and prepared for 400 guests.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Most significant when the family select a video-team are their assessment of the team’s previous DVDs and design of photo albums.

<sup>124</sup> In Norway the number of guests for such puberty ceremonies and weddings varies between 400 and 600.

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### *Coming together and posing images of love and unity*

By the following August, approximately one year after Selvi and Balraj made the phone calls to announce Kaviya's first period, all the arrangements for the ceremony in Oslo had been completed and importantly, the close relatives (*ende sondam*) had arrived: Selvi's eldest brother, wife and children had flown in from Canada, Selvi's sister Inthu and her husband had arrived from Paris, and Kaviya's *apamma* (paternal grandmother) had travelled all the way from Jaffna. Furthermore, several other Korte-relatives and extended Thiruppur-relatives and relatives of Selvi's husband living in London, Germany, and Paris had arrived. On Selvi's side of the family, all the siblings and their spouses and children were gathered, except for Puspha and her family who remained in Korte because Puspha was ill and was also unlikely to get a visa. On Balraj's side, all his siblings already lived in Oslo, except for his sister. His attempt to get visas for her and her three children was rejected.

With almost all of Kaviya's close relatives gathered, the family performed the bathing-ritual once again the day before the celebration of the puberty ceremony. Significantly, the ritual was now done "properly", with her eldest *mama* and *mami* leading the ritual and blessing her first, and with the hired videographer and photographer also present. In the living-room, as a substitute for the well in Korte, Kaviya's father had inflated a medium-size baby-pool and filled it with water. Selvi, and her sisters Inthu and Thilaga had added flowers and sandalwood. Kaviya had been dressed in a pink *panjabi* bought specifically for this occasion.<sup>125</sup> Each couple of husband and wife first blessed Kaviya with the sandalwood- and flower water. The blessing is done three times. At the first blessing, the videographer instructed the couple to stop at the moment of the blessing when they had their palms on Kaviya's head and to "look into the camera". The couple did as instructed; looked into the camera and smiled. The couple and Kaviya were filmed and photographed for about ten to fifteen seconds, all three of them smiling alternately into the video-camera and the photo-camera. When all the couples had been filmed and photographed performing the ritual act, the same round of choreographed blessing was then repeated, this time with milk instead of water.

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<sup>125</sup> A three-part suit worn by girls for festive occasions before puberty or when dancing.



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The next morning, on the day of the main celebration of *samathiya veedu*, the media-team again directed Kaviya and her relatives. Arriving Kaviya's house at 9.15, they rigged the camera and light equipment once again, this time at the other end of the living room. Kaviya's father and brother had hung a blue velvet fabric against the wall, which served as a backdrop. The photographer instructed Kaviya to stand in front of the backdrop. The video-camera was switched on, and the photographer instructed Kaviya to pose in different positions; standing and sitting, holding her hands out, up, down, looking up, to the side, to the other side and so on. Kaviya did her best: posing, smiling, and using the eye expressions she had learned in her *barathanatiam* lessons: a Tamil dance form in which eye-movements play a significant role. When the photographer was not happy with Kaviya's pose, he corrected her; first by posing himself, and if he still not was content, by physically moving Kaviya's arms, legs and head into the right positions. The whole session took about twenty minutes.

Thereafter, the photographer called on Kaviya's grandmother to pose with Kaviya and gave instructions; how they should stand, hug each other, and look at each other or at the camera. He then called on Selvi and Balraj and the three of them were photographed together. Lakshan, Kaviya's elder brother, was called upon to join them. The photographer again told them how to stand, where to look and how to hug. The hug had to be held for about half a minute, with only one cheek touching softly the other's cheek and with their faces turned towards the camera, smiling. This staging of hugs was repeated with Kaviya's other relatives: her *periyamma* Inthu and her husband, and her *mama* and *mami* from Canada.

It is the photographer that decides how Kaviya will look, repeating the poses in which he had instructed hundreds of other Tamil girls before Kaviya. He also decides how Kaviya, her parents and her grandmother should express their love for each other: standing close together and hugging, but in a way that allowed the viewer to see their faces. With the entrance of media into the ritual, then, the videographer and photographer take on distinctive roles as directors of the event. Rather than recording a spontaneous "live" performance, the emphasis is on getting images "right"; on having family members look into the camera and smile, visible to the viewer in particular desired ways.

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In his analysis of photography, Bourdieu (1990) discusses its significant role in family events. He points out that peasants prefer to hire professional photographers for large family celebrations such as weddings. These professional photographers had complete control over the arrangements of the photograph: directing everyone where to look, how to stand and so on (Bourdieu 1990, 23-24). Such strict control was needed in order to capture the persons in their social roles, in their relationships to each other, rather than producing amateur snapshots displaying persons' particularities as unrecognizable subjects (Bourdieu 1990, 24, 80). Therefore, the instructions given for the arrangements of the photograph enabled a specific group representation, solidifying the group's integration.

Posing together, directed by the photographer or videographer, Kaviya and her close relatives perform their social roles: Kaviya first performed alone as the "big girl" of the family, then as a daughter, granddaughter, sister, niece and so on together with her relatives. Likewise, Selvi performed her role as a mother and Balraj as a father. All family members took up their social roles in relation to each other. This is a different acting out of kinship relations than in daily life. Rather than on-going practices of relatedness (cf. Carsten 2000), the "staged" kinship relations are conscious performances of defined kinship roles. Performing specific aspects of kinship roles, the images become static representations of life and relations perceived by both family members and the photographer to have characterized life in the past: close relations among the relatives and "all of them" being together. In the images, as *lieux de mémoire* (cf. Nora 1989), the close relatives (*ende sondam*) are united, as "they should be".

However, performing such remembered static relationships, directed by the photographer, in front of the cameras, the family members seemed somewhat uncomfortable. In particular the parents and grandparents were uncomfortable when they were instructed to hug. Among Tamils, different generations of adults rarely hug each other, rather, hugging is reserved for small children and is performed in a different way: in which the adult puts his or her nose to the child's chin and makes a short "sniff". The embrace for which the photographer called is not normally done in daily life but, brought into the coulisses of the baby-pool and the blue velvet backdrop, they posed in

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their social roles as instructed (cf. Bourdieu 1990).<sup>126</sup> The family members played out the expected and coded signs of happiness, closeness, unity and love, as signs of the close relationships between relatives which were perceived to have existed in the past. Acting on the demands of the videographer and photographer, they constructed an image of the united, happy and close family as *lieux de mémoire*.

When the videographer and photographer were content with the session at home, Balraj who had constantly been keeping an eye at the time for the past forty-five minutes, loudly let out his stress: “Come on! We need to be going! We are already *way* behind schedule!” He was eager to get them all to the celebrations in the hall. Here they continued the imaging of the united close family, producing more *lieux de mémoire*, this time together with all the family present.

#### *Posing more lieux de mémoire*

Just before 11.00 a.m., Kaviya arrived at the entrance of the hall in her father’s brother’s car. Balraj, Nathan, Inthu and her husband had already arrived and seen that everything was in order before the media-team, Kaviya and the guests arrived. In particular, they had paid attention to the stage where Kaviya would be standing, and on which the photographer and videographer would focus. Kaviya’s exit from the car (together with her *mami*) was re-directed and filmed twice before the videographer was satisfied. It was not filmed using the car in which she had arrived, but her youngest *mama* Nathan’s car which was the newest model and most prestigious car in the family: a black BMW, which they agreed, would look much better on the video. Then the media-team filmed Kaviya making her entrance to the hall with her eldest *mama* and *mami*, followed by her female relatives, both close and distant. Finally, well-directed by the videographer, she reached the neatly decorated stage where she was instructed to stand in the centre, in front of a circular painting in rice flour (*koolam*). Here she was filmed and photographed until Selvi and Balraj entered the hall “officially” with a flower garland for Kaviya. Each act was staged and directed by the videographer, instructing Kaviya and her relatives where to stop, look and reminding them to keep smiling.

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<sup>126</sup> It is possible that embraces between adults may become more common as Tamils live longer in Europe, but today some discomfort and shyness is still often apparent in such situations.

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During the following ritual acts, everything was done with a concern to achieve a good video and photo production: the participant's faces had to be visible to the imagined audience, movements were done slowly in order to be captured properly by the camera. The central acts: Kaviya's entrance to the hall; the circulation of trays around Kaviya; the entrance of Selvi and Balraj; and their garlanding of Kaviya were stopped, re-staged and re-directed in order to achieve the best possible visual representations. Apart from the entrance of Kaviya to the hall, however, the guests and the audience seemed less concerned with the ritual acts and the filming. The majority were engaged in conversations and, whilst now and then they cast a glance toward the stage, their view was largely blocked by several flash lamps, umbrella reflectors, softboxes, video- and photo-cameras and camera operators.<sup>127</sup>

After the ritual acts had been completed, more photographing and filming was done. First Kaviya with her parents, then with her parents and her brother, then with her father's siblings and their families, then with her mother's siblings and their family. Lastly Kaviya was recorded with all her male relatives, and then with her female relatives. Each "composition" of family members was filmed and photographed for an average of four minutes. They all looked into the camera, smiling, and ended each session by exchanging hugs with Kaviya. While family members still acted on the photographer's direction, their attitudes were a little looser now, and spontaneous comments and laughs were exchanged.

Kaviya then left the stage to change from half-sari into sari whilst the guests were served rice and curries. This change of clothes symbolized the return from the temple-visit and it used to be after this event that the reintegration ritual of the *samathiya veedu* took place. When Kaviya re-entered the stage, it was set for a new round of filming and photographing with the close relatives (*ende sondam*), following the same order as in the first session. This time, however, her father's and mother's siblings also presented Kaviya with gifts of money and gold jewellery. Lastly, and differently from the first shoot, all of Kaviya's *ende sondam* who were present were photographed and filmed

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<sup>127</sup> Inthu's husband also filmed the ritual with an old VHS-camera and several of Kaviya's male cousins took photographs with small digital cameras.

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together, including Lakshmi-*aunti*, Selvi's mother's *ondavodda* sisters or parallel cousins.

### **Aesthetics as *lieux de mémoire*: re-entwining lines**

In the images produced on the stage, Kaviya poses together with her different relatives. As Bourdieu (1990, 20-21) points out, if we accept Émile Durkheim's argument that the function of a ritual or a family festivity is to unify a group, recreate and revitalize it, the photographs immortalize and reaffirm this unity. Living an everyday life in which their own lifelines are stretched out from the lines of their *sondam* and *ur*, the ritual becomes an effective way of re-connecting with this fragile unity or enmeshment. As Victor Turner (1957) argues, such rituals are crucial when other affective ways of keeping the group together are lacking. Living dispersed, the relatives lack the effective and meaningful practices they used in daily life in Korte and Thiruppur to build kinship and daily create new, malleable memories of family life. Thus, the ritual works as an important *lieux de memoire*, holding the group together and upholding the idealized enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*. Experiencing everyday life as holding moments of empty- and aloneness, relatives such as Inthu and Balasingam take great interest in such events and make great efforts to attend them. Kaviya's own nuclear family also invest much time and money in bringing the event together. As Selvi told on the evening before the celebration in the hall while making *shorteats*:<sup>128</sup> "It is much work and stress, but if we hadn't had this celebration, we wouldn't come together, all of us [*sondam*]. It is cosy to be everyone together."<sup>129</sup>

In particular the last picture taken on the stage is an image produced with much effort: the family members had flown in from various cities in Europe, Canada and Sri Lanka. Coming together on the stage in Oslo, Kaviya's closest relatives from both her parent's *urs* filled the stage completely; from one end to the other on the stage they stood packed together in two rows. Since the stage was not wide enough for all of them

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<sup>128</sup> Different sweet and salt snacks such as *murukku*, *vaddei*, *roles*, *patties*, *ladoo*, *kesari*, *kollukaddei* and cakes.

<sup>129</sup> Selvi stated this in Norwegian, using the word "*koselig*", which means cosy, but also implies a state of enjoyment and intimacy.

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to fit side by side in one row, the photographer instructed the children, youths and the shortest adults to make a second row at the front. The videographer and the photographer also had to take several steps back, in order to fit all of them into the frame. In their best saris, shirts and ties, they all smiled into the cameras.

In his study of families taking photographs on family vacations and sightseeing, Jonas Larsen (2005) discusses how tourist families pose in front of the camera, smiling and standing in close physical proximity. Larsen observes that photography does not so much reflect good or poor realities as make new realities. Photography should therefore be understood as production, as “parts of practices through which people work to establish realities” (Crang 1997, in Larsen 2005, 422). The social relations of unity and closeness that were so easy to call upon in Korte are, in the puberty ceremony in Oslo, re-constructed in front of the camera between people who seldom see each other and only come together after much effort.

I suggest that it is exactly because of their geographically dispersed lives, experiencing the rupture of their *milleu de memorie*, that such moments of gathering becomes crucial to organize, participate in and document (cf. Nora 1989): the social unity that is longed for and cherished in their memories is restored to its best extent. After much effort and organizing, a best possible representation of what they experience to have been in the past is pulled together. Thereby, the frozen memories of how life used to be are externalized into the rituals. Family members’ production and performance of not only concrete images, but also ritual events can be seen as what Nora (1989) has termed a *lieu de memoire*; a concrete memory-site that symbolizes and brings forth what has been. Because such moments of family togetherness are no longer part of daily life, memories of such life and togetherness no longer arise from their ongoing everyday life. Rather, memories of life before and after migration become tied to specific ways of coming together, such as life-cycle rituals.

By engaging themselves in the ritual; being among relatives and other Tamil-speaking people, dressed in their Tamil finery, eating Tamil food together, listening to Tamil music, the Korte-relatives bring out qualities of sounds, forms and tastes that produce a particular aesthetics. I suggest that this aesthetic relates to their life in their *ur*; being many relatives together in a “familiar” environment with familiar food and

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clothes, hearing language and music that they remember as part of their past life. Interacting in and with this aesthetic, seeing, smelling, tasting and touching, the aesthetics appeals to the participant's whole sensing body (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005, Meyer 2010). I suggest that this aesthetic enable the production, in the relatives, of emotions re-connecting their lines of life with the meaningful remembered enmeshment of their past lives. As such, the produced aesthetics are part of their action and their multi-sensorial perception (cf. Pinney 2001, 2004) within which the meaning of past life can be re-gained and experienced.

The sociality and meaningfulness that they understand to have characterized past life in the unity of the *ur-sondam* group can be re-lived and remembered both in the ritual event and the production of the images. In these *lieux de mémoire*, producing a particular aesthetics that brings forth senses and experiences of the environment and people of their past lives, the family members again become re-connected to those with whom they ought to be connected (cf. Daniel 1989). Painful emotions of aloneness and emptiness, of being disconnected from these relations, can be avoided, and the ritual occasion of coming together can be experienced as meaningful.

In the ritual, as the *lieu de memoire*, all the present relatives are spatially contracted in intermittent physical reunion. As this no longer happens daily, these moments need to be documented before relatives disperse again. The images of family members in unity in a familiar social environment seal the family's unity and become the material and concrete object of memory. As such, the image immortalizes and memorializes the unity of the family (Bourdieu 1990, MacDougall 1992). It becomes durable evidence proving that close *sondam*-relations can be maintained despite their dispersed context of living. These photos can be viewed again and thereby serve as materialized representations of what has been in terms of family unity, what could have been, how it should have been and what no longer is. In Kaviya's puberty ceremony, the relatives from her parents' two different *urs* are unified in one picture. This, might also be seen as a way to overcome the fact that Selvi and Balraj are not *ur-sondam*, and as such a way to re-create a sociality remembered to have existed in their respective *urs*.<sup>130</sup> The

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<sup>130</sup> Manthurai, Balraj's *ur*, is also a village where all the inhabitants are considered as *sondam*.

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filming and photography, making *lieux de mémoire*, itself becomes the ritual, rather than just a recording of the actual ritual as in past life.

Moreover, in-between the first and the second photo- and film session of Kaviya and her close *sondam*, divided by Kaviya's change of dress, all the other guests, extended *sondam* and *sondam-illai*, were filmed and photographed together with Kaviya. The *sondam-illai* are mostly Tamils living in Oslo who Kaviya's family know from their engagement in pro-LTTE activities in Oslo. In a long line, the guests waited for their turn to go on stage to be photographed and filmed with Kaviya. It took about two and a half hours before all the guests had been neatly documented on photo and film. Kaviya kept her smile and straight pose most of the time, only taking short breaks as one family left the stage and another entered. By the end of the day, Kaviya, having been awake since 6 a.m., was exhausted. In particular, she said that all the posing and smiling was tiring, but that all-in-all she had enjoyed it.

Having the extended relatives and other Tamils as guest for these events, and have them photographed, I suggest underlines the search for a similar sense of community to that they were used to "back home".<sup>131</sup> In seeking to recreate a similar, meaningful experience of unity, of being many together, the ritual is thereby expanded in terms of the number of guests. It becomes part of the ritual aesthetic that makes the event a *lieux de mémoire*. When the puberty ceremony of Parvathi's sister's grandchild was about to take place in London, Parvathi commented upon this practice of gathering so many people, relatives and non-relatives:

There it is fashion. They don't meet often there. They live far apart from each other. Not like it was here. So they do it in order to meet. We did not do like that for our daughter. We wouldn't tell everyone, so we did it here by our well. She held the *vetilai* and bathed.<sup>132</sup> It is embarrassing to tell so many. But there they do it. They say that they don't know how the girl will be married, that maybe the girl will run away.

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<sup>131</sup> Moreover, to leave such a function without having one's photo taken together with the girl or the girl's family is considered as an insult to the family hosting the ritual. Bourdieu (1990, 23) similarly points out how being photographed with the family is to honor and show gratitude for one's invitation.

<sup>132</sup> *Vetilai* is Tamil for betel leaf.



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Among the family members living in Europe, I have also heard the same explanation as that offered by Parvathi; that they make the puberty ceremony big because the parents do not know whether the girl will have a large wedding in the Tamil way. What is most important, both for puberty ceremonies and weddings, therefore, seems to be to gather *sondam* and generate a feeling of community and togetherness, seeking a sense of meaningfulness similar to that understood to have been characteristic of pre-war life in the *ur*. This feeling is achieved through specific staged and produced aesthetics that plays on references to their past life, living with *sondam* in their *ur*. Stating and immortalizing the *sondam*'s unity and moreover, the unity of a larger community, is only one of the experiences of the rituals and images as *lieux de memoire*, however.

### **Ritualizing ambivalent emotions**

A central and inherent quality of the family rituals and the images taken during the ritual, I suggest is also the distance that separates relatives in everyday life. In the images, the distance between relatives is minimised and downplayed, but never absent. Earlier studies of the role of media in dispersed, or so-called transnational families may have tended to over-romanticize the positive effects of media-use, such as phone calls, faxes and letters, in creating proximity and co-presence in space and time (Baldassar 2007, 2008, Boccagni 2012, Svašek 2008, Urry 2002, 2003). What is absent in the produced images, I would argue, also needs attention. In the context of Trobiander material culture, Debora Battaglia (1997) argues that what is visibly present also brings forth what is visibly absent. The absence of an object typically associated with a particular context or performance, can problematize the event. What is stated and what is not stated thereby becomes ambiguous.

In recording family unity on film and photographs, I suggest there are (at least) two types of absences. The first visible absence is exactly the distance that separates relatives in daily life, associated with potentially troublesome emotions of disconnection from each other. The photographs state a desired situation where everyone is physically present and close, surrounded by a larger community of Tamils,

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yet it is physical absence which characterises daily life. The second visible absence I suggest lies in the choreographing of the ritual by the videographer done for the absent viewer. While the family have arranged everything and now have come together to do the ritual as it “shall be done”, it is the videographer and photographer that are in charge of the ritual: they decide when to stop, where to look and importantly; when and where to smile. These halts and re-takes are done with those absent in mind; they give the participants that are present time to look into the camera, reaching out with their gaze towards the viewer. The absent viewers, mainly close relatives who ideally should have been present in the ritual, thereby become present in the production. Family unity and presence are experienced simultaneously with family distance and separation. Coming together and creating a memory of the ritual and family unity, the experience of the ritual is dominated by the media recording. Thus the ritual rather becomes a ritualization of such representations, stating the presence of those present and the absence of those absent simultaneously.

The element of media recording thereby holds the presence and unity of those family members gathered, as much as it holds an absence of those specific family members who “should have been there”, but are not. The visibility of those present, makes the others’ absence visible (cf. Battaglia 1997). In investing their time and money in attempting to re-create a social unity they ideally think should exist: the ideal presence of “the entire *sondam*”, the relatives simultaneously brings forth the idea and presence of those who are absent. The same produced aesthetics that draws upon references to their past life with relatives in their natal village, pulled together by decorations, food, music and the relative’s presence thereby also conveys emotions of absence. The produced images capture and state this ambivalence. The desired emotions of being connected and together, and the undesired and feared emotions of being disconnected and alone, are brought forth in one experience.

As Battaglia (1997) argues, when the stated and the unstated are joined, the situated becomes ambivalent. Such ambivalent emotions of distance and presence are also experienced in the families’ everyday life: feeling emotionally close, but being geographically distant, or feeling emotionally close for brief moments of visits and phone calls and then distant again when the line is cut or the visit ends. In re-creating

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family unity and making memories in front of the cameras, the choreographed and aesthetically staged production of the family pictures ritualizes what is emotionally desired and what is feared: being together with relatives or being alone, in one experience. Thereby, the ritual as a *lieu de memoire* not only becomes a representation of what has been, but also holds a sore reminder of what no longer is. Participating in the family ritual, the relatives' lifelines are thus re-entwined and untwined, meaning is gained and lost, it arises and disappears. Similar ambivalent emotions are also produced when those who were not present view the videos and photographs.

#### ***Viewing and ambivalence***

When the puberty ceremony for their granddaughter, Thushanthi, was celebrated in Oslo, Parvathi and Sanjeeven were present with their absence. They did not make the journey to Oslo, as neither would have been guaranteed a visa traveling together.<sup>133</sup> About four months later, they instead received the DVD of the ritual. During my year in Korte, Parvathi talked several times of the DVD and one afternoon after lunch, she found the right time to show it to me.

The sun filled the main room of Parvathi and Sanjeeven's house. Parvathi pulled out three bamboo chairs and placed them strategically between the TV and the open windows so we could catch the breeze. Sanjeeven inserted the DVD and took his place in one of the chairs before pressing the play-button on the remote control. Thushanthi appeared on the TV-screen. In different poses, dressed in a sari and all the accompanying jewellery, Thushanthi smiled to her grandparents. Parvathi kept the beat to the music with her left hand on the armrest of the chair. She seemed to enjoy herself, watching the images of her granddaughter, smiling when Thushanthi appeared on the screen. They watched as Thushanthi was bathed and blessed in water and milk by both Parvathi and Thushanthi's nearest relatives. In pairs of husband and wife, Parvathi saw some of her siblings and almost all of her siblings' children bless her granddaughter

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<sup>133</sup> The Norwegian government does not accept visa applications of spouses traveling together, in particular when all their children live abroad as they consider the possibility of the couple staying in Norway to be high.

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three times each. In between the blessings, Parvathi sang along with the songs, mainly those she knew from one of her favourite TV-programs; “Supersinger”.<sup>134</sup>

After each couple had done the blessing, each person was neatly filmed; first the husband to the camera’s left and then the wife to the camera’s right, and then all three of them in one picture, smiling towards Parvathi. As Parvathi saw each couple she commented on each and every one of them: saying their name and how they are related in different ways, and if not residing in Oslo, where they have travelled from, mostly London or Paris. Her tone of voice was light and she appeared content.

Bourdieu (1990, 22) describes how sending photographs as gifts is a way to maintain relationships similar to the act of visiting, between family members who live at a distance. It requires the receiver to update and engage themselves with the photographed family members. Placing herself in front of her relatives, watching them as they smile towards her, Parvathi interacts with the images of her granddaughter and other close relatives. She engages with the images of her close significant others. This can be seen as a performance of relatedness (cf. Carsten 2000). The images enable Parvathi to at least partly take part in her granddaughter’s life and her family’s celebration (cf. Sahlins 2011), to be together with those with whom she desires to be together.

Here, it is Parvathi’s mutual interactive engagement with the images that brings forth the experience of being part of her relatives’ event. Pinney (2001, 2004) captures this potent mutual and interactive engagement with images in his concept of corporetics. He argues that the practice of seeing endows images with extraordinary power. The embodied engagement people have with images of deities enhances the power of the images in terms of what the image can do in religious experience, blessing and other favours received. Viewing images engages the viewer in a mutual and interactive bodily engagement with them. Interacting with the images, the images as aesthetics, mobilizes all the senses simultaneously (Meyer 2010, Pinney 2004). The viewer becomes engaged with what is seen. It is the mutual *interaction* between the viewing devotee and the

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<sup>134</sup> Talent- and contest show on Indian Tamil TV in which the participants sing covers of famous songs. Shown every day Monday-Friday between 8 and 9 p.m., Sri Lankan and Indian time.

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images inherent in *darsan* that “mobilizes vision as a unified human sensorium”, where the “visual interaction can be transformative” (Pinney 2005, 9).

In the images that Parvathi views of her relatives, their faces are visible all the time and their eyes shown clearly while smiling. Like the eyes in the images of Hindu deities, the visible open eyes of her relatives, invite Parvathi to meet their gazes and “be transformed”. Unlike the exchange of gaze in Hindu worship, the eyes of the relatives that Parvathi views, and the gaze between them and herself, are gazes between two humans and not between a human and a deity. However, I suggest that the act of seeing and meeting the eyes of her relatives, endows the images with extraordinary power, giving Parvathi a sense of her relatives’ presence. Parvathi’s interaction with the images is as such an active practice of relatedness (cf. Carsten 2000): Parvathi chooses to watch and interact with the video-images of her relatives.

This viewing is one way Parvathi can take part in her granddaughter’s ritual, to be able to experience a part of the event her relatives experienced. As much as representing a ritual that took place in the past, the images are also a contemporary and interactive space (West 2014, 181). Moreover, in the act of engaging with her relatives, and in particular the practice of recounting how all of them are related to her, Parvathi positions herself within her family. Through her own engagement with the images of her relatives, Parvathi confirms and re-entwines her lifeline with the lines of each of her relatives and becomes re-enmeshed in the kin-group. This re-enmeshment takes place from distance and whilst the surrounding *ur* is not physically present, it is aesthetically alluded to through the people, decorations and objects that brings forth a sense of familiar and past surroundings. Viewing her relatives’ happiness and physical and emotional closeness in hugs and physical proximity, the family re-appears as united, intimate and close. It is within this united family that Parvathi places herself, re-connecting with her relatives and, to some extent, what was perceived as the past *ur*. This experience undoubtedly forms Parvathi’s own understanding of her family and her belonging to it.

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### *Viewing unity in Oslo, feeling alone in Korte*

The unity stated in the experience of viewing the images, is however not the only emotion that is produced in Parvathi. At the point where all of Parvathi's close relatives (*ende sondam*) are gathered on the stage, similar to the last family photo during Kaviya's puberty ceremony, the video image gets blurry. Sanjeeven suggests fast-forwarding the DVD to another scene. "Wait!" Parvathi demands: "There is a picture with all my sisters' and brothers' children". We wait. Then, all of Parvathi's seven siblings' children appear together, including her own children: 27 of them in total, covering the entire stage.<sup>135</sup> "Look! Look at them!" Parvathi demands. "All are *ondavodda sondam*, own siblings, *machan* and *machal!*" she says eagerly. Then her happy tone of voice swiftly disappears: "So many... In Norway we have a lot of relatives, maaaany. But here are no one." Parvathi's voice is now marked with desolation.

Parvathi is struck by sadness. Her relatives are there together, but she and her husband are "alone" in Korte. While viewing and interacting with the images of her close relatives gives Parvathi a sense of connection and belonging to her *sondam*, viewing them all united together she is also suddenly made aware of the reality; the geographical distance that separates them from her. Through the others' presence, her own absence becomes visible (cf. Battaglia 1997). The experience of presence and belonging to her family members during the viewing is abruptly shattered by the sense of distance and absence. The performativity of viewing is thus taken into her everyday setting where most family members are not gathered and she is "alone". The staged and produced images of family unity together with Parvathi's actual surroundings produce ambivalent experiences of closeness and connectedness along with distance and disconnectedness to those with whom she ought to be living in unity.

In the process of viewing, not only are presence and nearness stated as Pinney (2001, 2004) argues, but the potential for distance to enter the experience is also opened up. The memory her relatives have put so much effort to stage, produce and send to her thereby does not function solely as a representation of the unified *sondam* group, as a

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<sup>135</sup> Including her own children, Paravthi and her siblings have all together 33 children (cf. kinship chart, Appendix 1). Those living in Sri Lanka and a few others did not make it for the ceremony.

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*lieu de mémoire*, re-connecting her with the kin-group, but also disconnect her from them. Viewing the video, Parvathi re-lives her experience of being close and distant to her relatives at the same time. These are experiences she, like others in diaspora, experience in their daily lives: the weekly phone calls from her children, bringing them close, then hanging up, making them more distant again, or their infrequent summer visits, before they leave again. But here, viewing the video, this experience of being close and distant, being part of the *sondam* unity and not, is compressed within a few minutes and without a hint or warning.

Parvathi also experienced such ambivalence of happiness, presence and family belonging and sadness and aloneness when she viewed the images in the photo album from the puberty ceremony of her eldest son's daughter. Parvathi showed the album to me a few weeks before we saw the video of Thushanthi's puberty ceremony. The album was thick with glossed pages of photographs. Parvathi told me that her son had spent 25,000 rupees to have this copy made for them last time they visited in Jaffna.<sup>136</sup> Parvathi happily viewed the first pages of photographs, pointing out her relatives and explaining the relationships. Then she stopped at the picture showing all her sisters' and brothers' children and viewed it for a good while, falling silent. As she kept looking at the photograph, I asked her how she felt. Parvathi smiled sadly, asking rhetorically "If we were there, how would it have been?"

The album her son had made for them, I assume with love and care and with the intention to make them feel included, also has the opposite effect. Associating the images to the ideal of being the *sondam* all united, the images make Parvathi feel alone and disconnected from them, emotions that are undesired and experienced as a threat of meaninglessness. While the images in the album bridge closeness, her son's gift also confirms, or even deepens the experience of the geographical distance separating her from her relatives. It states how she lives in an undesirable situation away from those with whom she should be entwined. Consuming such staged and produced images in videos or photographs therefore brings forth experiences of being entwined and untwined with the past unity of *sondam* and *ur* in close succession or even simultaneously.

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<sup>136</sup> 1.250 NOK or 120 GBP, a little more than a teacher's monthly wage in Sri Lanka.

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In contrast to these two experiences, Parvathi told me about their eldest son's marriage in Norway. A video-tape was made and sent to them. Their VHS-player no longer worked, but retelling how she had received and watched the VHS-tape, Parvathi's eyes were vivid and her voice filled with eagerness: "When the video came, we called our relatives here. We showed them the video and served them food and drinks. It was like we were there in the wedding!"

At that time, in the early 1990's, there were still more relatives in Korte than now: sufficient for them to call a small crowd of to watch the video together. Still being with relatives in Korte, watching the video together with them, the images had the power to collapse the space between Korte and Oslo, giving Parvathi an experience of being part of the ritual and the family. The felt unity with the other relatives watching together with her seemed to fend off the sad emotions of aloneness and distance. The emotions of aloneness and distance from her relatives that Parvathi experiences in interacting with images as *lieux de mémoire*, then, are much influenced by the social context and the changes migration has caused.

### *Re-viewing in Oslo*

The nuclear families who hold the ritual event also wait eagerly for the DVD and photo album. When the DVDs are complete, the family members watch them – alone or together with a few other family members. In the time that has passed since Kaviya's puberty ceremony, Selvi, Kaviya and Balraj have watched the DVD and photo album of the ritual many times. In their spare time, they put on the video to enjoy the experiences and moments of the ritual again. Each time, Selvi and Kaviya in particular express joy and happiness at viewing the video. Like Parvathi, they also comment on their relatives, as well as themselves.

In the re-viewing of the ritual, Selvi and Kaviya meet their own gaze and the gaze of other family members that have long returned to their respective places of living. The act of viewing thus reproduces and reaffirms a particular representation of the united *sondam* and a sense of *ur* and their belonging to this unity, despite being spread out across different countries, cities and within cities in everyday life. The images thus prolong the festivity or the highlight of family life (Bourdieu 1990, 27), and thus of



### *Underneath the margosa tree*

their union. As a materialized memory, the images display the *sondam*-unity as a reconstruction of the local and social unity that existed in pre-war times. Through the images, Selvi can picture how life was in the *ur*, and Kaviya can imagine the unity in the *ur* she has been told about: almost all her relatives are there to the backdrop of a specific community conveyed to the presence of particular people, objects, food and sound. When the video is turned off, however, Selvi and Kaviya find themselves again rather alone; it is far to the sister's or *periamma*'s house in Paris and Jaffna, and the houses of those living in Oslo are also some distance away. The images bridge and unite the family, and are reminders of the life that has been, but also restate the gap between the relatives and are tokens of what no longer is. The closeness and distance, the remembered unity or enmeshment and the actual separation of the relatives are experienced simultaneously.

### **Ritualized ambivalence**

The visual media and the aesthetics produced in and for such media production play an important role in family members' understanding of themselves as part of the close and extended *ur-sondam* group. In an everyday life in which all their close relatives live in different countries, different cities or different parts of the same city, the unity of the *sondam* and their belonging to the *ur* is ambivalent. Searching for meaningful activities in which to engage oneself, in order to partly maintain the remembered enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* in daily life, planning, organizing, attending and making memories of these moments of family unity becomes crucial (cf. Nora 1989). I suggest that all the striving in terms of time, money, arrangements and planning for such family events shows the relatives own desire to re-produce situations where a sense of life in the past is re-produced.

In order for the events and images of the events to work as *lieux de mémoire*, the general aesthetics produced by interaction with particular food, clothes and decorations as much as the presence of relatives and other Tamils are central. Through the specific aesthetic, such events and the images capturing the events, bring forth a sense of the past life. By viewing images or participating in the events, this produced aesthetic

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appeals to the viewer's and participant's whole sensing body (Kapferer and Hobart 2005, Meyer 2010). In this process the aesthetic enables the production of emotions of re-enmeshment in relationships with the *ur-sondam* unity as it connects to ideals and thoughts of this past life (cf. Deleuze 2000). This can re-create experiences of meaning or *illusio* (cf. Bourdieu 2000). Striving to put their different life experiences together, the family rituals become one way to re-entangle their own lifeline with those of relatives and thus restore meaning. Yet, in the ritual event and the produced images, family absence and distance arises along with family unity and representations of the sociality that they remember as central to pre-war Korte or Jaffna life. Their lifelines become re-entwined and again untwined with the meaningful enmeshment of *sondam* and *ur*. As such the produced aesthetics brings forth ambivalent emotions of being both part of and distant from meaningful relationships.

I suggest that these ambivalent emotions and experiences needs to be included in order to understand the emotional life of individual family members and relations between family members. Emotions of closeness and distance give new insights into the experience of living as a dispersed family as relatives seek meaningful activities in which to invest themselves. Using specific objects and media technology to produce and consume *lieux de mémoire* that have an aesthetic dimension, these emotions of presence and absence, memories of what has been and reminders of what no longer is, come into play. Presence and absence overlap, the desired experience of being connected with relatives fades and rises again. The experience of entwining one's own lifeline with those of one's relatives, as one should, provides emotional stability, but the experience of being disconnected from this meaningful enmeshment can destabilise this experience and emotion, producing ambivalent feelings of being and not being with whom one ought to be. The media and produced aesthetics thus compresses such ambivalent emotions that also exist in everyday life, stating the particular sense of being simultaneously distant and close, connected and disconnected to their relatives and living with the loss of this enmeshment and the memories of what life has and should have been. In the next chapter I proceed to explore such ambivalent emotions produced in the use of virtual media and real-time audio-visual streaming during a family crisis.

*Underneath the margosa tree*

## Chapter 7:

### The pain over the divided “death-house”

“I want to see my sister! I want to see her!” I heard Selvi’s scream reach a high pitch. I was in Jaffna, as she spoke to me on the phone from Oslo. She was devastated at the news that her sister Puspha in Korte has passed away and in further pain because she is not there with Puspha and it is impossible for her to travel to Korte to partake in the mourning and funeral rite. Inconsolable, Selvi cries, screams and stutters about her sister’s death, of her last sufferings and her own strong desire and need to see Puspha’s body and to make a last goodbye.

Selvi’s longing to see Puspha before she died and pain at her inability to be present in the death-house was reinforced by the loss of her eldest sister, Malar, who had also died in Korte two years previously. As in the case of Pushpa, Selvi had not seen Malar since 2002, during the ceasefire, and was unable to travel to partake in the mourning and funeral in the *sette veedu*. The wake and funeral rituals take place in and outside the house where the dead person lived: this is the *sette veedu*, literary “death-house”. Because Selvi was involved in pro-LTTE organizations and activities in Norway, traveling to Sri Lanka would risk being detained at the airport and returned to Norway, or even imprisoned.

After Malar’s death, Selvi hoped that the situation in Sri Lanka would improve so it would be safe for her to visit Puspha one last time, as Pushpa had been sick for two years. Even after the end of the war in 2009, however, it remained dangerous for LTTE-supporters to return home. Now, losing Puspha, without having seen her, and still being unable to travel for her funeral, was unbearable to Selvi. Puspha’s siblings, all of whom now live in Europe or Canada, all felt a desperate desire to be present in Korte, to see Puspha’s body and participate in the death-house and the funeral together with other

*Underneath the margosa tree*

relatives. Murali and Thilaga, who had not so actively been involved in LTTE-activities, travelled to Korte, while Selvi and Nathan had to remain in Oslo. Coping with their own absence, they requested images, in the form of photographs and live, real-time video through Skype: a telecommunications software that provides video-calls from computers, tablets and smartphones via the Internet to other devices or telephones.

In this chapter I discuss the emotional work of a dispersed family in times of mourning and grief caused by a family member's death. In particular, attention will be given to images and real-time audio-visual streaming in the endeavour to overcome absence in order to be emotionally present in order to process one's loss and sorrow. Tamil families in the diaspora now experience the death of elder siblings and parents in Jaffna more frequently. This raises the issue of traveling to Sri Lanka to participate in the death-house and funeral. Many cannot make it, primarily due to their engagement in LTTE and obligations of work and children in their country of residence. To be enmeshed in social relationships with relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) is, to the Korte-relatives, experienced as emotionally desirable and crucial for their well-being. This well-being is what is emotionally at stake (cf. Chapter 3). Grieving the death of one of those with whom one has experience enmeshment whilst being unable to participate with other remaining relatives with whom one ought to be enmeshed in times of family crisis therefore becomes emotionally troublesome. Desiring to be together across geographical distance in such events, family members half a world away from the ritual site are increasingly participating in mourning and funeral rites through Skype and photographs. The use of Skype in other life-cycle rituals where significant close relatives (*ende sondam*) are absent is also becoming more frequent.

The discussion in this chapter is centred on observations of the mourning and funeral of Puspha. The political situation, the risk of traveling, and the shifting of the Korte-relatives' residences and sites for large family events from Korte to diaspora became salient at the time of Puspha's death. The fact that few close relatives were present in the *sette veedu* in Korte was deeply felt. This ethnography is based on participant-observation in the death-house in Korte and on conversations and observations through telephone and Skype with Puspha's sister Selvi in what became the death-house in Oslo. As most of Puspha's relatives live abroad, many in Oslo,

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Selvi's house became a centre of mourning for the relatives living there. During the mourning and funeral, I also spoke with Selvi's husband and daughter, as well as Puspha's and Selvi's brother Nathan, and Selvi's close friend Jeyanthi through telephone and Skype. I emphasize how communication technology and new digital platforms for social media play an increasingly significant role within the social relationships of those in Korte and in Oslo.

### Death, mourning and forms of participation

The death of Puspha in the context of her siblings' dispersed living arrangements was an acutely painful event for the Sittampalam-siblings, causing intense emotions. Puspha was the last among them remaining in Korte. For her siblings, therefore, Puspha's death not only involved the loss of one of the important lifelines in which they were enmeshed and by which they were constituted, but also became a symbol of the loss of the sibling-group's direct attachment or entwinement with their *ur* in Korte. As the thirteen year-old daughter of Selvi's sister Thilaga said: "Everyone wants to have someone in the homeland, but now we haven't. That is why everyone cry so much"<sup>137</sup>. Losing an important lifeline to the enmeshment of which they perceived themselves to be part also implied losing future possibilities of being physical entwined with Korte. As such, a family member's death in times of dispersed living makes the future unity of the *sondam* precarious and the siblings' understanding of themselves as a unity enmeshed in *sondam* and *ur* is disturbed. This disturbance increases the pain of a family member's death, imposing the threat of meaninglessness on the experience of the present (cf. Bourdieu 2000).

The death of a person as a partial destruction of the social has long been a topic of interest to anthropology (cf. Durkheim 1995 [1912], van Gennep 1960 [1909], Hertz

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<sup>137</sup> This statement also bear witness to the fact that when most family members live abroad, ties to relatives in Korte are mainly maintained through siblings, and less through cousin-siblings. When Selvi, some months after Puspha's death, stated that "now I don't have anyone to visit there", I asked her if she could not visit Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya. Selvi answered: "Yes, I can. But that is not the same." Although she had once been close to Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya, and today is close to their siblings living in Oslo, visiting Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya in Korte would not be the same as visiting her own sister.

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1960 [1907], Radcliffe-Brown 1964). Robert Hertz (1960 [1907]) argued that the intense emotions that arise among survivors upon a death are caused by their experience of society being deeply disturbed: “When a man dies, society loses in him much more than a unit; it is stricken in the very principle of its life, in the faith it has in itself” (Hertz 1960 [1907], 78). The death of a family member can as such be seen as a disturbance to the social life and to their existential meaning. A blow to the principle of the unity of *sondam* and *ur*, and to the faith that it could be sustained, was clearly visible on the occasion of Puspha’s death, which was a significant loss understood in relation to other losses in the sibling’s group personal and collective life. The death of a close relative was not merely an ending of the physical body, but a destruction of “the social being grafted upon the physical individual and to whom the collective consciousness attributed great dignity and importance” (Hertz 1960 [1907], 77). Having exceptional symbolic value to her siblings, Pushpa’s death caused deep emotional stress.

Selvi’s intense emotions of grief were compounded by her inability to be physically present in her late sister’s death-house in Korte during the days of mourning and the funeral rite. When a family member dies among Jaffna Tamils, the whole family ideally comes together in the death-house as soon as possible, in particular the close relatives (*ende sondam*). This can be seen as a practice of re-entwining lifelines with those who are left to re-establish the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*. It is important for Tamils to be together among *sondam*, and gathered around the dead. Moreover, the rituals following the death are important in the process through which survivors accept the loss, and social order is re-established (cf. Durkheim 1995 [1912], van Gennep 1960 [1909], Hertz 1960 [1907], Radcliffe-Brown 1964). In the Tamil funeral rite itself, it is the ritual performances of the relatives, and in particular the close relatives, which ensure that the soul of the departed will join the ancestors. They pray to the recently departed soul with flowers and symbolically put fire to the body. Hindus do not believe

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in conserving the body: rather it is disposed of to enable the soul to enter the world of the ancestors.<sup>138</sup>

Durkheim (1995 [1912]) saw the death ritual as serving the social group more than the need of the individual to mourn. Collective mourning tightens the bonds between survivors and reinforces the weakened social group. In the case of the death of a close relative among dispersed Tamil families, I suggest that both personal and social needs are important: recovery of a sense of social and meaningful stability is sought in the act of coming together, but close family members of the deceased also express their individual need to utter their grief in tears, screams and self-affliction in order to come to terms with their personal loss and re-establish meaning.

Family members express much grief during the period of mourning before the funeral as well as during the funeral rite itself. Close female relatives will stand or sit close to the body, crying, screaming and striking themselves. Close male relatives, such as sons and husbands also express emotions of grief, but less intensely than female relatives. Extended relatives also involve themselves in similar collective performances of grief (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1964), although in calmer style.<sup>139</sup> Being able to participate in such rites, sharing and displaying their emotions of grief and pain together, appears vital for Jaffna Tamils in order to come to terms with their loss, and restore personal and social meaning. As Rosaldo (1993 [1989]) has argued, it is important to attend to such emotional forces of death, which depend upon the bonds of intimacy with the deceased.

For those unable to travel, images and live audio-visual transference becomes valuable substitutes for presence, enabling important emotional work in times of crises.

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<sup>138</sup> During the rite, the ancestors are invited and offered prayers, the names of male ancestors three generations back are recited (Banks 1957, 117). While, in the funeral ritual, only the ascendants agnates on the father's side are recited, Banks (1957, 117) also reports that in weddings the names of the three ascendants agnates of both bride and groom are recited. The joining of the recently departed soul with its ancestors' souls is symbolized in the ritual when four cakes of rice and turmeric are formed, each representing the three ancestors and the recently departed soul. The cake representing the recently departed is divided in three, and each piece added to one of the cakes representing the other three ancestor souls.

<sup>139</sup> In his ethnography, *The Andaman Islanders*, Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown (1964) showed how expressions during funeral ceremonies, such as weeping, are a collective performance rather than personal expressions of sorrow. He even suggested that it is the ceremony that produces the emotions, the expression of which is obligatory. While crying, screaming and hitting oneself are expected ways of performing pain and mourning among Tamils, I recognize such enactments of sorrow among Pushpa's close relatives as genuine experiences of grief and loss.



### *Underneath the margosa tree*

During the mourning of Puspha, the use of photographs, and in particular the use of Skype during the funeral, permitted Selvi and Nathan, who were physically absent from the death-house in Korte, to see and be bodily involved in the funeral rite, and to participate with their other close and more distant *sondam*. Moreover, the family's use of photographs and Skype during the mourning permitted more of Puspha's close relatives to see and take part in the ritual than would otherwise have been possible. Through the medium of Skype, they participated simultaneously, sharing experiences and witnessing and being affected by each other's emotional expressions.

The two-way, real-time communication through Skype enabled a more active and participatory role for those who were physically absent, than viewing a packaged DVD and photo album, as was the case in the puberty ceremonies. Here, the staging and choreography found when producing videos and photographs is replaced by a dynamic and simultaneous interaction between those geographically present and absent. This two-way connection, and the situation of death and family crisis, seemed to intensify the emotional participation of those who were geographical distant in the ritual. The performance of the ritual, which prior to extensive migration took place within 24 hours as part of a collective tradition and custom (cf. Nora 1989) now depends on audio-visual media.<sup>140</sup> The technology connects family members in times of crises, enabling re-entwinements. The bonds are fragile, however, as poor Internet lines or exhausted laptop batteries may disconnect them at any time.

## **The divided death-house**

### *The need for people: a sparsely visited death-house in Korte*

It was Selvi's husband in Oslo who first informed me of Puspha's death, calling me during the early morning in Jaffna. For him, it was the middle of the night. Selvi was crying loudly and bitterly in the background. The conversation was short. He asked me

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<sup>140</sup> The funeral ritual is supposed to take place within 24 hours of the death. However, in Jaffna and in the Tamil diaspora today, this practice is difficult to follow as most families are living geographically dispersed. Despite the availability of media-technologies, most families choose to postpone the funeral until at least some of the close relatives living in other countries arrive.

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to go to Puspha's house, "to be there". I knew I was not just being informed as part of the family, but was also being asked to be present. They could not go to the death-house themselves, and my presence, in my role as Selvi's daughter, would add to the number of relatives and visitors to the death-house.

Reaching Puspha's house, I find Jeevan sitting on the door-step, chewing betel nut which is customary at any family ritual. He looks tired, his eyes sore from lack of sleep, and, I guess, from crying. Seeing me, he gets up and says, "Only now one hour ago I got her body here". Jeevan takes me inside. Puspha's body is lying on a bier placed in the living room. She is dressed in a purple sari with gold borders. The bier: an unfolded coffin draped with fine, white cotton, is decorated with yellow and red flowers. Earrings, bracelets, a chain and a nose ring, all in delicate gold, have also been placed upon Puspha. Her hands are covered with white gloves, and her feet with white socks. A fine-knitted white net covers her face and chest. She looks peaceful and proud. At her head, a tall brass oil lamp burns with a burning incense stick stuck into a banana at the top. Above her body, a white sheet, tied to the supporting beams, forms a canopy.

The calm and peaceful impression given by my initial sight of Puspha's decorated body cracks as I come closer: three ladies, one elderly and two middle-aged, rise from their chairs and cry out loud. They embrace me, let me go, embrace me and let me go again and again, all while crying. The sound and heat from the three women's bodies are intense. One of them had cared for Puspha at home recently. I had never seen the other two before, although one of them was a relative of Puspha living in Thiruppur. After calming down, they introduced themselves. The oldest was the mother of Puspha's brother's wife living in Canada. The second, a middle-age woman, is an *ondavodda tangechi* (mother's sister's younger daughter) of Puspha's husband from a different *ur* outside Arayalai. Puspha's close relatives in Korte: Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya, Puspha's *ondavodda* sister (Parvathi) and daughters of Puspha's *ondavodda* brother (Sasikala and Vijaya) are nowhere to be seen.

There is silence in the house again. After a while, a few more mourners arrive. Most introduce themselves as relatives of Puspha's husband. The loud crying and embraces by which I was met when I entered the house are repeated every time a new person enters. The crying goes on for a while, then they calm down. After exchanging some

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words about Puspha, how she suffered and now, finally, was at peace, the women fall silent, staring alternately at Puspha's body and into the air. The seven women now present sit on chairs next to each other around Puspha's body in the living room, while two men and Jeevan sit outside. The time passes slowly. Waiting.

Around two o'clock, Parvathi and her husband show up. They had decided to eat their lunch before they came. Only low whispering is heard between the women inside. Apart from discussions of the late Puspha's health, the topic repeatedly raised among them is the lack of people in the death-house: *Akheil illai*, "no people", *akhal venum* "there needs to be people", and *Pullei pavam. Inge oru terram illai. Sittamma illai, mama illai, ellerum velle natile irrikrange*, "Poor children. No-one is here. No "little mothers" (i.e. mother's younger sisters) or mother's elder brothers. They are all in outside countries".

There should, according to the women, have been more relatives in the death-house. Pointing out the lack of relatives is also related to the Hindu belief that the soul of the dead remains in the house and thus needs to be surrounded by his or her relatives until cremation. Furthermore, some see it as reassuring to be amongst many surrounding the dead soul and body, particularly during the night, when the soul is believed to be more likely to be active. In Puspha's death-house there are few relatives, however. The tent that Jeevan had arranged for a group of boys to pitch in the narrow alley between their house and Lakshmi's house had not yet come into use.<sup>141</sup> Jeevan explained that the tent would provide shelter for the people that are expected to visit in the days before the funeral, and to attend the funeral itself. Their own house was quite small as was the verandah in front of the house. But so far, there was no need for extra space.

***"Where there many people there?"***

When I talked to Selvi and Kaviya on the phone at lunchtime, they echoed the whispering women's concern about the lack of people in Puspha's house. It was Selvi who called, and it was the first time I had talked to her since Puspha died. In the beginning she only sobbed, cried and screamed. Only when she calmed down did she

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<sup>141</sup> After she settled in Norway, Lakshmi built a house for herself in Korte on a piece of her parent's land.

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ask me: “Were there many people there?” I replied that some people were there, listing the names of the ones I knew. She started crying loudly again.

In pain and grief at the loss of her sister and not being present in the death-house, Selvi attempted to find consolation in knowing there were many gathered in the death-house together with Puspha’s children, Jeevan and Renuka. But my answer provided small comfort; there should have been more relatives gathered in the place of mourning. Selvi cried louder and Kaviya took over the phone. Kaviya repeated her mother’s question, if there were many people at Puspha’s house. I told her that there were some. “Was *apamma* there?” Kaviya then asked. “No, but your father’s sister was there”, I answered. With disappointment in her voice Kaviya said “Oh, I though *appa*’s [father’s] family was there”.

Selvi as well as Kaviya had expected more people to be present – at least Kaviya’s grandmother and her father’s other relatives living near Korte. Being many together, and particular being many gathered for life-cycle-rituals such as funerals, puberty ceremonies, and weddings is what Selvi and her siblings are used to and it is how it should be. Puspha’s and Selvi’s family is a big family. However, few of their close relatives were in Korte to be present in the death-house: like Selvi, they are all abroad. Those who live nearby do not necessarily attend, such as Kaviya’s paternal grandmother. Kaviya is disappointed by the absence of her father’s family, and the lack of people in Puspha’s house only increases Selvi’s grief and pain at the loss of Puspha and at her own absence.

The poor attendance in the death-house in Korte appeared even more striking when Kaviya told me that many has visited their house in eastern Oslo, and that they have received many condolences over the phone. Kaviya said that her *sitti* (her father’s younger brother’s wife) was the first to visit them. She came and made tea, and they expected her to return later with the whole family once her husband finished work. Kaviya also told me that many had also called to say they can bring food, an offer Kaviya said they had refused.

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When someone dies in Jaffna, Tamils do not make food in the house of the dead, as the house is regarded as polluted.<sup>142</sup> Rather the food is made by relatives and brought to the house so that the close relatives staying there can have unpolluted food. Selvi and Kaviya had turned down the offerings of food, however, because they wanted to restrict the numbers of visitors to their house. They had only called and informed their close relatives of Puspha's death, attempting not to spread the news too widely. Over the following days, however, Selvi's house was packed with visitors coming and going as knowledge of Puspha's death spread. On the second day, Selvi's husband told me on Skype from Oslo that:

Today the whole crowd has been here. Yesterday Arulnithy [his brother's wife] came straight away, and also many Korte-people came. They started coming in the evening. And today more people have been here. Thiruppur-people and also Selvi's friends, and even more people from Araiyalai came. Where there many people there?

Close and extended relatives, and *ur-akhal* from Araiyalai, Selvi's husband's relatives and other women from the pro-LTTE activist community in Oslo had come to see Selvi and her family. Kaviya also told me that "Inthu-*amma*<sup>143</sup> is calling frequent now". Living in Paris while the rest of her siblings are in Oslo, Inthu knows that her siblings will, as usual, gather in Selvi's house. Calling here, Inthu had the opportunity to talk to Selvi and Thilaga, Murali and Nathan all at once, as well as more extended relatives and *ur-akhal* visiting Selvi's house.

The many visitors to Selvi's house were in stark contrast to the situation in Puspha's house in Korte where few were present. Despite the fact that Selvi and her husband, as well as Thilaga and Nathan had called their relatives in and near Thiruppur and informed them of Puspha's death, urging them to go to the house, few attended. During the first evening, there were even fewer people in Puspha's house than in the morning, although a few new people had arrived; Vijaya and Sasikala, the children of Puspha's *ondavodda* brother, living just around the corner from Puspha's house and

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<sup>142</sup> Although this is a Hindu custom, it is to my knowledge also followed among Tamil Christians in Jaffna.

<sup>143</sup> Inthu is the (elder) sister of Kaviya's mother, as such she becomes (*periyamma*), mother, to Kaviya.

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three friends of Jeevan from Vavuniya. The offer of food brought to the house that Selvi had declined in Oslo was not even a question in the death-house in Korte. Rather, Jeevan had ordered food from a restaurant for himself, his sister and his friends staying overnight. His relatives nearby did not bring food that day although some food was brought to the house by one of the relatives of Puspha's husband over the following days.

Puspha's house in Korte was the *de facto* death-house. Here all the mourners, ideally all the close and extended relatives should gather and the funeral ritual will take place. However, there were few people there, and in particular, the close relatives that should have been there were absent. More distant relatives were also lacking, resulting in the lack of food brought to the house. Puspha's house in Korte lacked the sociality that traditionally should be present in the death-house. Rather, this sociality was found on the other side of the globe, in eastern Oslo in Selvi's house, with close and extended relatives visiting, making tea, bringing food and calling. While lacking the body of the dead, Selvi's house manifests more of the sociality that should have been present in the death-house in Korte. The traditional death-house, containing all the relatives and the dead body is thus split into (at least) two death-houses: one house containing the body and the other containing the social relations.<sup>144</sup>

The lack of relatives to attend Puspha's death-house in Korte troubled Selvi and her family. Selvi's wish not to have many visitors in her own house and attempt not to spread the news of Puspha's death bear witness to the emotionally troublesome nature of the situation for Selvi: not being together in the actual *sette veedu* in such an event threatened the re-restoration of the social bonds between them in times of death. Moreover, her wish to not have many visitors in her house may also have been an expression of guilt and felt unfairness, that many relatives were with her in Oslo instead of being present in Korte. However, for Selvi, her own absence from Korte during these days was the most painful experience.

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<sup>144</sup> Selvi told me that her brother in Canada also received visits of Korte-relatives and other Tamil friends during the days after Puspha's death.

## **“I want to see my sister!” – the pain of the divided death-house**

During my phone conversation with Selvi on the day Puspha died, when she had calmed down, Selvi asked with a pained voice: “How does she [Puspha] look now?” Carefully I answered her question: “She looks peaceful, *amma*”, and I told her of the colours of the sari and the jewels in which Puspha had been dressed. It was at this point that Selvi let out a loud, sore scream, and cried out: “I want to see my sister! I want to see her!” I tried to sooth her by emphasizing that Puspha looked peaceful. “I’m sure she was in a lot of pain”, Selvi sobbingly stammered, falling into several minutes of intense crying. Then she asked: “Can you take pictures of Puspha and send them to me?” Hesitantly I agreed, wondering whether this might only cause her more pain.

Unable to be present to see Puspha’s body, I suggest that Selvi’s request for images is one way she sought to compensate for her absence. In order to experience enmeshment with her *sondam* and *ur*, she should have been present in the place of mourning with Puspha’s body and the other relatives. Being separated from these relations in a time of crisis became painful: threatening her experience of existential meaning. Disconnected from her *ur* and *sondam*, the images may help bridge some of the painfully experienced distance and thus sooth the pain.

When I returned to Puspha’s house in the afternoon, I brought my camera and took photographs of Puspha’s body; some close-ups of her face and upper body, some more distant showing the full body as she lies in her sari and gold ornaments on the bier decorated with flowers. Puspha’s eyes are closed and white, sacred ash of *viboothi* has been smeared horizontally on her forehead. When I left that night, Jeevan reminded me to send the photos to Selvi as soon as I got back to my house. Jeevan had received the same message from Selvi, to ask me to take pictures and send her. Reaching the house, I sent the photos to Selvi by e-mail. Neither she, nor Kaviya, her son or husband were online so I sent a text message to Selvi’s cell phone, saying that I had sent the photos.

The following day, Selvi’s friend Jeyanthi called me. She told me that Selvi had told her that I sent the photographs. Anxious about Selvi’s reaction to the photographs, I asked Jeyanthi what she had said. “She said that it helped, that it was good to see”, Jeyanthi reassured me. Selvi herself also called later when I was again in Puspha’s

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house. With a sad, but lighter tone of voice than the previous day, she said: “I saw the pictures yesterday... It was good to see Puspha. She looks peaceful, like you say. I think she died easily, not hard.” Selvi was much calmer now than the day before.

Through her own corporeal engagement by placing herself in front of the photograph of Puspha on her laptop, I suggest Puspha’s body and the relatives present in the *sette veedu* in Korte were brought into Selvi’s physical presence (cf. Pinney 2004). The act of seeing thereby evokes a sense of proximity to Puspha’s body and the place and relatives she should have been with in this situation. Furthermore, the quality of knowledge inherent in the seeing (cf. Pinney 2004, 9); Selvi now knows how Puspha looks and can draw the conclusion that “she looks peaceful”, taking comfort from it.

On the phone, Selvi also tells me that she has just come back from the airport having seen Murali off to Colombo. It had been decided the day before that Murali and Thilaga should travel to Korte, arriving on Sunday, two days after Puspha’s death. Thilaga had travelled the previous night, with a stop-over in London, and Murali followed in the morning. From Colombo it was planned that they would go in a privately hired van to Jaffna.

Seeing her brother off on his flight to Colombo and having seen the photos of Puspha seem to have eased Selvi’s experience of being absent from the death-house in Korte. Her brother and sister traveling to Korte brought more of Selvi’s relatives to the death-house, and thus physically closer to Puspha’s body and children. More of the family members with whom Selvi experienced enmeshment and that “should be together” would now come together. Although she is not there herself, experiencing enmeshment through these others may have given a sense that a part of her was also coming together with essential others in the place of mourning. Moreover, the photo of Puspha’s body brought it physically closer to Selvi in her flat in Oslo and to the mourning relatives there. The two death-houses, one in Korte and the other in Oslo, become more, yet still far from fully, complete.

### *Placing and screening images - mediating the two death-houses*

Later the same evening, while I was still in Puspha’s house, Jeevan and I received the same text message from Selvi’s husband, asking for more photographs of Puspha, and



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this time also of the house and surroundings. Jeevan nodded towards my phone, having seen that I also had received the message. “Can you please do it?” I took a few more photographs of Puspha and then some of the house and the surroundings; people sitting in the chairs, and the street leading to the house where a white flag was put up to indicate the presence of a death-house.

In the night, I again talked with Selvi, this time on Skype. The signal was good enough to have the video running. Selvi sat on the burgundy couch in their living room. Her hair was tied up in a loose bun, and she was wearing a baggy blue coloured, long-sleeved cotton shirt. She looked tired. “Many people have been here today, Stine. Everyone has seen the pictures you sent. They say we are lucky to have you there to take photos.” The house phone sounds and her husband gives the phone to Selvi. She excuses herself, saying it is another relative calling passing on his condolences. Balraj remains in front of the camera, saying: “It is good that you sent those photographs. We show them to everyone who comes. It goes on the slideshow on the TV here.”

The pictures of Puspha’s body have been screened on the family’s 52 inch flat-screen, placed centre stage in the living room in front of the lounge suite where visitors are invited to sit. Edwards (2012, 226) points out that the placing of photographs is a statement of their social importance and efficacy: situating the image within social relations. Through the image of Puspha’s body, screened in the middle of Selvi’s living room, right in front of the guests invited to sit in front of the TV, Puspha’s body becomes present in the midst of her relatives in Oslo.

Pinney (2001, 2004) argues that the viewer can enhance the power of the image through their engagement with it. In this way, Selvi’s, Balraj’s and the visitors’ own corporeal placement in front of the image enhance the power of the photograph. Viewing and being seated in front of the images of Puspha’s body brings it into close proximity. The images invite the relatives to engage with them: to see and feel. It is Selvi and Balraj who place the photographs, which, in turn, affect them.

This placing and interaction with the image may also give Selvi and the others a feeling of being present among Puspha’s children and the more distant relatives in the death-house in Korte. Balraj’s request for more pictures, including the house and the surroundings – knowing the images also will capture the people present, indicates, I

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suggest, their wish to also see their relatives. Through her own and her husband's placement of, and interaction with the images, Selvi partly fulfils her desire to see her sister and be present in the death-house in Korte.

The placing of Puspha's photo in the middle of the living room replicates the placing of Puspha's body in the death-house: As Puspha's body in Korte is surrounded by distant relatives sitting in chairs around the body on the bier, Puspha's body is at the same time surrounded by her relatives in Oslo. The numbers of people in the death-house in Korte and their own desire to be present there were concerns of Selvi, Kaviya and Balraj. Through visual mediation, the practices of placement of the photographs and their own corporeal interaction with them, Selvi and Balraj compensate for their absence, as well as for the absences of other Korte-relatives. The production and placing of the images thereby collapses the space between the death-houses in Korte and Oslo, bringing the two death-houses into one. Through the image, more of Puspha's close relatives surround the dead body together, filling up the death-house in Korte from a distance.

### **"I want to see her go": Puspha's funeral in Korte and Oslo**

*Aiyooooo!* Selvi *illei*, Nathan *illei!* *Aiyooooo!*, "*Aiyooooo!* No Selvi, No Nathan! *Aiyooooo!*" On the day of the funeral, Thilaga's laments reach me as I come along the alley into Puspha's house. Thilaga here certainly uses the expression of "*aiyo*" in pain and frustration - over her sister's death and the absence of Selvi and Nathan: "Selvi *illei*, Nathan *illei!*" Not having all of the siblings together to mourn as they should have adds to the pain over her dead sister. When I enter the house, I find Thilaga standing next to Puspha's body together with Puspha's daughter Renuka. Thilaga is wearing a black sari with gold border and Renuka is wearing a light pink panjabi that Thilaga had brought for her.

Thilaga arrived the night before together with Murali. She had not been back to Sri Lanka since she left twenty-one years ago. Getting down from the van that had brought them from Colombo in the alley in front of Puspha's house, Thilaga had started the same laments: "*Aiyoo!* Puspha-*akka!* Puspha-*akka!*", hitting herself with the palms onto

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her forehead. She reiterated the laments and the self-inflicted blows until she entered the house where she collapsed over Puspha's body, screaming out her name "Puspha-akkaaaaaa" in a long, sore howl. Now, on the day of the funeral, Thilaga's laments filled the house and the alley, repeatedly crying out the absence of her siblings: "Aiyoooooo! Selvi illei, Nathan illei!" Thilaga's face is wet with tears and twisted in pain, revealed as screams.

Selvi's absence is upsetting Selvi no less than Thilaga. The day before, Selvi had asked me to transmit the funeral ritual on Skype. She said that at least, she wanted to "see Puspha go".<sup>145</sup> A few minutes past 1.00 p.m., Selvi called the house phone in Puspha's house. Jeevan answered and conveyed the message that Selvi wanted to test the Skype-connection before the funeral rite starts. I moved away from the small crowd that now sat outside the house. I signed into Skype and called up Selvi. As on the previous day, she sat on the couch in the living-room. Her voice was faint and she looked tired. After she confirmed what I suspected, that she has not eaten since Puspha died, she demanded: "I want to see her, I want to see Puspha-akka's face. Please, show me her face". Complying with her wish, I take the laptop inside where Puspha's body lies.

I place myself and the laptop close to Puspha's face, standing next to Thilaga. "A little closer" Selvi demands, "I can't see her well". I put the laptop closer and a little higher at an angle so that Selvi sees Puspha's face close up. Then I, Thilaga and the others in the room hear Selvi's painful cry: "Puspha-akkaaaaaa!" Thilaga responds to Selvi's cry: she bends over Puspha's body, looking at Selvi and cries out: "Selvi, Puspha-akka! Puspha-akka has gone!" Selvi starts crying inconsolably, hitting her head with her palms, crying and screaming "Puspha-akka, Puspha-akka!" Thilaga pulls herself back up to a straight, standing position, still next to me with the laptop. Like Selvi, Thilaga screams out their dead sister's name: "Puspha-akkaaaaaa!" repeatedly while she also hits herself on the forehead. The two sisters now have the sense of standing side by side and crying together over Puspha's body.

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<sup>145</sup> Here, I suggest that the "need to see" reflects the emphasis on visibility and knowledge in Hinduism (cf. Pinney 2004, 9). I will discuss this below.

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As the camera is held still over Puspha's face, Selvi receives this image for several minutes, whilst, for a moment, she sees the image of Thilaga looking into the camera as she hears the sound of Thilaga's cries. Through the close-up image of her sister from beside the bier, Selvi, in her living-room in Oslo, views her dead sister in almost the same position as she would had if she had been physically present. At the same time, Thilaga, as well as the others in the room, can see Selvi's tears and hear her cries. The image brings Puspha's body and Thilaga into Selvi's presence, simultaneously bringing Selvi into the presence of Thilaga and the other in Puspha's house. Through the audio-visual medium of Skype, Selvi and Thilaga are given a sense of a physical proximity to each other and to Puspha's body (cf. Pinney 2001, 167); the two sisters mourn together over Puspha's body as they "should have done".

Through Skype, Selvi becomes an active participant in the family's death-house in Korte, affecting Thilaga as well as being affected by the images of Puspha's body and Thilaga's crying and screaming. It is viewing the close-up image of Puspha's body that intensifies Selvi's cries. Likewise, hearing and viewing Selvi's laments again brings Thilaga to tears, prompting her to scream out laments and strike herself again.

With reference to the French philosopher Jean-Francois Lyotard, Pinney (2004, 21-22, 2005, 266) makes an interesting point concerning aesthetics and affects. Lyotard's writing on "figure" is opposed to, and resists, the "linguistic-philosophical closure" of discourse (Pinney 2004, 22, 116). Hence, "figure" is relatively free of the demands of meaning: it is not an area for production and communication of meaning, but invokes a field of affective intensity (Pinney 2004, 22, 116). "Figure" is "a zone where 'intensities are felt'" (Pinney 2005, 266). Through the medium of Skype, the image, or "the figure", of Puspha's body and Thilaga's and Selvi's cries, the images of their faces covered by tears and pain, viewed by the sisters themselves creates an aesthetics, appealing to Selvi's and Thilaga's senses and evoking intense affects in the two of them. These affects are revealed as they cry and scream louder and hit their foreheads with their palms. As the visual and bodily performances of Hindu devotees contribute crucially to the potential power of the image (Pinney 2001, 167), Thilaga's and Selvi's own corporeal engagement enhances the power of the images transmitted through Skype.

*Underneath the margosa tree*

As noted by Pinney (2001, 160), aesthetics thereby “touch on the raw” and “de-anaesthetize”; they arouse and awaken affects in the engaged person. Pinney borrows these expressions from Alla Efimova’s writing on Soviet Social Realism and the ways in which it mobilized an aesthetics engaging the senses by means of pain and fear. Aesthetics, then, is not only beauty, but a broad sensory reality, as in Aristotele’s *aisthesis*, including negative feelings of pain, sorrow, grief, fear, distress and so on (cf. Pinney 2001, 160). Though not physically present, Selvi achieves a kind of physical proximity through the aesthetic qualities that the images and sounds convey through the medium of Skype. Interacting with these “objects”, the produced aesthetic stimulates, or “touches upon” her senses and enables her to have many similar emotional reactions to those she would have expected had she been physically present.

Brought into visual and auditory proximity to the ritual event of her sister’s death, Selvi’s emotions are stirred.<sup>146</sup> The emotional intensity gives an experience of direct involvement in the death-house and with the relatives in Korte; of being where she should be and re-entwining her lifeline with the relations with whom she should be enmeshed. Through the images, Puspha’s dead body and the two sisters comes together. Thilaga and Selvi become present to each other, engaging and participating in the same emotional experiences. Selvi is an active participant in the death-house. The geographically dispersed death-house becomes centred and constituted around the two sisters.

For Selvi, I suggest, achieving such intense negative feelings by actively participating in the death-house ritual through Skype is important to her process of coping with the loss of her sister. However, the Internet-line, Skype and the laptop enabling these experiences, as well as giving Thilaga an experience of Selvi’s presence, is also a constant reminder of Selvi’s physical absence: the technology states the geographical distance between Selvi and the death-house in Korte. At anytime, the line that connects Selvi with her relatives in Korte may fail, or become unstable. And Selvi can also turn it off, as she did after having seen these close-up images of Puspha.

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<sup>146</sup> In their work on information communication technologies used in family therapy in transnational families, Gonzalo Baciagalupe and Susan Lambe (2011) also states that the visual component of web consultation in sessions added to the emotional intensity due to its ability to capture non-verbal and analogical information.

## Experiencing the funeral ritual in two places

In Oslo, Selvi has disconnected Skype, disconnected the intense emotional experience of being present. Now she awaits the beginning of the funeral ritual. Murali, who has been wandering about restlessly, only sitting now and then, talking with visitors, approaches me: “It is good you brought the computer. It is this they are very engaged with there. All are waiting for it [...] You can come to the cremation place also”.<sup>147</sup> Murali, in Korte, is also concerned about his siblings in Oslo. He knows it is important for them to see the ritual, including the cremation.

Everything is now prepared for the ritual to begin at 3.00 p.m., one hour before the announced start of the funeral when they will place the body in the hearse and transport it to the place outside Arayalai where it will be cremated. The two men who usually sing at funerals in Korte have taken their place. They have drawn white lines in the sand, marking the space where the ritual will be performed. Jeevan and his friends have also made arrangements; putting threads, forming a square under the ceiling of the tent that he had put up the same day Puspha passed away, and attaching streams of palms leaves folded in three arrows pointing to the ground.<sup>148</sup> This square underneath the ceiling and the white lines drawn by the singers marks the ritual space. The overseer of the ritual has also arrived and has placed all the necessary paraphernalia: turmeric paste, argum grass, water in bucket, rice, flour, a thick wooden bat, bananas, coconuts, a clay pot, mango leaves, oil lamps, ghee and flower petals. He has also sprinkled water on the ground where they will place Puspha on her bier, inside the marked ritual space. Importantly more people have now arrived. The majority are close and distant relatives living in Korte and Thiruppur and relatives of Puspha’s late husband, as well as the in-laws of the other siblings, whilst some are from neighbouring villages in Ariyalai.

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<sup>147</sup> The custom is that only men go to the cremation ground outside Arayalai. But if a dead person only has female close relatives, the wife or daughter will attend. Murali wanted me to attend so that I could transmit the final cremation to Selvi and Nathan in Oslo. He also said that since I was “as *sondam*” to them, I could go.

<sup>148</sup> Such streamers of palms leaves are folded for decoration in every Tamil ritual event. At funerals, the arrow is folded pointing downwards, whereas for “happy” occasions, such as weddings and puberty ceremonies, the arrow is folded pointing upwards.

*Underneath the margosa tree*

When the ritual begins inside the house, I call Selvi on Skype.<sup>149</sup> As before, she sits on the couch in her living room, still looking tired. She says a low “Hi” and then clearly focuses her eyes on the place of the ritual. She now sees the two singers chanting religious songs and the elderly man who oversees the ritual, directing Jeevan through the ritual acts which he, as Pushpa’s only son, must perform. Jeevan’s head is completely shaved, a symbol of sacrifice for his mother he explained. The ritual overseer directs Jeevan to put ash, using three fingers in his forehead and he puts a thread over Jeevan’s head, landing on the right shoulder, directing Jeevan to put the left hand over it so that the thread crosses his upper body.

I try to capture the ritual setting for Selvi: the singers, Puspha’s body and the ritual acts performed by Jeevan. The religious chanting goes on continually, inviting the presence of the Hindu deities Pullier, or Ganesh, Siva and Sakthi and entreating them to move all obstacles and grant their grace for the entrance of the soul on the right path to join its ancestors. Selvi cries, but is more controlled now than earlier. Kaviya, and Thilaga’s daughter Nirosha, also come to see. The song is long. After some time, Selvi tells me it would be better to save the laptop battery and to call her up when they take the body outside. “I’ll be waiting here”, she says, “I’m not going anywhere”.

Selvi is concerned to be present in the ritual’s most important parts. She disconnects herself from the presence the images give her. She is visibly absent from the ritual in Korte again, but emotionally she is still concerned with the funeral rite, “waiting”, “not going anywhere”.

When the body is taken outside to be washed, I connect Selvi to Skype again. Selvi accepts the call at once. She now sees the ritual overseer directing Jeevan through the symbolic washing of his mother. A mirror is held in front of Puspha’s face and Jeevan washes the mirror image of his mother with fruits cut into small pieces, milk and water, comparable to the washing of deities in Hindu temples. Piraga’s shoulders shiver and tears run heavily down his cheeks. Selvi, Kaviya and Nirosha watch, Selvi sobbing continually, sometimes with more ease, then bursting out in loud sore cries, hitting

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<sup>149</sup> As Selvi also had asked me to take her place in the ritual today to perform the ritual acts for her, my partner at the time took care of the Skype-transmission whilst I performed the ritual acts on behalf of Selvi. The remainder of the time, I handled the laptop.

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herself on the forehead. Kaviya and Nirosha are also crying, but more lightly. Both of them are stroking Selvi alternately on the back, trying to console her.

During this session, Nathan also calls me, wanting me to include him in the Skype transference. I wish to oblige, but only having the free version of Skype which does not facilitate conference calls, it is not possible. About fifteen minutes later, I see him next to Selvi. The four of them are now watching Puspha's funeral in Korte from the couch in Oslo.

Puspha's body is now moved to the tent, inside the ritually marked space. With the laptop in my hands, I follow the participants turning towards Puspha's body. The tent and the area beyond are now crammed with people. The women are standing at the front, dressed in dark coloured saris. The men stand behind in their white *veshti* and light coloured shirts.<sup>150</sup> Jeevan is now instructed to beat flour, rice and sandalwood, placed a short way from the body, but inside the ritual marked space. The singers chant while shaking small bells and Jeevan is asked to beat at irregular intervals during the song. Selvi's sore and intense cries mix with those of the other participants, in particular those of Thilaga and, from time to time, Jeevan. The cries mix further with the chants and the sounds of Jeevan's beating.

Jeevan is then instructed to take ash and smear it in the forehead of his mother and to make a *puttu* – head mark, with sandalwood paste and a dot of *kumkumam*<sup>151</sup> on top. Selvi's crying intensifies significantly. Nathan and the two girls are quiet. Thereafter, the close relatives, both on Puspha's and her husband's side, are asked to come forward. Following Selvi's wish for me to perform the ritual acts she would have done if she was physically present, I now take her place together with Jeevan, Renuka, Thilaga and Murali. We are asked to take flower petals from a tray and place them on Puspha's feet. Jeevan goes first, then Renuka and then Thilaga. Murali and I follow. We circulate around the body three times, each time placing our hands on Puspha's feet and then her eyes in the act of praying to Puspha's body as it is believed that her soul now is with the Gods.

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<sup>150</sup> A *veshti* is a four-yard long cloth covering a man from the waist down.

<sup>151</sup> *Kumkumam* is a red powder made of a mixture of slaked lime and turmeric. It is believed that applying *kumkumam* to the forehead where the eyebrows meet is effective as it a spot where nerves meet. Also, it is believed that *kumkumam* on the forehead drives away evil spirits and forces.



*Underneath the margosa tree*

As I pray to Puspha's body, the loss of Puspha, the thought of her children who are now alone in Korte, and the absence of Selvi, knowing how much she desired to be here, overwhelm me with sadness. I only get quick glimpses on the screen showing Selvi's living-room in Oslo. Nathan and the girls are now out of the camera angle. The laptop is a few meters away from where I stand and the sounds of chants, bells and crying covers up the sound coming from Selvi's living-room. What I see is Selvi's lips quivering, then separating into a wide gap. She hits herself on the forehead repeatedly. Thilaga is also hitting herself on the head while shouting "Puspha-akkaaaa! Puspha-akkaaaa!"

Selvi and the others watch as Jeevan, Renuka, Murali, Thilaga and I take one flower garland each from the five garlands that have been ordered from a shop in Jaffna town. One by one we place them around Puspha's neck. Puspha's body is covered with flowers on her chest and flower petals at the end of her feet. The acts are accompanied to the sound of chants, mixing with cries and Thilaga's laments. Selvi's face is twisted as she cries. As the present close relatives and some distant relatives are standing in a circle around Puspha's body, waiting while the singing continues, Thilaga again returns to her laments, shouting the name of Puspha again and again: "Puspha-akkka, Puspha-akkaaaaaa!" Then she includes Selvi in the laments "Selvi, *seriane anpu!*" – "Selvi loved a lot!"

The closure of the ritual approaches. Parvathi, Sasikala, Vijaya, the mother-in-law of Puspha's eldest brother, and Puspha's distant relatives present in Korte, gather in a half-circle around the body together with Jeevan, Renuka, Thilaga, Murali and myself. The lap-top camera is still in the same position, so that Selvi sees Puspha's body and the relatives gathered around it. Thilaga is crying her heart out, emitting loud, shouting cries. Tears are running down the cheeks of Jeevan and Renuka. The eyes of Parvathi, Sasikala and Vijaya are also wet. We are all given small wooden-sticks topped with cloth dipped in lighter fuel and set on fire. Puspha's body is now surrounded by a half-circle of small flames, held by the close relatives that are physically present. I hold a stick for Selvi. This ritual act is to symbolize the burning of the dead body that will take

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place later at the place of cremation. Thilaga shouts out her laments again: “Puspha-akka, aiyoo! *Sapathu kodukke illei*” – “Puspha-akka, aiyooo! I didn’t give you food!”<sup>152</sup>

One by one, the flames on the wooden sticks go out. The two men are still singing. The women remain gathered around the body. Thilaga is inconsolable. She takes off the two gold bracelets she is wearing and puts them on the chest of her sister body’s. Eight men come forward, wrap up the bier into a coffin and carry it into the waiting hearse. Thilaga and Jeevan follow the car, crying and screaming: Jeevan shouting “*Ammaaaa!*” over and over again and Thilaga “*Puspha-akkaaaaa!*”, while she embraces Renuka who is also crying. The car starts to move slowly. The men follow on motorbikes and in rickshaws, heading towards the cremation place ten minutes drive outside Ariyalai, along the A9 towards Colombo.

For now, this is the last image Selvi and the others get, as the laptop battery is dead. I leave the laptop, take my smartphone and go with Murali and one of his distant relatives in a rickshaw.

At the place of cremation, a large fireplace has already been prepared for the men to place the coffin. First, all the gold jewellery on Puspha’s body is removed, and Jeevan performs a last ritual before the body can be cremated. A clay pot full of water is placed on his left shoulder. Then, the ritual expert taps a hole into the pot, allowing the water to run out. Jeevan walks around his mother’s body three times, the water leaving a dark circle in the dry sand. He cries heavily, his cheeks are wet again. I watch from a little distance in order to give those in Oslo a good overview of the ceremony. I hold the smartphone high up so they can see over the small crowd of men that are gathered around the body. I do not see them now, but I can hear Selvi still crying and sobbing loudly. The body is set on fire and the men withdraw a few meters. They watch for a while. Selvi and Nathan also watch the flames for a while, before Nathan says: “It was good to see it. Good to see her go.” The line is disconnected.

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<sup>152</sup> Other woman were also sobbing and expressing sadness. In funerals, however, it is mainly siblings and children that scream out loud laments as Thilaga, Selvi and Jeevan did.

## **Powerful aesthetic images**

From her living-room in Oslo, Selvi and the others watched almost the entire funeral in Korte. A two-hour flow of images, forcefully impacting Selvi's senses and appealing to her emotions, made her cry, sob and hit herself. I suggest that the many visual and auditory elements of the ritual; Puspha's body, the colours of the ornaments, flower and cloths decorating Puspha's body, the sound of chants, bells shaking, mantras uttered, Thilaga's, Piraga's and other participant's cries, the beating, and the background of the relatives and other people, palm and palmyra trees, the sun and the sand make up a particular aesthetics of the ritual in Korte. This aesthetic was conveyed to Selvi, Nathan and the girls in Oslo through images on Skype.

Meyer (2010) argues that the power of aesthetics lies in what it renders sensible by appealing to the body. By viewing the flow of images, Selvi's visual perception is engaged as part of a unified human sensorium, wherein seeing connects with other bodily senses (Pinney 2004, 9). The aesthetic qualities of the funeral ritual constitute "a field of affective intensity" (Pinney 2004, 22, 116), evoking emotions. Meyer (2010) terms the aesthetics' appeal to the sensing body as the aesthetics' "sensational forms". In her analysis of Pentecostal religious practices, Meyer argues for an understanding of religion as aesthetics to analyse the power of specific religious practices of worship and patterns of feelings. She suggests that the "sensational forms" in religious practice are important because they have the power to mediate between "the levels of humans and God (or some transcendental realm of force)" (Meyer 2010, 750).

In the transmitted funeral ritual in Korte, I suggest that the aesthetics of the performed funeral ritual appeal to Selvi's senses. Through her visual and bodily engagement the images as "sensational form" bridge the space that separates Selvi physically from the ritual site in Korte. Here, the aesthetics are the outcome of a planned procedure by the ritual overseer for the sake of the ritual itself, rather than for the benefit of filming and photography as in the puberty ritual discussed in the previous chapter. Similarly, the backgrounds were not staged, but consisted of the natural environment of Korte. It is these aesthetic qualities that Selvi receives in her living-room in Oslo. She experiences participation in the funeral rite with her relatives in Korte. This experience was enhanced by Selvi's own interaction with the images, which

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affected her, eliciting emotions expressed in crying, screaming and hitting herself. This bodily interaction with images in turn enhances their power (Pinney 2001, 2004). Participating through the medium of Skype became important to emotional involvement, enabling coming to terms with one's loss and with feelings of separation from one's relations during times of crisis.

The effort the family members invest in participating together in family events, either through Skype, as in Pushpa's funeral, through DVDs and photographs as described in the previous chapter, or through sending and receiving of gifts, as described in Chapter 4, show that coming together and participating in each other lives still remains important to the relatives despite their geographical dispersal. Participating through Skype offers a powerful means of reducing the distance between them. Live images allow participation in here and now experience. Conveying the aesthetic qualities of the ritual, the images facilitate and partly fulfil Selvi's strong desire to see Puspha's body and be together with her relatives in a moment of family crisis when the need and longing to "be there" is at its most intense (cf. Svašek 2008, 221). The live images offer a simultaneous experience, as opposed to the sending of gifts and photographs, in which the engagement of sender and receiver is not synchronized.

The two-way flow of images on Skype enables this intense experience of being present and of participating. In two publications, John Urry (2002, 2003), referring to Georg Simmel, stresses the significance of access to the eyes in co-presence (Urry 2002, 259). To Simmel, the eye, the looking at and seeing of each other, is the most direct and pure form of interaction. It is exchanged looks between people that establish intimacy: "[o]ne cannot take through the eye without at the same time giving; this produces the 'most complete reciprocity' of person to person, face to face" (Frisby and Featherstone, 1997, 112 in Urry 2002, 259). As the look is returned, eye contact establishes intimacy and trust. The two-way, live images conveyed through Skype give such access through the eyes.

Throughout the ritual, Selvi sees and is being seen by her close and distant relatives in Korte. Enabling the return of the gaze, the images mediate proximity between the relatives in Korte and those in Oslo throughout the funeral. The media of Skype thereby works as a mutual aesthetic field of affective intensity, wherein family members in

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

Korte and Oslo come into contact and are present to each other. In this field they are affected by each other's actions, and emotional states. Within the same frame of time and space they simultaneously engage with each other emotionally and participate in the same experience. Having her grief expressed to, and recognized by, Puspaha's children and Thilaga and Murali is, I suggest, crucial to the process through which Selvi accepts Puspaha's death and the fact that she could not travel to Korte for the funeral (cf. Das 1996).

To be together in the *sette veedu*, the death-house, and participate in the same emotional experience is important to the survivors in their process of accepting death and re-establishing faith in society (cf. Durkheim 1995 [1912], van Gennep 1960 [1909], Hertz 1960 [1907], Radcliffe-Brown 1964). Yet, while the live images give an experience of presence, participation, togetherness and closeness, like those in the puberty ceremony discussed in the previous chapter, they also hold the presence of absence and distance. In the moment where Selvi's nearest *sondam* are gathered around Puspaha's body in Korte, and I have performed the ritual actions on her behalf, Selvi's face is twisted in a painful scream. Seeing the others, but not being there herself, seeing me instead of her, is a sore reminder of her own absence (cf. Battaglia 1997). Furthermore, the distance separating her from Korte on this day is switched on and off, as she connects and disconnects the Skype-line. The media makes Selvi present and absent, connected and disconnected at the same time.

### **Mediated, but incomplete togetherness**

The final disappearance of a lifeline in which the remaining family members experience themselves to be enmeshed is crucial. In particular in times of dispersed living, the end of one line makes the future of the family unity precarious. In the moment of a family member's death, meaning can thus be felt as lacking and the desire to be together and re-entwine one's lifeline with other remaining relatives becomes intensified. Coming together in times of such family crises is, for Tamil families today, complicated by the political situation in Sri Lanka. The situation makes photographs and real-time audio-visual media such as Skype appreciated mediums to bridge geographical distances. In

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particular, real-time audio-visual media enables those physically absent to see and be emotionally affected by ritual aesthetics. Those physically absent become active participants with those present in the ritual, taking part in a common emotional event. Here, both those physically absent and present affect and are affected by each other's emotional display.

This involvement, I suggest, is important to their process of healing. Allowing interaction between those absent and present, the participants can re-entangle their lifelines with each other, see and sense each other's loss, and participate together in ritual acts, allowing them to come to terms with the death. In this process, however, presence and participation are both connected and disconnected. The distance between those physically absent and the *de facto* death-house and ritual site is always present. Participating in the ritual through media thereby does not give a complete experience of passing through the whole ritual together with ones essential others (cf. van Gennep 1960 [1909]). The experience does not fully satisfy their desire to see and be together in times of crisis. Coming to terms with the loss of a loved one from a distance, re-establishing the society or the enmeshment of which the deceased was a part, and finding and re-orient meaning, then, becomes more difficult. Media simultaneously enable connection and stress the family's condition of living dispersed, thus highlighting the fragility of family unity. Thus, ritual participation through distance-bridging media technologies does not fully re-establish hope for the future, but perhaps rather, brings it into question.

The families' use of media communication bring ambivalent emotions of distance, closeness and an uncertain future into play. Rather than focusing merely on the positive aspects of such communication (Baldassar 2007, 2008, Boccagni 2012, Giddens 1990, 1991, Svašek 2008, Urry 2002, 2003), I suggest that it is necessary to attend to and recognize such ambivalent emotions in order to grasp a more complete understanding of practices and sociality within dispersed families. Similarly, Giddens (1990, 1991), in his work on modernity only emphasised the positive opportunities and effects of what he calls "expert knowledge" in processes of disembedding in societies. Here, expert systems are understood to free the individual of traditional constraints. Giddens (1990,

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28, 1991, 21) argues that such expert knowledge is constitutive of modern society: it enables relations across distances of space and time to be upheld and guaranteed.

The growing media industry among Tamils the last ten years bear witness to the need for, and dependence upon, media technology, or expert knowledge, to maintain family unity and some level of participation in each other's lives across distances. The entrance of media to rituals does enable some degree of connectedness. Yet, in order to grasp the lived lives in a dispersed family, we need to recognize that the use of media in rituals makes the rituals not only processes where the *sondam* is re-connected and unified (Durkheim 1995 [1912], Turner 1957), but it also produces experiences of separation and disconnection. These ambivalent emotions, desired and undesired, of being connected and disconnected with the meaningful enmeshment of which relatives believe they should be part, are central to the emotional experiences in these Tamil families' lives. Studying the dynamics and interrelationships between those who have migrated and those remaining in the family's natal village, sheds light on these ambivalent emotions (cf. Glick Schiller and Salazar 2012).

The ambivalence that arises in family events, including the uncertainty of the future, together with the difficulties of gathering family members for such events, do not give a completely satisfying experience of togetherness and unity. This incomplete experience of *ur-sondam* unity opens the way for other forms of togetherness and unity to emerge, particularly in the diaspora. This brings me to the final part of this thesis wherein I discuss the way in which LTTE's nationalism has become vital to many Korte-relatives in re-creating meaningful lives in the diaspora.

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# Nationalism as meaningful family belonging<sup>153</sup>

“Kaviya, *elumongo!*”, “Kaviya, wake up!”. Selvi peeks into the room. It is half past eight, Saturday morning. Kaviya barely raises her head from the pillow before she drops it down again letting out a tired “awww”. Kaviya and her brother Lakshan have to be at the Tamil weekend school in half an hour. Here they study Tamil language, dance, song and musical instruments every Saturday and Sunday, together with two thousand other children of Tamil parents in Oslo. To Selvi and Balraj, it is important that their children acquire a “Tamil identity”. Learning the Tamil language and cultural practices offered in the weekend school they consider to be important in this process. Before the end of the war in 2009, the school was in close contact with LTTE and today it still supports the organization’s ideology and goal of an independent Tamil Eelam. Throughout the year, Selvi, Balraj and their children also attend and participate together in a range of rituals, commemorations and gatherings related to LTTE’s struggle for Tamil Eelam.

Like many other Tamil parents with LTTE sympathies that I encountered in Norway, the pre-war Korte generation and parents now in diaspora invest much time, money and engagement for their children to identify themselves as Tamils and learn Tamil language and culture. They strongly desire their children to adopt what they call a “Tamil identity”, understood as crucial in becoming confident persons. To achieve this, the parents socialize their children into a specific embodied understanding of what it means to be a Tamil – closely tied to the nationalistic discourse of LTTE. The majority of Korte-relatives living in Oslo, Paris and London sympathize with LTTE and some,

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<sup>153</sup> This chapter is based on similar material to my (2012) publication: “Nationalism as meaningful life projects in transnational Tamil families”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, volume 9, no.4. Some of this material is also used in my forthcoming work: “‘The eye likes it’: national identity and the aesthetics of attraction in shared religious practices among Tamil Catholics and Hindus” in Svasek, M. and Meyer, B. (eds.) *Creativity in Transition. Politics and Aesthetics of Circulating Images*. New York: Beghahn Books.



such as Selvi, are highly active in LTTE-supporting activities. Whilst a few changed their position after LTTE's defeat, most continue to sympathize with the LTTE to some degree.<sup>154</sup> Their involvement in children's activities organized by the Tamil weekend school and their participation in LTTE's rituals and other gatherings, makes for a hectic everyday life for families. In particular, weekends are filled with "programs": cultural and social events organized by the various sub-organizations of LTTE in the evenings, in addition to the Tamil weekend school in the mornings and afternoons. Engaged and involved in these activities, parents still express feelings of having lost their past life. Statements of aloneness, emptiness and awaiting time are more seldom expressed than in other contexts, however, and they generally display more enthusiasm and are more active than others who are only peripherally involved, or not involved at all, in pro-LTTE activities.

### **Generation, nationalism and *illusio***

In this chapter I focus on the relationship between the two generations, those who migrated and their children born in diaspora. I discuss how LTTE's nationalism becomes one attractive solution in the parents' striving to re-create meaning after war and migration. Here, their children play an important role, as parents and children recreate each other intersubjectively (Howell 2003). LTTE offers guidelines for how to be a Tamil in diaspora, as well as activities of belonging and a community in which to engage in order to achieve this. This community, I suggest, produces an experience of *illusio* – experiencing the world as meaningful in the present (Bourdieu 2000). In this process, children's Tamil identities become important to their parent's own well-being and re-orientation towards a meaningful life. The experience of meaningfulness is enhanced by LTTE's claim for a future independent Tamil Eelam. By legitimizing this present claim for the future in a glorious past, LTTE ties past, present and future together. This future is, as Bourdieu (2000) argues, important for the individual to

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<sup>154</sup> Among the relatives who remain in Korte and Thiruppur, the attitude to LTTE is more ambivalent. They support the Tamil cause and they hope for better days for the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, but they have also seen the terrifying sides of LTTE: threats, murders and rule by fear. These concerns do not seem to have impacted the financial and ideological support of LTTE by their relatives in diaspora.

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experience *illusio*. LTTE's nationalism thereby provides a larger plot that transcends the individual in space and time, in which the individual can place their thoughts, actions, desires and understanding of the world within a larger meaningful story (cf. Hastrup 2007). As such, engaging themselves in LTTE's nationalism can be one way to re-orient themselves when living mostly disconnected from relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). Finding a new wholeness may sooth the experienced loss of their former life world, and keep aloneness and emptiness at distance. Important in this process is LTTE's ability to play on the pre-war generation's experiences of childhood and adolescence in their discourse and literary culture of songs and poems. By formulating and articulating their personal loss, LTTE seems able to re-formulate the pre-war generation's longing for their past life as a notion of nationalism, and turn this loss into engagement for the future, which conditions the experience of the present.

In everyday practice and discourse, family members merge the importance of "being a Tamil" and having a "Tamil identity" in terms of kinship and nationalism. I argue that a perspective of practiced relatedness (cf. Carsten 2000), as presented in Chapter 1, is fruitful in understanding how families intertwine kinship and nationalism in their private practices of relatedness. Nationalistic engagement among diaspora populations is not a new phenomenon (Anderson 1992, Fuglerud 1999, Silverstein 2004, Alinia 2004). The idea of nationalism as kinship is also not novel (Anderson 1992, Delaney 1995). Yet, the literature on how kinship and nationalism are intertwined in generational practices is limited, as is literature on generational relations between parents and children in dispersed families in general (cf. Eastmond and Åkesson 2007, Levitt, Khalil, and Barnett 2008, Olwig and Gulløv 2003, Pedersen 2009).

Where generational relations have been in focus, literature has tended to emphasize oppositional relations between parents and youth. In such a relationship parents are implicitly "demonized", described as traditionalist and backwards, holding on to practices and values from their homeland (Erel 2002, Hall 1995, Timera 2002). I argue that there is a need for perspectives that include insights into the merging of private relations and political issues in analysis of the relationship between generations. This has to consider that parents and children recreate each other intersubjectively through their daily practices of relatedness (Howell 2003). Making children into "good human

beings” (cf. Pedersen 2009) and (re-)creating meaningful lives for oneself and one’s children needs to be understood as parents’ common concerns.

Since the empirical data for this and the next chapter is situated in Norway, I will first provide a short presentation of the Norwegian Tamil diaspora and LTTE’s presence here and in the Tamil diaspora in general.

## **Life between war and peace: LTTE’s presence among Norwegian Tamils**

Today, about 12.000 people with Sri Lankan Tamil background reside in Norway (SSB 2007), approximately half of these in Oslo. Important to the creation of a Tamil community in Norway and LTTE’s popularity within it, was the Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC) and their many sub-organizations. In Norway, as in the rest of the Tamil diaspora, TCC provides the Tamil population with social and cultural events, news services, lobbying and fundraising capacities, language and cultural training for children – all promoting the goals and vision of LTTE.<sup>155</sup> In particular the organizations arrange national rituals and commemorations, following LTTE’s calendar.

TCC in diaspora was part of LTTE’s development into a highly professional and disciplined fighting force and well-organized political group in their fight for Tamil Eelam. Through TCC, at national rituals and other activities, as well as door-to-door campaigns, LTTE collected money, voluntarily and forced, throughout the diaspora.<sup>156</sup> Together with international shipping and smuggling networks (Thiranagama 2014, 3),

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<sup>155</sup> Christine Fair (2005, 31) claims that LTTE had offices, in the form of TCC, in more than 40 different countries where Tamils are settled and that LTTE’s success in large degree derived from the diaspora’s support. As such, TCC is a local, national and transnational organization that forms part of the spatial context in which the LTTE-sympathizing Tamils live and imagine themselves (cf. Georgiou 2005).

<sup>156</sup> Several studies have noted the Tamil diaspora’s financial and material contribution to the LTTE (Bruland 2015, Cheran 2003, Fuglerud 1999, La 2004, McDowell 1996, Tharmalingam 2010, Thiranagama 2014). While many Tamils contributed voluntarily to the LTTE, the practice of forced money-collection has also been pointed to (La 2004, Thiranagama 2014). Tamils who did not support the LTTE have reported different methods of intimidation: threatening door-to-door campaigns and “taxation” of money sent by migrants to their families back home (Human Rights Watch 2006, La 2004). According to Human Rights Watch (2006) this was particularly widespread in Toronto and London. Tharmalingam (2010, 73) questions these observations of coercion and extortion, by pointing to the Canadian Tamil Congress’s (a leading Tamil Community organisation in Canada) questioning of the methodology and thus the credibility of the Human Rights Watch’ findings. However, Thiranagama’s (2014) recent study from Toronto shows that many Tamil families gave money to the LTTE out of fear.

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the diaspora Tamils economic contribution, along with LTTE's taxation of Tamils in Sri Lanka,<sup>157</sup> supported LTTE's forces of army, navy (the Sea Tigers), intelligence wings, a rudimentary air force and special suicide squads (the Black Tigers).<sup>158</sup> An indication of the Tamil diaspora's loyalty to LTTE is its financial contribution, estimated to have been between 200 and 300 million US dollars per year (Jane's Intelligence Review 2007).

With a relatively small Tamil population, I suggest that these organizations and activities allowed LTTE to gain political and social control over Tamils living in Norway. Until LTTE's defeat in May 2009, expressions of support towards LTTE's liberation struggle were required in order to be "a good Tamil". Sending their children to the Tamil school, ensuring that they acquired a "Tamil identity", together with participation in *Maaveerar Naal*,<sup>159</sup> were the foremost indications of such support. LTTE's control seems to have been stronger in Norway than other part of the Tamil diaspora, such as Paris, London and Toronto where larger and less controllable Tamil populations are found.

Subordinate to LTTE's goals and visions, the Tamil school in Norway, like those in other parts of the Tamil diaspora, also promotes the discourse and ideology of LTTE to its students. These schools make LTTE present in the diaspora in every city with a significant Tamil population. Moreover, the Tamil schools provide standard Tamil language tests at all levels for the students. This implies that all Tamil children, independent of their place of living, are tested similarly according to one "Tamil Eelam-standard". Out of a population of 6000 Tamils in Oslo, 2000 children are enrolled in the Tamil school, indicating that most parents value the school's activities. The teachers in Tamil schools are honoured by LTTE: in Oslo, commonly being awarded prizes during LTTE's cultural events.

Through the organization of the Tamil school, as well as social and cultural events and extensive news services, the sub-organizations of TCC made LTTE's fight for

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<sup>157</sup> Within the LTTE-controlled area in the North and East of Sri Lanka, LTTE taxed all businesses and controlled most cooperatives (Thiranagama 2014, 3).

<sup>158</sup> These were divided into elite corps and female and male battalions, as well as the infamous child "baby brigades" (Thiranagama 2014, 3).

<sup>159</sup> *Maaveerar Naal* translates as Great Heroes Day, a ritual in which LTTE celebrate and honour their dead soldiers: see discussion in Chapter 9.

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Tamil Eelam an almost daily presence in the lives of those Tamils who involved themselves with these organizations (see Fuglerud 1999, and Bruland 2011 for further elaboration). Based primarily on fieldwork in a LTTE-sympathizing environment, this chapter and the next are situated in a context that has undergone great change since the defeat of LTTE. While the demand to support LTTE in order to be seen as a good Tamil has somewhat softened in Norway since 2009, TCC continued to operate the Tamil school until late 2014 and they still today organize the annual *Maaveerar Naal*.<sup>160</sup> Both the Tamil school and the *Maaveerar Naal* have roughly the same numbers of participants now as before the end of the war.<sup>161</sup> This indicates a continued strong loyalty to LTTE and their demand for Tamil Eelam.

### **The desire for an identity**

Like other LTTE-sympathizing parents I know in Norway, Selvi and Balraj stress the children's participation in what they call "Tamil activities". Their two children, Kaviya and Lakshan, nine and fourteen years old in 2008, both attend the local Tamil weekend school.<sup>162</sup> On Saturdays they attend Tamil language classes and on Sundays, Tamil song, dance and drumming classes, making a hectic weekend schedule for the family. When asked why they chose to enroll their children at the Tamil school, Selvi states:

The mother tongue is important. I want them to feel that they have a Tamil identity. Even if they have lived here or are born and raised here, it is good to have an

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<sup>160</sup> Due to an internal, political and personal conflict, the leadership of the Tamil school has changed, and TCC are no longer part of it. Nevertheless, the new leadership also sympathize with the goals and visions promoted by LTTE. The difference between the new leadership and the one under TCC, is that the new leadership does not wish to have much contact or collaboration with the majority society and other similar immigrant organizations in Norway. However, the school is still located in locals owned by TCC.

<sup>161</sup> In Oslo, the ritual of *Maaveerar Naal* gathers 4.000 of the 6.000 Tamils in Oslo. In other countries the ritual gathers approximately 50.000 out of 150.000 Tamils in London, and 9.000 out of 100.000 Tamils in Paris. Numbers of Tamils in each city in the diaspora are difficult to establish. Tamils and Sinhalese are often included in the same category as "Sri Lankans", and in France ethnicity is not registered in official censuses (cf. Canagarajah 2008, 174, n. 4). The number of the Tamil population in Paris is an unofficial figure: <http://www.english.rfi.fr/visiting-france/20110203-sdgvsdg>, Retrieved on 04.02.2011. Official figures in 2002 estimated 50.000 Tamils (Etiemble 2004).

<sup>162</sup> Tamil children in the diaspora normally attend the Tamil school from the age of four or five until they pass the final exam in their last year of primary education, the year they turn sixteen. After he passed his exam, Lakshan continued to be active at the Tamil school, helping out as a science teacher in the "homework help" program.

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identity as a basis. They can say they are from Sri Lanka or that they are a Tamil. We are very aware of this, that the mother tongue is important.

Selvi sees the children's learning of the Tamil language as particularly important as a means for them to achieve a Tamil identity. Moreover, she regards this as contributing to her children's development into confident individuals. This can be achieved through the Tamil school and its activities. In close accordance with LTTE's national discourse and goal, the school also have a strong focus on identity. The following episode illustrates how the school operates within LTTE's discourse on Tamil identity and the Tamil cause. Coming home after an extra class at the Tamil school before the annual Tamil language exam, Kaviya recounted:

A man came to the extra class. He read out loud many questions and we had to answer them. He asked where we had land, or something like that, where we come from. On the answer sheet we could tick off Tamil Eelam, Sri Lanka or mmmmm... I don't remember, but a place where the Sinhalese live. Everyone replied Tamil Eelam. Then he told that we should never forget that, because we come from Tamil Eelam.

Together with Tamil language training, the children learn that they come from Tamil Eelam, a nation that LTTE fought for on a daily basis until May 2009, and which now remains a dream and hope. Within a Tamil nationalist worldview, the conception, discourse and idea of Tamil identity has emerged as a response to what was experienced as Sinhalese hegemony and discrimination. LTTE contributed to this development, their propaganda office making "Tamil identity" part of a range of strategically planned discourses and symbols. This Tamil identity is constructed on selected markers based on what is seen and frequently referred to as "ancient Tamil culture". The ancient Tamil culture is believed to have existed in a glorified time before Sinhalese colonization (Schalk 1997a, 37), and "Tamil language", "Tamil dance", "Tamil music" and "Tamil song", respectively, *bharathanatyam*, *veenai*, *miruthangam* and *sangeetham*, are regarded as markers of this proud Tamil period. These practices and knowledges, among other things, are thus taken into the national discourse. Drawing upon such already existing elements as markers, LTTE legitimized its construction of a national

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Tamil (Eelam) identity. These identity markers are conflated by Tamil parents with the markers of what it means to belong to a Tamil family from Sri Lanka. The LTTE has thereby tried to “historicize” the Tamil identity, claiming continuity with the past in order to legitimize their contemporary claim for a Tamil nation-state. This was clearly stated on LTTE’s website eelam.com:

The Tamil people of the island of Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka) constitute a distinct nation. They form a social entity, with their own history, traditions, culture, language and traditional homeland. The Tamil people call their nation “Tamil Eelam”.

This website was accessible until sometime during the summer or autumn of 2009, disappearing after the final battles in Sri Lanka. To build such a common Tamil identity was especially necessary to the Tamil nationalist project since, in the Tamil community, as described in Chapters 1 and 2, family, village and caste have traditionally been the organizing principles of belonging (cf. Daniel 1984, Fuglerud 2001). In contrast to the tightly bounded *ur-sondam* form of identity and belonging, the Tamil national identity is open to any Tamil.

Learning Tamil language, Tamil music and Tamil dance in diaspora, the children learn the markers of the proud “ancient Tamil culture”. In his influential book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1992) shows how the use of a common language and print media were important for the development and spread of the concept of the nation. Speaking the Tamil language is central to imagining a Tamil national community. Equally, I suggest that techniques and knowledge of Tamil dance, song and musical instruments have similar communicative qualities and constitute additional ways to imagine the national community. By associating oneself with already achieved knowledge of these practices, defined as characteristic of Tamil identity, or by learning them, children will be able to appropriate a Tamil identity and imagine themselves as members of the Tamil national community. These Tamil identity markers can be seen as what Penelope Harvey (1996) has termed “technologies of nationhood”; practical social techniques that produce and naturalize knowledge to promote and continuously recreate the nation in order to maintain it as real.

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Because LTTE has been the dominant political force amongst Tamils since 1986-1987, their definition of Tamil identity has become hegemonic among Tamils, including those living in Norway. LTTE's definition of what it means to be Tamil is easily accessible for Selvi, and gives her comprehensive guidelines for what is required in order to be recognized and accepted as a Tamil. The personal desire to make her children into confident human beings leads Selvi to involve them in a political understanding of what it means to be Tamil. This understanding is developed in a context of conflict in Sri Lanka and Selvi employs it in her family life in Norway. By focusing on clearly identifiable markers: Tamil language, dance, song and music, LTTE's strategically emphasizes criteria of Tamilness that can contribute to a nationalist project, downplaying Tamils self-definitions as belonging to relatives (*sondam*), natal village (*ur*) and caste (*sadi*). In acquiring this Tamil national identity at their local Tamil school and in their homes, the children's bodies play a central role.

### *Learning to be a Tamil*

Dressed in *panjabies*, six girls from the ages of seven to eleven are dancing barefoot in a classroom at the Tamil school. The teacher sits on a small blanket on the floor with her legs crossed. She is beating a wooden stick against a square woodblock: *tap, tap, tap, tap, tap* "No, no, no!" The teacher puts down the stick. "You have to sit further down in *arraimandi*!" The girl who is pointed at, sinks even deeper down in the position of *arraimandi*: straight upper body, heels together, toes apart and knees bent outwards. "From the beginning!", the teacher demands. The girls stamp their feet hard down in the floor, bending deeply at the knees to keep *arraimandi*.

Mastering Tamil identity practices requires great precision in bodily techniques. As an example, the classical *bharathanatyam* dance described above demands great exactness in arm, leg and facial movements. Mauss (1973 [1934]) argues that the body is our primary and natural instrument of learning, and we acquire bodily techniques through imitation. From as young as the age of four, the girls rehearse, repeat and imitate the teacher's movements.<sup>163</sup> Through continual repetition, they gain control over

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<sup>163</sup> The *bharathanatyam* classes in Norway are primarily composed of girls, with only a few boys attending.



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the movements and perform with increasing ease. The movements become embodied as part of their habitus (cf. Bourdieu 1977). In similar ways, the children learn to sing and play musical instruments, as well as to read and write Tamil language. They rehearse the correct movements of the tongue to make the sounds that form the words. Likewise they learn the correct movement and speed of hand or fingers to produce the specific tone on the *miruthangam*<sup>164</sup> or the *veenai*.<sup>165</sup> All these Tamil identity practices require bodily knowledge and discipline that is achieved by continual repetition until the techniques become naturalized. This naturalization process incorporates “Tamil identity” into their habitus.

The children’s process of learning these specific bodily techniques, all defined and recognized as markers of Tamil identity, is particularly interesting in light of Harriet Nielsen and Monica Rudberg’s (1993) analysis of identity. They emphasise that identities learned during childhood will be central to one’s sense of self throughout life. Rehearsing and learning new dance steps, Tamil words and meanings each weekend at the Tamil school, the different markers of Tamil identity can be seen as composing a Tamil social body, a language through which cultural identity is expressed (Scheper-Huges and Lock 1987). The body is mutual to the world; we express ourselves to the world at the same time as we experience the world through the body (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Learning identity characteristics over time and performing them in a personal way facilitates the incorporation of the identity into the children’s self-understanding. In this process, cultural identity can be experienced as personal, as a national and/or family belonging. Their command of bodily techniques enables the children to imagine the Tamil community as one to which they belong.

In the process of learning, the children are also performing these identity markers. These practices involve the children and the potential observer in a specific symbolic world with a particular aesthetic order (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005). When dancing *bharathanatyam*, playing *miruthangam* or singing *sangeetham*, costumes and instruments are used; dance moves, sounds, melodies and text in music are produced or acted out, all of which are defined as “Tamil”. These practices thereby produce an

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<sup>164</sup> Classical South Indian percussion instrument.

<sup>165</sup> Classical South Indian string instrument.

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aesthetic order that is rooted in the (imagined) Tamil homeland and context. Through the aesthetics's sensual qualities experienced in interaction with the sensing body through sight, smell, touch, sound and taste and various combinations of these, that aesthetics produces experiences and emotions in the person (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005, Meyer 2010). Performing an art form such as *bharathanatyam* or *miruthangam*, the children produce and sense a "Tamil aesthetic", which enables an experience of themselves as more Tamil than if they did not participate in such activities. Learning and performing activities defined as Tamil, they are involved in a process which simultaneously facilitates the incorporation and sensing of their "Tamilness".

When asked whether she feels Norwegian, Tamil, or both Kaviya explained that: "I am Tamil because mum and dad are [Tamil], and I know the language. I don't know why I am Tamil [...]". "Because of your parents?" I ask. "No, not only because of that. I have many Tamil friends, [I am] Tamil because my homeland is Tamil Eelam, and... I am Tamil." Kaviya hesitates a bit with her answer. I know that in other contexts, as when referring to a classmate of non-Norwegian parents, she has talked about others being "less Norwegian" than herself. Nevertheless, in this situation, her parents' origin and her own knowledge of the Tamil language are important in experiencing herself as Tamil, and moreover as a Tamil from Tamil Eelam. She merges relatedness to her family and the national community. The social body, as a marker of identity, is part of her self-understanding, and she experiences herself as Tamil. The imagined nation has become embodied in her individual bodily experience through physical repetition, performance and sensing, as well by extension of her relation to her parents.

Kaviya experiences herself as being Tamil, amongst other things. The Tamil identity has become part of her self-understanding as Selvi desired. Through the teaching of national identity, Selvi has succeeded in her desire to give her children a secure identity, perceived as necessary for their well-being. Selvi regards this identity as vital for making the children confident in whom they are when growing up in Norway. As the identity is learned during childhood it is an identity that, to a great extent, can mould the child's experience of the self (cf. Nielsen and Rudberg 1993). After Kaviya and Lakshan accomplished their Tamil language education at the Tamil school, passing the final exam at the age of sixteen, they both have become active members of the

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Tamil Youth Organization (TYO). The vision of the organization, which operates under TCC, is to help and motivate Tamil youth in relation to studies and career, and to work towards the goal of an independent Tamil Eelam. Kaviya's and Lakshan's involvement in this organization indicates a continued strong self-understanding as Tamils.

#### ***Singing the motherland and Prabhakaran***

In addition to the regular identity learning each weekend, the LTTE-supporting parents in Norway are eager to involve their children in annual pro-LTTE activities, such as sports, speech and song contests. Practically everybody in Selvi's network of family and friends attends these events, and Selvi encourages her children to participate whenever possible. The show cabinet in their living room is filled with prizes Kaviya and Lakshan have gained through participation in sports and cultural contests and events, as well as a few won by Selvi and Balraj. The trophies all carry the emblem of LTTE: the roaming yellow tiger encircled by a yellow sun on the red background or the map of Tamil Eelam.

The annual song contest is one of these many competitive events. It brings together hundreds of families each year: there are qualifying contests in several Norwegian towns with the final round in Oslo. Having been a spectator for as long as she could remember, Kaviya was thrilled to sign up for the contest in 2008. The contest's rules are, as Kaviya excitedly explained to me while pointing at a picture of LTTE's leader Prabhakaran in their kitchen: "We can only sing songs about him and our country." Kaviya here refers to the martyr- and resistance poetry written in the spirit of LTTE, the so-called *pulipatukal*, or "Tiger songs" (Schalk 2003), among which the children select one song each for the contest. These songs are central in all pro-LTTE activity, and both children and adults perform them and know many of them by heart. Kaviya started preparing herself several weeks before the competition; picking out a song, writing down the lyrics and rehearse the singing. The song she selected was *Magane, magane*,

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meaning “Son, son” written by a Tamil called Kavianban.<sup>166</sup> The song conveys a mother’s encouragement to her son to go into battle, liberating their land.<sup>167</sup>

My son, my son. Go now and come back. You shall participate in struggle. Tamil Eelam is ours; we have to get it back. We have lost the soil to the Sinhalese, we will get it back. Go now and come back. It is our Motherland. The homeland is under other’s hands. It is not good. You should go now and come back. You have to be fast and go fight and come back. The soil might shiver. The soil may feel that it is crushing. Go now and come back. Son, son, go and come back to liberate the soil we have lost.

Mother’s son that got milk from the breast. That time has not yet past, but even though you are little, you have to go and liberate our country. I sent you to fight, but my heart is not able to think about it. You are a boy of school age, but you are going to liberation struggle. Hurry to go to liberation struggle. Son, son, liberate our soil and come back.

Our tears have not yet disappeared. When I have been beaten, have not yet disappeared. I can not leave you [my son], but I don’t have any way. We cannot do anything except fight. We cannot let the others take away our land. It is a good job, there is nothing else to do in the Motherland. Son, son, go and come back. Our country is in the hands of others. Go and fight for the country. Go and come back.

We have been given this country, but they have turned our lives into a game of dice/fear [*pajam*]. We were born in that land, but they have made us afraid/worried to live in that land. They have killed pregnant women. The Sinhalese are extreme and must be deprived of power. Therefore you must go and fight to get our own country. Freedom. Freedom. Son, son, go and come back. Our country is in the hands of others. Go and fight for the country. Go and come back.

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<sup>166</sup> *Magane* is the written form of *mahen*, son.

<sup>167</sup> Selvi translated the song from Tamil to Norwegian one night as Kaviya was rehearsing. The translation from Norwegian to English is my own.

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The lyrics are built around classical, standardized themes in LTTE's martial culture and discourse: the evil enemy that took the land that was traditionally theirs. The act of the soldier and the encouraging mother are glorified, as is the freedom that will alleviate their pains. One might also interpret "mother's son that got milk from the breast" as the Motherland herself, having nurtured all Tamils with her soil and water, asking all her sons to go into battle to save her. The Motherland has a strong and central meaning in Tamil nationalism wherein Tamil Eelam is seen as *Tayakam*, the Motherland, believed to be every Tamil's mother, giving them life (Fuglerud 1999, Schalk 2003). As such, this image of the Motherland bears similarities with the belief that the soil in the *ur* forms and affects its inhabitants as described in Chapter 1. In the national discourse, to dwell or to have dwelled in the Tamil Motherland has impacted their lifeline.

Kaviya, like many of the other children in the contest, has trained classical *sangeetham* since she was seven at the Tamil school. Therefore the tones are familiar to her, although she needs to rehearse in order to memorize the lyrics and pronunciation. Every night of the last week before the competition, Selvi encouraged Kaviya to rehearse after she had finished her homework. Selvi clapped the rhythm of the song, so as to help Kaviya keep the pace, and corrected her when she sang a wrong word or when she was not satisfied with Kaviya's Tamil pronunciation. Through repeated training and performance, Kaviya participates actively with her body in this process of incorporating the national message that the song conveys. One of the Tamil identity markers is thus explicitly given a nationalistic feature, facilitating the embedding of the national discourse in the children's experience of themselves. The learning and performance of classical Tamil artistic aesthetics thus becomes a learning and performance of national aesthetics.

In this process, the practice of nationalistic songs works as a technology of nationhood, contributing to the children's experience of themselves as Tamils, making the imagined nation real and natural (cf. Harvey 1996). By desiring a Tamil identity for their children, the LTTE-sympathizing parents socialize their children into an embodied understanding of nationalistic discourse and of what it means to be a Tamil. Personal desire thus benefits what is seen as politically necessary and *vice versa*.

### Resonating with a new *milieu de mémoire*; forging a new future

During the final of the song contest all the children that had participated were given awards, small cups inscribed with the map of Tamil Eelam, and larger cups for those ranked first, second and third in the final. Accompanied by applause from a large Tamil audience, the children, dressed in their Tamil fineries: the girls in *panjabies* and the boys wearing pants, shirts and ties<sup>168</sup>, were called, one by one, to the stage to receive their awards. The children seemed to appreciate their awards. Their experience of their childhood, and their later memories, are coloured by nationalism, as in “my first award in the song contest” and “my first performance in a commemoration”. Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1997) argues likewise that Norwegian’s childhood memories become national memories: excessive ice-cream eating on the national day and Norwegian flags on the Christmas tree.

In addition to Eriksen’s argument concerning the children relating memories to the nation, I suggest that parents’ participation in their children’s national activities is of equal importance. The parents encourage the children to participate and help them to rehearse the Tamil song, with its particular melody and pronunciation of Tamil words, and to prepare for the event. During the song contest awards the parents were obviously proud, taking pictures of their children with their awards and congratulating each other upon their children’s performance. The parent generation’s experience and memories of being Tamil parents in Norway thus also acquires a national flavour, as in “my daughter’s first award in the song contest”. LTTE’s nationalism becomes a natural part of the children’s childhood and part of being a parent. Events like the song contest becomes both a personal achievement for the individual child, and brings pride to the parents, as well as linking the family to the homeland struggle.

I suggest that the “Tamilness” conveyed in the environment of LTTE in Norway makes these activities in this context attractive practices in which to engage. Attending the Tamil school, going to sports events, song contests and other cultural events together with many, sometimes several hundreds, of Tamil children and adults, the

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<sup>168</sup> At Tamil functions, boys and men wear trousers with a long-sleeved shirt and tie in matching colours. Although this is a common form of dress for men, the matching colours of the shirt and tie, the preferred colours of light pink, light blue, purple or yellow, sometimes with embroidery on the collar, makes the outfit aesthetically “Tamil”.

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children and the parents take part in and are socialized into this environment or community. Here, the general shared feature is that they are all Tamils, emphasized by the use of Tamil language, Tamil songs and music, and also the overarching ideology of the dream of Tamil Eelam. The aesthetic qualities that are revealed in such events: the use of Tamil language, seeing only other Tamils and many of them, the women and girls dressed in Tamil saris and *panjabis*, the men in their “Tamil” shirts and ties, listening to and seeing performances of Tamil music, song and dance, eating Tamil food such as *vaddei*, *murukku*, *rools*, give those involved an experience of a lived Tamil environment.

In her article *Beyond the words: the power of resonance*, Wikan (1992) describes how her Muslim informant resonated with a Hindu healer based on earlier experience. Wikan took the Muslim woman to the Hindu healer because she believed that the healer could help the woman. When the healer cast his advice in idioms of value meaningful to himself, but alien and wrong to the Muslim woman’s religious principles, Wikan thought that her intent to help the woman had failed miserably. But instead, the woman overlooked the semantic meaning of the healer’s precise words “and – on the power of resonance – recognized the deeper intention beyond” (Wikan 1992, 465). Although dealing with translation in a different context, I think that Wikan’s emphasis on experiences and feeling in the process of understanding, is valuable. We understand our world and surroundings not only through reason and thought, but also in terms of familiarities, experiences and emotions.

Though not identical to the past life, I suggest that the Tamil environment in LTTE-events resonates well with the parents’ associations and experiences of life in the *ur* prior to migration and war: people speaking in Tamil, eating Tamil food, hearing Tamil music, and in particular, being many together as is so warmly remembered of their past lives. Meyer (2004, 96) argues that “style, by putting things in a certain way speaks to, as well as evokes, emotions.” All Tamils come from an *ur*, and have sentiments of love or are obliged to have such strong feelings towards it (Daniel 1989, Thiranagama 2007, 130). Employing known and recognizable elements, such as Tamil language, music, songs, food, clothes and being many together makes the participants feel confident and familiar with the context. I suggest that this environment and its aesthetic qualities gives

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Selvi and the other parents an experience of being included in a comparable social world to that which they remember experiencing when living with *sondam* in their *ur*. The great difference is that the environment and community that the LTTE offers is live and on-going, while the memories of the life before belong to the past.

The activities of the Tamil school, the annual song contest and sports events organized by LTTE-aligned organizations are repeated activities, through the weeks and years of the family's daily life. It is a *milieu de mémoire*; activities and traditions that "naturally" (albeit with some planning and preparation) take place in a "live" environment carrying memories in tradition and costumes, lived and acted out (Nora 1989). According to Nora (1989) it is in such environments that malleable memories are formed, and past and present brings forth a future. Thereby, engagement in the environment provided by LTTE, the national *milieu de mémoire*, is able to bring forth a history with a future. This is in contrast to the static and frozen memories of the past before migration: of the life that no longer exists, only reachable in *lieux de mémoire*.

### Parents' striving towards *illusio* and LTTE's reformulation of loss

Associations to Tamils lost lives in their *urs* are particularly seen in LTTE's literary culture of songs and poems. When Kaviya participated in the song contest, it was Selvi who was most eager to rehearse. The rehearsing was done in similar ways each night during the last week before the contest: Selvi put on the CD and asked Kaviya to listen carefully for where to begin. While Kaviya was singing, Selvi watched her with great attention, humming along softly and now and then joining the singing. To the backdrop of "Tamil" melodies and lyrics revolving around loss of the (mother)land, milk from the mother(land), the bond between the child and mother and their glorified contribution to the liberation struggle, watching and listening to her daughter's singing, Selvi's face displayed a delighted smile, while her body was moving gently from side to side, following the rhythm.

Judging by Selvi's body language, it seemed that she enjoyed herself, maybe remembering her own childhood; the *ur*, smells, flavours and the heat, picking mangos



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from the tree in the backyard and her mother frying *rotti*'s on rainy days - scenes from the past life in Korte that she often recounts. Idealized memories of how life was are recalled through her daughter's action of conveying what has been lost to the hands of the Sinhalese, wrapped in a Tamil aesthetic of Tamil words and sounds, and imagining how life could be in the future within a Tamil Eelam.

I suggest that LTTE's literary culture of songs and poems is a significant factor in the appeal of LTTE's nationalism to Tamil diasporic parents (cf. Schalk 2003, 411). By using literary pictures, the authors that write for LTTE are able to express the pre-war generation's experiences of childhood and adolescence – experiences that we all carry with us but that are not normally articulated. By formulating this loss and longing as attached to everyday local life in the *ur*, LTTE seems able to re-formulate the pre-war generation's longing for their past life as a form of nationalism, and moreover re-formulate this loss into an active and powerful hope for the future; achieving Tamil Eelam.

Like the Korte-relatives, all Tamils in the diaspora have, to a greater or lesser extent, lost their life in the *ur*.<sup>169</sup> Among the parental generation in the pro-LTTE environment, there is a common discourse concerning “all that has been lost”. Yet, they do not express frequent emotions of aloneness and emptiness or relapse into periods of depression. Rather they talk about the life that was lost as a good life they enjoyed, and how the time that has passed and the money they have sent back to family members at home has changed life in Korte and Thiruppur, as well as the rest of Jaffna significantly (cf. Chapter 4). Selvi pointed this out once when reminiscing with one of her cross-cousins: “Now everyone has family living abroad, they buy refrigerators and washing machines [...] We want to go back to the way it was. Now everything has changed so much.” Selvi's longing is for a life that is lost – set in a time before refrigerators entered the Jaffna homes – refrigerators that she helped pay for.

The old or the “ancient”, a glorious time now lost, is the focus of LTTE's construction of Tamil identity and moreover a general theme in their national discourse. In the pro-LTTE environment, the parents often also talk about the lost life in terms of

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<sup>169</sup> Not all *urs* in Jaffna are as dense with relatives or *sondam* as Korte and Thiruppur. But as both Banks (1957) and Thiranagama (2011) point out, people feel a strong attachment to their *ur* and strong community with others living in their neighbourhood.

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“All the ancient Tamil culture that has been lost.” Here, nationalism also marks what is understood to have been lost. Selvi and Balraj also note, “We need to rebuild what we once had and were” or “Think about all the great culture that we have lost, how great we could have been.” These utterances are in line with LTTE’s discourse, and are commonly heard among LTTE-sympathizing Tamils residing in Oslo, as well as in Paris and London.<sup>170</sup>

LTTE’s discourse of loss and what the Sinhalese enemy has taken away from them, thereby appeals to the migrants’ own feeling of having lost their past lives, as Selvi stated above and as previously discussed in Chapters 1, 3 and 5. The personal experience of loss of their former life with *sondam* in the *ur* is conflated to a national loss. Moreover, I suggest that LTTE’s discourse, found in speeches, songs and poems reinforces the personal loss of the life once lived, and contributes to the “freezing” of memories of the past. Focusing on a specific representation of the past, fixed as history, LTTE promotes a specific interpretation of the past (cf. Nora 1989). This past is not negotiable and might thereby nourish the static and frozen memories the Korte-relatives and other Tamils holds of their own past.

Yet, with the focus on the future goal of achieving Tamil Eelam, and activities in which to involve oneself in order to achieve this goal, LTTE turn feelings of loss into motivations for action and participation in the present. Herein, I suggest, lies one explanation as to how LTTE succeeded in gaining extensive support among diasporic Tamils for their cause. By putting people’s personal loss into the frame of a larger historic context in terms of, “How great we once were, what we lost and what we will regain”, personal loss is brought into a history with a future. The national discourse may bring forth *illusio* among those who find this story meaningful.

Moreover, LTTE’s national plot directly proposes a future for the person: to be part of the coming nation. In their discourse and goals, Tamil Eelam will give freedom to all Tamils. LTTE promises an improved society from that which existed pre-war: one in which no differences between caste and occupation are tolerated, where men and

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<sup>170</sup> Private conversations with representatives for the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam (TGTE) during one of their international video-conferences in Paris 29-30.10.2010. TGTE was founded a short time after the fall of LTTE. Its goal is to maintain the idea of Tamil Eelam and to achieve Tamil Eelam as a separate state. Their goals are thus similar to LTTE’s, but TGTE take a more moderate approach in which physical fighting is not seen as an option.

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women are equals. LTTE's visions of Tamil Eelam is portrayed as a good life for the Tamil community and thus also for the Tamil person. Here, the future of the nation blurs with the future of the person. Listening to her daughter's singing, Selvi's frozen memories of everyday life prior to war in the *ur* are re-remembered and given hope for the future through the nationalistic aesthetic performance of her daughter. LTTE projects a desired future, a future to which the parental generation in diaspora can connect and with which they can occupy their imagination.

Moreover, believing in LTTE's national story and project, their supporters also find new activities, relations and meanings in which to engage and occupy themselves within the national *milieu de mémoire*, rather than turning to experiences of aloneness and emptiness. Time is filled and becomes busy, and thus its passing is not noticed (cf. Bourdieu 2000). Loss of the past is turned into *illusio* of the future, engaging themselves in a *milieu de mémoire* which makes the present more meaningful. Thereby the frozen memories of the past that most Korte-relatives carry are incorporated into a history wherein they have meaning and forms who they are becoming. Here the past is turned toward the future, dispelling the experience of time as empty and slow in coming, as described in Chapter 5. By drawing on familiar references and offering a discourse, understanding and activities that sooth the personal dilemma of living with loss by projecting that loss into a meaningful future, LTTE makes involvement in their organization and support for it, self-motivated rather than merely a felt obligation.

While Inthu and Balsingam both support LTTE's struggle for Tamil Eelam and participate in some of the pro-LTTE events in London and Paris, neither of them have young children to endow with a Tamil identity. Nor are they so actively involved in LTTE-organizations as Selvi and Balraj are. Children, and the decision to engage actively or not in the pro-LTTE environment or *milieu de mémoire* may make the difference as to whether time is experienced as full and meaningful or not.

#### ***Children and planting: active ways of finding new illusio***

The engagement in activities defined as "Tamil" and seeking to inculcate a Tamil identity in their children, I suggest that parents like Selvi and Balraj are able to experience themselves as more Tamil, as a result of their children coming to experience

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themselves as Tamil. Parents understand themselves in relation to their children, simultaneously as the children understand themselves in relation to their parents (Howell 2003). By socializing their children into the national community and giving them a Tamil identity, parents simultaneously re-confirm their own belonging to this community. The children play an important role in the parents' search for meaning and well-being.

The parents' effort to give the children, and themselves, a sense of belonging to the Tamil community is also seen in photo albums from the families' journeys to Sri Lanka during the ceasefire agreement.<sup>171</sup> Many politically engaged families, such as those of Selvi and her friend Jeyanthi, visited LTTE-troops during their stay. The pictures in Selvi's album display Kaviya and Lakshan with several LTTE-soldiers, including a picture of Kaviya sitting on the lap of a female soldier. Jeyanthi also has two children, a boy and a girl of similar ages to Selvi's children. The first time I visited Jeyanthi's home she showed me around the apartment. In the living room she stopped in front of a row of three pictures and pointed: "Here are the most important pictures". One of these pictures displayed her children with high-ranking Tigers.

By placing the children together with LTTE-cadres in Tamil Eelam, and perpetuating this juxtaposition through photographs, the child's body is symbolically "planted" in the national soil (cf. Howell 2003, 472-473), as a sign of their Tamil identity and national belonging. The national soil may be seen as an emblem of the parents' life lived before in the *ur* and the LTTE-soldiers as representatives of the hope of recovering this good life in future: a future in which the parents will, ideally, be able to re-entwine their lifelines with their childhood relations of *sondam* and *ur*, as much as a new meaningful community. The images capture a present hope to reconcile their past life with their experience of themselves in the future.

Photographs reflect the photographer's intentions and ideologies (Edwards 1992), in this case those of the parents. The photographs become a practice for coping with the children's, and thus also their own absence from national soil, providing the family with a Tamil belonging despite their distant residence. Moreover, LTTE until recently, fought for the same place that the parents associate with their relations to *sondam* and *ur*.

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<sup>171</sup> 2002 until January 2008.

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As such, LTTE are understood as having fought for the longed for past life that now is lost. The Tamil identity stated in the photographs becomes a “thing” which the LTTE-sympathizing parents can “think through”, and that has the ability to “collapse spatial and temporal distance, bringing together people who would otherwise quite literally remain out of touch” (Henare 2005, 6).

The present hope of achieving Tamil Eelam in LTTE’s spirit conserves the hope of achieving the same type of togetherness as was lived in the past life. The pictures suggest a meaning, they preserve what is “real” or “true”, because the viewer finds what s/he expects to see, in which “this is how it should be” becomes “this is true” (Edwards 1992, 8). The family’s Tamil identity and the national community that goes with it, stated in the photos of the children with LTTE-cadres, transcends geographic distance and creates continuity in family history, enabling Korte-relatives to remain Tamils also in diaspora. Being part of a national community, then, can create a sense of continuity for the parents between the relations shaping who they were then and who they are now. This bridging between the self-understanding of the person in the past and present, I suggest, is vital for parents to picture themselves in relation to a meaningful future. Thereby, the decision to support LTTE might seem “natural”: as a continuation of one’s own life as well as an active and necessary choice in order to regain a sense of meaningfulness in the present.

Ingold and Hallam (2007) argue that to sustain social and cultural life demands creativity. In a situation where their everyday life and relationships have been ruptured, and memories of the past are frozen, there are few possibilities to create malleable memories because the past is no longer a *milieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989). In a *milieu de mémoire*, future comes into being through memories carried in traditions and actions in the present. I suggest that when the memories are frozen, something needs to be done *actively* in order to achieve an experience of a future. Including oneself and one’s children into LTTE’s plot, or *milieu de mémoire*, I argue is one accessible way of finding a new future, making the experience of the present meaningful, crucial to experience life as worth living (Bourdieu 2000). The Tamil parents, with and through their children, again become part of a larger history with a meaningful past, present and

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future. Finding such solutions is not a passive but an active way of “carrying on” life (Ingold and Hallam 2007).

Compared to the meaningful activities and moments connected with the planning of, and participation in, family rituals (cf. Chapters 6 and 7), I suggest that the openness of the nationalist version of “Tamil identity” is important. By including every Tamil who shares their goals and vision, LTTE’s nationalism becomes an attractive plot and community in which to involve oneself, in order to re-establish a sense of meaningfulness. LTTE’s national community and its activities as a *milieu de mémoire* do not, like family rituals, require the presence of particular family members within one place to have a complete experience of unity. Living in Oslo, Paris or Toronto, one can be part of the national community in which meaningful activities and relationships with other Tamils are offered. To regain such meaningfulness in the present, I suggest, becomes a well-received alternative to potential experiences of emptiness and aloneness. Here, crushed expectations of how life was supposed to be can also be soothed. Yet paradoxically, during the time of war, the families did not wish their children or themselves to join LTTE’s forces to fight for Tamil Eelam. Furthermore, it is precisely their involvement in LTTE’s community in diaspora that makes return to the homeland impossible for many, now that the war has ended.

### *A compensating community and illusio*

The parents’ practice of socializing their children within a Tamil national community, can also be understood as stemming from a desire to provide their children with a sense of belonging to a unity and community similar to that which the pre-war Korte-parents experienced through *sondam* and *ur*. Being enmeshed in these relations is remembered as a good and meaningful life, but its loss is experienced emotionally as a threat to personal well-being (cf. Chapter 2). In this situation the national community offers one solution: including their children in a sociality larger than themselves, with a meaningful past, present and future.

The Tamil identity as national relatedness among the families who involve themselves in LTTE’s activities and ideology in diaspora, thereby seems to compensate, to some extent, for the loss of their life with relatives in their natal village that the

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parents considered vital to being a social person. Being part of the pro-LTTE community, having many with whom to engage themselves in activities at the Tamil school and LTTE-events, children and parents potentially become enmeshed with other LTTE-supporters, and with a place; the Tamil nation.

Activities in the pro-LTTE environment provide meeting points to practically engage and become involved with others for a cause: achieving Tamil Eelam. The motivation to become enmeshed in these relations can be seen as an extension of the parent's desire to be enmeshed with *sondam* and *ur*. Such meaningful relations and sociality are emotionally experienced as crucial to ones well-being (cf. Chapter 2). To provide children with these belongings can be seen as necessary in order to give the children a sense of well-being and make them into confident individuals. Socializing their children into this national community might therefore also be regarded as one way in which parents secure the continuation of *sondam* and *ur* through the generations, as emphasized in the ideal of keeping *sondam* and *ur* together (cf. Chapter 2). This perceived necessity to enmesh themselves and their children with others and with something larger than themselves can give parents the emotional motivation to become part of the national community. Nationalism becomes a meaningful family belonging.

The pro-LTTE environment in diaspora, providing activities, relations, knowledge and guidelines to be part of the community gives the parents a new meaningful *milieu de mémoire*, drawing upon the belongings to the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur*. Nationalism provides a similar, but not identical community of belonging and direction as the one remembered to have been provided by the life in the *ur*. Nationalism gives parents and their children activities and relations in which to engage, with the goal of achieving a common future: Tamil Eelam. Such activities, relations and a future are crucial to the experience of *illusio* (cf. Bourdieu 2000). Ingold's (2007a, 2011) notion that our own lifelines entwine with the lifelines of others in our surrounding does seem relevant here, despite my challenge to its application in the past life of *sondam* and *ur*. In the nationalist movement, parents engage themselves in a new community, including people outside the *ur-sondam* group. Yet, as Balasingam said, they never completely trust such "strangers" although they can develop ties with them. Nevertheless, in the context of the national goal and vision, new relations and meanings are being made.

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I suggest that it is nationalism's ability to offer a larger wholeness in which parents can involve themselves, drawing upon the older belonging to *sondam* and *ur*, that is crucial for the Korte-relatives to open themselves to engagement with others outside their own *ur-sondam* group. Here, I suggest that the "Tamil aesthetic", which dominates activities such as the Tamil school and pro-LTTE gatherings, is central. Within a broad aesthetic of "Tamilness", the differences between Tamils based on *sondam*, *ur* and caste are down-played, at least partly and for a period: they are all Tamils together. This aesthetic, I suggest, works much as Anderson (2006) argues that language does: it helps all Tamils, despite their differences in *ur*, *sondam* and caste to identify themselves as part of a national community. Such identification enables solidarity and empathy with other Tamils outside the *ur-sondam* group, contributing to a more united Tamil community and an experienced relationship to the Tamil nation, and thus also engagement and sympathy with Tamils suffering in their homeland. Providing the emotional rewards of meaningful activities and a past, present and future with familiar aesthetic qualities, nationalism motivates parents to include themselves in the national community. Such meaningful activities together with others may keep aloneness and empty time at distance - at least for a period. Thereby it seems that in the "right" context, a context that is aesthetically similar to their earlier experiences and also provides a meaningful unity, Korte-relatives and other Tamils are able to form bonds with others outside the *ur-sondam* group.

To be included and part of the national community does not mean that the relation to the *ur-sondam* group becomes insignificant. Rather, belonging to the national community is a belonging that involves relations that are more manageable and easier to gather in daily life than gathering the relations and unity of the *ur-sondam* group. It exists as a unity independent of specific family members' presence, and is part of their on-going daily life. As such, the national belonging can be experienced as more active part of everyday life than the belonging to *sondam* and *ur*.



## **Nationalism and the re-creation of meaning**

For those who accept or embrace LTTE's visions and goals, involvement in national discourse and activities, and being Tamil persons, Tamil parents and a Tamil family as defined by these discourses, becomes one route through which parents can find and re-create meaning following the loss of the meaningful wholeness of *ur-sondam*. Those who actively involve themselves and their children in pro-LTTE activities seem, to a considerable degree, to find new ways of experiencing *illusio* (cf. Bourdieu 2000), and thus life as meaningful, than those who do not believe in LTTE's national project. To secure their children a "Tamil identity", involving themselves and their children in activities, relations and an environment with a particular aesthetics can therefore be seen as more important to the parents than to the children in making meaningful lives. As such, the generational perspective in this chapter has highlighted practices of "Tamil identity" both as means to socialize children into becoming "good" or "confident human beings" and as central to re-creating a meaningful life for the parents after war and migration. In this process the families also re-create the (imagined) nation.

In the process of experiencing the national community as meaningful for oneself and one's children, the ability of LTTE's national discourse, literature and activities to appeal to the parents' personal experience of loss and turn it into hope for the future, is central. In the next chapter I explore in more depth the ways that LTTE as an organization strives – and in large degree succeeds – in framing and directing their supporters' sensations and imagination during rituals within a nationalist ideological schema in order to provide them with a meaningful experience, which in turn benefits LTTE's struggle for Tamil Eelam.

## Chapter 9:

# The politics of senses and imaginary<sup>172</sup>

Every year on the 27<sup>th</sup> November, tens of thousands of Tamil LTTE supporters attend *Maaveerar Naal*, or “Heroes day” in cities like Paris, London, Oslo, Copenhagen, Toronto, New Jersey, Chennai, and Sidney.<sup>173</sup> In this ritual of *Maaveerar Naal*, LTTE-supporters honour their *maaveerars*, “heroes” or “martyrs”, who have died fighting for Tamil Eelam. LTTE supporters invest a great amount of work, time, and money in the construction of ritual sites in the diaspora, following a similar pattern and direction in which they make use of the extensive set of national symbols and materials developed by LTTE’s leadership; the national flag, national anthem, national flower, national colours (red and yellow), *maaveerars* (heros/martyrs), the flame of *tiyakam* (abandonment) and *tuyam illam* (graveyards for *maaveerars*).

In this chapter I explore in more depth how LTTE also strove to create a meaningful world for Tamils in order to attract supporters, crucial for securing legitimization and economic support for their fight for Tamil Eelam. Through a focus on LTTE’s aesthetic world of rituals, I discuss how rituals are staged and performed by LTTE-supporters around the world. I argue that the ritual staging during *Maaveerer Naal* creates a particular aesthetics, producing and organizing existential emotions amongst LTTE-supporters. Here, the participant’s senses and imagination are framed within LTTE’s particular worldview. Within this aesthetically framed worldview, potentially negative

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<sup>172</sup> A slightly different version of this chapter has been published elsewhere as: Bruland, S. (2015). “Long-distance aesthetics: Being here and there. Aesthetics and Emotions in Tamil Nationalism”. In (eds.) Fuglerud, Ø. and Wainwright, L., *Objects and Imagination: Perspectives on Materialization and Meaning*. New York: Berghahn Books.

<sup>173</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, *Maaveerar Naal* is still celebrated each year also after LTTE’s defeat in 2009. The numbers of participants have remained roughly the same after the end of the war as they were during it, gathering 50.000 in London, 9.000 in Paris and 4.000 thousand in Oslo.

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

and ambiguous feelings of grief and pain for the loss of the past life and guilt and relief of living away from the homeland are absorbed and transcended through belief in the future Tamil Eelam. I suggest that this framing enhances the LTTE-supporter's experience of nationalism as a meaningful unity and community. In a situation where the unity of relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) and the person's enmeshment into these relations is ambivalent and the desire to be together is difficult to fulfil, Tamil nationalism feeds from the belongings to *ur* and *sondam*. Here, the Korte-relatives' orientation towards the homeland seems to move towards a stronger belonging to the Tamil nation rather than to the *sondam* and *ur*.

In order to explore how LTTE's ritual absorbs the personal loss of the Tamils, I first present a theoretical frame of aesthetics, senses and imagination. Then I present a broader discussion of LTTE's symbolism of martial ideology and hero worship, before I turn to the empirical material.

### **Aesthetics, senses and imagination in meaning-making**

The ritual of *Maaveerar Naal* overflows with ritual objects and symbols. The use of symbols and ritual practices by the LTTE has attracted the interest of social scientists for some time (see Fuglerud 2011, Natali 2008, Roberts 2005a, b, 2007, Schalk 1997a, b, 2003). These contributions have searched for the semiotics of LTTE's symbols and rituals. In particular, it has been debated whether the organization's symbols and ritual practices are secular or religious. Through various publications, the historian Peter Schalk (1997a, b, 2003) has emphasized LTTE's secularity, arguing that secularity is conveyed by LTTE in order to be inclusive and attractive to Hindus, Christians and Muslims and further to prevent conflicts between religious groups. Schalk relied on LTTE to gain access (Thiranagama 2011, 14), which may have affected his "neutral" understanding of LTTE's symbolism.

Michael Roberts, a Sri-Lanka born anthropologist, educated in Australia, has argued strongly against Schalk's secular understanding of LTTE. Roberts (2005a, b, 2007) rather exemplifies how LTTE's symbols, ideas and practices draw on references to Hinduism, which also find resonance among the Christian Tamils. Fuglerud's (2011)

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recent paper is based on Schalk's and Robert's previous work and on LTTE's own published material. Fuglerud argues that LTTE's use of symbols has been strategically ambiguous. Drawing on religious sources in their symbolism, while claiming secularism has enhanced the emotional value of LTTE's symbols. The ideas and symbols have thereby been laid open to interpretation by both soldiers and supporters with different religious backgrounds.

While such analyses are important, I believe there is also a need to look at the way in which LTTE's symbols and ritual practices are experienced by those who involve themselves with the organization. Here I draw on empirical data from ethnographic fieldwork among LTTE-supporters in Oslo. Rather than searching for the LTTE's ritual semiotic, I explore how these symbols and rituals affect the participants, what they *do*, and how LTTE's framing of rituals appeals to the participants' personal striving to re-create their worlds as meaningful.

The copious use of symbols and ritual objects in the *Maaveerar Naal* produces a specific aesthetic effect. Here I develop the perspective on aesthetics set out in Chapters 4 and 6, in which I understood aesthetics as a relational quality produced in the interaction between persons and objects, taking into account the whole range of sensations humans experience in mutual interaction with such objects. In line with Bruce Kapferer and Angela Hobart (2005), I also emphasise the performance of objects: It is when humans *perform* the ritual objects and symbols that their inherent sensorial qualities - such as their smell, touch, view, taste, and sound - are revealed (Kapferer and Hobart 2005). These sensorial qualities are crucial to understand how different aesthetics are experienced, as the force and potency inherent in aesthetics lies in its intimacy with the sensing body (Kapferer and Hobart 2005, 4). Sensations and emotions produced in interaction with objects are vital aspects of how people form and understand their life worlds, how they connect to further thoughts, ideas and actions (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005, Meyer 2015, Deleuze 2000).

Objects thus affect ritual participants in concrete ways, but the ways that the material world enters into human meaning-making is considerably more complex than simple cause and effect. Following Meyer (2015, 164), I argue that imagination is central to aesthetics (as a broad sense of materiality) and the ways humans imagine and

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form their everyday lives. Meyer (2015, 162) defines imagination as “the individual creative and formative faculty to imagine something before the mind’s eye which is not necessarily there”. The individual imagination may use the “materials” (in a wide sense, also including other organisms) situated in its surroundings, but it is partial and selective; it does not necessarily represent the world “as it is”, but may wander in different directions, escaping into realms of fantasy and vision (Meyer 2015, 162). In the processes of human imagination, aesthetics mediates ways of being through its form. Aesthetics contributes to how human beings imagine, form and make sense of existential events, occurrences and surroundings – their life.

While imagination is individual, imaginaries are social; our collective representations of particular, often significant issues in societies such as the nation and the family (Meyer 2015, 162).<sup>174</sup> The fact that people are able to imagine along similar lines, Meyer argues, is the outcome of effective processes wherein the individual imagination is attracted and directed into a social imaginary. The social processes that surround us thereby affect our individual imagination. Meyer here prefers imaginaries in plural to capture the existence of more than one coherent dominant social imaginary in every society. Nevertheless, these imaginaries are often related and concern “significant semantic domains” (Meyer 2015, 162). The distinction between the individual imagination and social imaginaries gives a dynamic interface between the individual and the social, allowing a consideration of how and to what extent individual imagination is controlled by social imaginaries (Meyer 2015, 162).

As Meyer (2015, 162) stresses, this view implies that imagination is not just a mental affair, a process limited within the mind. Rather, imagination is fed from our material world and we employ our imagination as part of our world-making. Here, imagination is a process that is not direct and immediate but depends on media and mediation; material objects as media that are involved in processes of generating communication that bring forth a world vested with reality (Meyer 2015). In what follows, I will argue that the aesthetics produced in LTTE’s rituals are prominent mediators of imagination and meaning-making. In this process, the ritual aesthetics

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<sup>174</sup> Meyer’s perspective on imaginaries is inspired by the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis and his view of the social imaginary.

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enables the absorption of personal loss into collective representations and ideas of the nation.

### Long-distant aesthetics: martial ideology and hero worship

As the name of the LTTE's propaganda office – Office of Great Heroes Belonging to Tamil Eelam- indicates, the *maaveerars* are an important national symbol. *Maaveerar*, translated as “hero” or “martyr” by the LTTE, are LTTE-soldiers who have died fighting for the cause of Tamil Eelam.<sup>175</sup> Schalk (1997a, 67-8) notes that a *maaveerar* is not a martyr in a Judeo-Christian tradition, because the *maaveerar* have not chosen subordination in the act of a martyr. Rather the *maaveerar* is ready to be killed in the act of killing so that others, the Tamil people, can be liberated. This idea is closely connected to the idea of *tiyakam* and *tiyaki*, which derive from Sanskrit, meaning “abandonment” and “one who abandons (life)” (Schalk 1997a, 68). I agree with Fuglerud (2011) when he notes that these ideas and concepts of abandonment, needs to be understood together with the concepts of *arapanippu*, “sacrifice” or “dedication”. The LTTE's supporters thereby worship their heroes, or their *maaveerars*, for their dedication to the cause of achieving Tamil Eelam as they have sacrificed their life (*tiyakam* and *tiyaki*), and thus their own dreams (*arapanippu*), in order to liberate the Tamil people.

Moreover, it is by being dead that the title of *maaveerar* is achieved. However, the *maaveerars* are not considered as dead, but as *vitai*, “seeds”, in the country that is to be born (Schalk 1997a) In a well-known speech made by Prabhakaran on *Maaveerar Naal*, he says that “the death of these fighters is the force that is driving and moving our history ... the heroic warriors [*maaveerars*] have sown in our soil the seed for a unique liberation” (in Fuglerud 2001, 205). Therefore, I concur with Schalk (1997b, 57) when he argues that it is through death that *maaveerars* reveal their potential, bringing life to the nation: “it is the hero's death that brings Tamil Eelam” (Schalk 1997b, 57).

The ritual day of *Maaveerar Naal* came into being on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November, 1989 when Prabhakaran gathered his troops to commemorate the 1.307 LTTE soldiers who

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<sup>175</sup> One etymology of *maaveerar* or *maravar* is also “warrior” (Fawcett 1903, 57).

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had died in the previous years (Fuglerud 2011). This day was first selected to mark the death of Shankar, a close friend of Prabhakaran who became the first *maaveerar* on the 27<sup>th</sup> of November in 1982. He died with his head in Prabhakaran's lap from his wounds after being shot (Fuglerud 2011). Ever since this first celebration, the day has been widely celebrated in the grandiose ritual of *Maaveerar Naal*, now considered as Tamil Eelam's national day.<sup>176</sup>

In this ritual, the entire set of national symbols and practices comes into play: the national flag is hoisted, the flame of *tiyakam* is lit and the national flower distributed. LTTE-supporters maintain one minute of silence for the *maaveerars* and dead civilians and visit the *maaveerar illam*, the graveyards for *maaveerars*. Here, in these graveyards, LTTE-supporters honour their *maaveerars* with flowers and candles and sing the national anthem. Supporters also perform a range of *pulipatukal*, or "Tiger songs" and poems, of the type performed by Kaviya in the song contest discussed in the previous chapter. *Maaveerar Naal* thus provides a significant instance through which to explore the ways that LTTE-supporters sense and experience the organization's material symbols and ritual practices. Although created in Jaffna, *Maaveerar Naal* is now a globally enacted ritual which has been widely performed in almost every town with a significant Tamil population ever since it was first celebrated, in 1989.

I choose here to discuss the experiences and use of LTTE's aesthetics through Selvi's experiences during the morning hours of *Maaveerar Naal*, and in the public ritual. Selvi has taken part in *Maaveerar Naal* since it started in 1989. At that time she had lived in Norway for some years, and was already involved in pro-LTTE organizations there. I now take you to the home of Selvi, on the morning of *Maaveerar Naal*. The year is 2008 and LTTE is actively fighting to achieve Tamil Eelam while controlling an area of 18.000 square miles in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka.

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<sup>176</sup> Throughout the years, LTTE also developed several national rituals and commemorations. During the year, twelve commemorations days for special *maaveerars* such as Kittu, Thileepan and Tamilchelvan are celebrated. In the diaspora, the sub-organizations of TCC follow LTTE's ritual calendar and organize national rituals and commemorations. This organizational role underlines the importance of these organizations and their activities to LTTE's success in gaining and maintaining supporters for their fight for Tamil Eelam around the world, as well as recruiting tens of thousands of soldiers in the home country.

## Getting in the right mood

The sounds of *miruthangam* and *veenai*<sup>177</sup> pull me out of sleep. I recall that today is *Maaveerar Naal*, the day to remember and honour LTTE's dead soldiers. I get up and find Selvi already in the kitchen. Handing me a cup of coffee with her special touch of ginger and cinnamon she says "I turned on Tamil radio, the one broadcasting from London." "Is it Tiger songs," I wonder. "No, it is just ordinary songs, but I need it to get in the right mood," she explains, while swaying to the rhythm.

For seven days, Selvi and other LTTE-supporters have been thinking about their *maaveerars* as it is *Maaveerarvaranatukurippu*, "Great Heroes Week". In the living room, Selvi has placed a small coffee table upon which she has set a picture of her husband's *tambi*, younger brother, who became a *maaveerar* in the early years of the fight for Tamil Eelam. Next to her husband's *tambi*, Selvi has also placed a slightly smaller picture of Antony Balasingham, the LTTE's late political advisor. She has bought a pink flower in a pot that she has placed in front of the pictures, and every morning for the last week she has lit a candle. After breakfast, Selvi asks me to cut the tips of her long hair. She cuts it twice a year, for *Maaveerar Naal* and the summer holiday.

Buying flowers, lighting the candle, turning on music, and cutting her hair, are Selvi's ritual actions on the day of *Maaveerar Naal*. Except for the hair-cutting (which could be seen as a form of sacrifice), all the other symbols and practices are the same as those found in the public ritual, when Selvi, Balraj and their children will "light the flame of *tiyakam*" and "salute with a garland as a commemoration of the Great Heroes" as these practices are officially called by LTTE. Though the music on the radio is "just ordinary songs", these songs are similar to the "Tiger songs" that will be performed in the public ritual, as "Tiger songs" follow the same style of rhythm and melody and use the same instruments as both classical and modern Tamil music (cf. Chapter 8). The practice at home prefigures the public ritual in which they will participate together as a family later that day. The fact that Selvi's brother-in-law, her husband's *tambi*, became

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<sup>177</sup> Drum and string instruments.



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a *maaveerar* means there is a personal relationship between Selvi's family and the struggle for Tamil Eelam.

Selvi enacts these symbols and practices, developed by the LTTE in Jaffna, to "get in the right mood" in her home in Oslo. It is the *performance* of objects, the human engagement with the objects, that realizes their aesthetic qualities and thus affects the sensing body (Kapferer and Hobart 2005). When Selvi takes out the picture of their *maaveerar*, places it on the table, brings the flowers and candles to the table, lights the candle, and turns on the radio, that the image, flowers, music, and candle cohere as a specific set of symbols and a particular aesthetics is produced. This interaction reveals the sounds, smells, and visual forms of the aesthetic, which involve the senses of seeing, hearing, and smelling. It is in this interplay that aesthetics gain force and potency, appealing to feelings and bringing forth affects and experiences in persons (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005, Deleuze 2000).

The sensorial qualities of the objects and symbols Selvi performs in her home are important in the process of "getting in the right mood". The particular mood Selvi searches for today appears to be one primarily of joy and anticipation: Selvi seems happy. She is swaying to the music, while preparing a big breakfast of eggs, bacon, and fresh-baked baguettes, a treat otherwise reserved for an occasional Sunday. The day before, she also brought out the Sunday-best for her children and her husband, and a yellow and red sari for herself. An air of positive expectation fills the home. The encounter between Selvi and the objects, symbols and music – together making up a particular aesthetics, produce a sensual intensity moving through Selvi (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005). Selvi's interaction with this aesthetics does something: Selvi acts out the objects at the same time as the objects, through her perception, brings forth experiences in her.

The picture of the family's *maaveerar* in the living room, however, adds a sad undertone to the festive atmosphere Selvi has created in her apartment today. It is a reminder of all those who have died in the struggle. Four days earlier, Selvi told me with a serious voice and sad look about their week of *maaveerar*: "We have a lot to think of this week. We think about them all the time, the soldiers who died for the country." But today, having turned on the music, preparing a feast of a breakfast and

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swaying to the music she appears to be more light-hearted than in the days before. The visual beauty of flowers and lit candles against the backdrop of music seems to overcome the sadness of the *maaveerars* in the aesthetic Selvi has created in her home.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (2004) notes that affect is the ability to affect and be affected. In this process, the intensity moving through the human body brings the body through a passage from one state to another. Selvi's interaction with the aesthetics, producing sensual intensities, helps her to move from one sensual state, or mood, to another. Beauty and hope overcoming sadness and sorrow is also the overall official symbolic interpretation of the *maaveerars*; the dead heroes will bring Tamil Eelam and thereby peace and a future to the Tamil people. *Maaveerar Naal* is thus also called *Elucci Naal*, "Day of Rising" or "Day of Edification" (Fuglerud 2011, Roberts 2007, Schalk 2003). Grief for those lost in battle is downplayed, while new hope and belief in the success of the armed struggle to gain Tamil Eelam is promoted. This was the case, at least, in the years before May 2009.

### Recreating a piece of the Tamil homeland

When breakfast is finished, Selvi and her family all dress in their "Tamil" finery: Selvi in a red and yellow sari, the national colours of Tamil Eelam, Kaviya in a red Panjabi and her nails coloured with red and yellow nail polish, Balraj in grey trousers and a white shirt and black tie and Lakshan in black trousers and a blue shirt.<sup>178</sup> When everybody is ready, they drive to the immense hall outside Oslo for the public ritual of *Maaveerar Naal*. Throughout the diaspora, halls housing thousands of LTTE-supporters are formed into ritual spaces for the day of *Maaveerar Naal*. In LTTE-controlled areas in Sri Lanka, *Maaveerar Naal* was, until the end of the war, celebrated in the cemeteries of the *maaveerars*, the *tuyilamillam*<sup>179</sup> or *maaveerar illam*. The LTTE's change of funerary practices is seen by Fuglerud (2011) as one of the most remarkable innovations in the organization's material culture. Until sometime around 1990, the LTTE cremated their soldiers according to Hindu practice and the ashes were given to the parents. Then

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<sup>178</sup> Cf. comment on the "Tamil" aesthetics of male clothing in Chapter 8, p. 251.

<sup>179</sup> "Resting place" or "sleeping place".

### *Underneath the margosa tree*

the LTTE started to bury the dead soldiers in war cemeteries, which until recently were dotted across LTTE-controlled areas, and given *natukal*, “planted stones” (Schalk 2003).<sup>180</sup> LTTE’s official explanation for this change is that they wished to adopt the practices of America and England to respect their dead (Natali 2008). Fuglerud (2011) was given another reason at the LTTE’s administrative headquarters in Kilinochchi: that they realized they would eventually run out of wood for the cremations. Another plausible inspiration of the *natukal* could be from the Cankam or Sangam age in South India.<sup>181</sup> Kings who had fallen in war were given such stones and people who desired victory in war worshiped these “hero stones” in order to be blessed with victory (Subrahmanian 1966). Whatever the motive for the change, it has played a significant role in LTTE’s ideology and rituals.

In the diaspora, imitations of the *maaveerar* cemeteries in Sri Lanka are reconstructed, constituting the central place of the ritual performance. The previous day, Selvi, Balraj and their children helped prepare the hall for the ritual, together with some fifty other volunteers: from morning to late at night, women and men, children and adults, were working; painting polystyrene boxes, turning them into coffins and gravestones for the *maaveerar illam*, surrounding them with a fence of chains and putting up an entrance. Flower decorations for the graves were also made, and the entire hall decorated: the walls draped in the national colours of red and yellow, red and yellow balloons printed with the map of Tamil Eelam inflated and tied to ceiling and walls, rows of red and yellow streamers used to decorate the ceiling, full-size portraits of Prabhakaran and large TV-screens put up, sound- and light-cables extended and, finally, chairs put out. The hall is lavishly decorated with artefacts and materials, leaving little space bare. It is transformed from a plain site to a ritual site, following the script of *maaveerar illams* in Sri Lanka, directed by the LTTE. In Oslo, it is within this

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<sup>180</sup> These cemeteries were the first things to be destroyed by the Sri Lankan government as they regained the territory. Today all of them are gone.

<sup>181</sup> There are three Cankam or Sangam ages, the first said to date from 9600 BCE and the last being the first four centuries of the Christian Era during which most of the Cankam poetry was produced (cf. Chapter 3, p.118).

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recreated *maaveerar illam* of painted polystyrene boxes that the most important ritual performances of *maaveerar naal* take place (see Picture 3).<sup>182</sup>

### *Being there while being here*

Arriving at the hall, Selvi, her family, and I find our seats on the left side of the hall, reserved for *maaveerar* families. We wait for Prabhakaran's only annual speech, which initiates the ritual.<sup>183</sup> Prabhakaran's figure appears on a large screen and the voice and picture is broadcast on satellite, followed by one minute of silence. Music then fills the hall: a "Tiger song", accompanied by pictures from celebrations of *Maaveerar Naal* in Sri Lanka, is projected on a screen on the stage. We stand silent, waiting. The sound of crying is heard in-between the music. When the song finishes, the lights in the hall are turned off, leaving a feeling of dusk, only broken by some minor spotlights illuminating the *maaveerar illam*. Then small candles that we all received when entering the hall, are lit. Starting from a few sources in the back rows, the lights spreads from one candle to the next along the seat rows, until there is a sea of small lights in the hall. The Tiger songs still fill the ambience, but now at a slightly lower volume. The *maaveerar* families go to "salute the Great Heroes" first, while the others line up in a queue in front of the entrance of the cemetery.

With lit candles Selvi, her daughter, and I proceed in silence through the entrance of the *maaveerar illam*, an arc painted in yellow and red, with thin black borders and the emblem of the Tamil Tigers on the top. A woman stands to the left, carrying a large silver tray filled to the brim with flower petals. She indicates that we should take some. Just inside the entrance is a large wooden coffin placed on a two-levelled elevation. It is draped with a Tamil Eelam flag, which is identical to the Tamil Tiger symbol (Picture 5). The gravestone is nameless, built for those who do not have a *maaveerar* in their family to put the candle and flower petals on. Selvi passes this coffin and the eighteen smaller ones made of grey painted polystyrene boxes, and continues on to the "wall" of

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<sup>182</sup> In Oslo the participants walk within the cemetery, whereas in Paris it is walked around. I assume this is a question of organization; twice as many attend the ritual in Paris as in Oslo and it would take too much time to have all the people circulate through the cemetery.

<sup>183</sup> Since May 2009, Prabhakaran's speech has been substituted by a speech of an unidentifiable voice, claimed to be speaking in the ideological spirit of Prabhakaran.

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ninety-nine pictures of the *maaveerars* of families residing in Oslo and nearby (Picture 4).<sup>184</sup> The photos are divided into three rows. Underneath each row of pictures is a narrow shelf on which to place the candles and flower petals. Smoke leaks out of two smoke generators placed on each side of the cemetery. Selvi places her candle in front of the picture of her husband's brother and lays down the flowers next to the candle. For a moment she remains still in front of the picture. Then she asks her daughter for more candles. Selvi finds the pictures of Tamilselvan and Balasingham and repeats the act.<sup>185</sup>

Walking slowly toward the exit, Selvi stops and glances at the scene: the coffins, the painted polystyrene boxes and gravestones, the pictures of the *maaveerars* and the flag, in candle lit surroundings, draped lightly with the smoke seeping in from the sides. Selvi breaks her own silence, saying quietly: "*It's sad.*" I agree with her, the atmosphere is gloomy, so I carefully say, "Yes". But not able to hold back my curiosity, I continue, "But is it not a little bit strange with an imitated cemetery?" Keeping her eyes fixed in front of her, she answers: "With this, we feel that we are there. We are not able to go there. This is the best we can do. I feel that I'm there."

Selvi sounds relieved. We stand here in silence for a little while. Then we slowly walk out of the cemetery and find our way back to our seats. From there we watch the large coffin draped with the Tamil Eelam flag as it becomes covered with candles and flowers (Picture 5 and 6). It takes about an hour and a half for the last person to leave the *maaveerar illam*.

#### ***Staged sensing: Bridging homeland and exile***

Through the ritual performance Selvi experiences a feeling of "being there", referring to being in Sri Lanka. As in her home in the morning, the aesthetics of the objects is revealed and plays with Selvi's sensing body (cf. Kapferer and Hobart 2005). Through her performances with the candle and flowers, moving through the entrance, observing the coffins, the darkened scenery, the smoke and finally, the pictures of the *maaveerars*

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<sup>184</sup> In larger cities the numbers of *maaveerars* are higher, such as in Paris, where the number is about 1,000.

<sup>185</sup> Tamilselvan was leader of the political wing of the LTTE. He participated in the peace negotiations in Norway and was one of the closest associates of Prabhakaran. Both Talmilshelvan and Balasingham were highly popular among LTTE-supporters.

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before placing the flowers and lit candles in front of them Selvi achieves the particular experience of “being there”. The aesthetics opens up feelings and emotions that are otherwise not accessible, giving her a sense of being in Sri Lanka. Kapferer and Hobart (2005, 4) also note how aesthetic formations have the ability to re-orient persons, opening them to new possibilities, actions and understandings. The encounters between Selvi’s body and the many objects and sensorial effects of light, sound, smoke etc. produces an affective aesthetic, giving her a passageway from an experience of being in Oslo to the experience of being in the *maaveerar illam* in Sri Lanka (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2004). The particular staging of the ritual scene and the way such staging directs participants’ behaviour make this process of passage possible.

The many hours of work in carefully decorating the hall with LTTE’s well-defined and pre-decided objects, colours, sound, and light illustrate the importance of staging the ritual in a specific way. Furthermore, the supporters’ effort in applying and staging these directed objects to create the ritual space underlines the importance and desire of achieving a specific experience. In particular, the use of the smoke generators makes clear that not only is the ritual to be performed in a certain way, but it is also supposed to be performed within a particular atmosphere. Furthermore, the directions given the participants as to how to stand during the one minute silence, to take flowers, to stand in line, where to walk inside the cemetery, where to put flowers and light candles, where to exit the cemetery, and where and when to sit illustrate the importance of the participants experiencing the ritual in a particular way through specific acts and behaviour.

The ritual structure of performance is important for the participants’ experience within the ritual: the structure of specific events, their aesthetic properties, the orientation of the participants and their interaction with specific elements in particular acts, forms the participants’ experience of the ritual in a particular manner (cf. Kapferer 2005). It is in this process that the reconstructed *maaveerar illam* in a hall on the outskirts of Oslo on a cold, early winter day transcends the spatial distance and brings Selvi to the warmth and dust of Sri Lanka. The reconstructed *maaveerar illam* “flips”, and becomes a *maaveerar illam* in Sri Lanka.<sup>186</sup> This “flipping point” where, in Georg

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<sup>186</sup> I am grateful to Birgit Meyer for this insight.

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Marcus's words, "the relationships or connections between sites are indeed not clear" (Marcus 1999, 7), is realized through the power of senses and imagination. The carefully planned decoration of the hall feeds Selvi's imagination, enabling the mediation between the two *maaveerar illams* in Oslo and Sri Lanka.

### **Senses and imagination in the production of meaning**

Through the aesthetic qualities of the created setting, Selvi's own actions and her imagination, the national ritual takes Selvi back to Sri Lanka, to a *maaveerar illam* there. This must be seen as part of how Selvi constructs her reality, highlighting the need to go back to Aristotle's notion of *aesthesis*, to acknowledge that our understanding of the world comes through the inseparable whole of our five senses (cf. Meyer 2010, 743, Verrips 2006).<sup>187</sup> Kapferer and Hobart similarly argue that:

The forms and schemes of reason ... are aesthetic in their composition and have their potency realised in their appeal to feeling as much as to a rationating body ... It is the feeling, intuitive body that is vital in the very production of the schemes of reason and in the creation of abstract, objective knowledge (Kapferer and Hobart 2005, 4).

Like rational thinking, aesthetics, and its production of senses or feelings is central to our experiences and understandings of the world, and thus to our production of meaning. The aesthetics of the *maaveerar illam* "feed" Selvi's imagination and "let it wander off" (cf. Meyer 2010). The particular ritual staging of *Maaveerar Naal*, its aesthetic form, enables the production of sensations that in turn mediate ways of being and a world vested with reality through the force of imagination. The aesthetics contributes to Selvi's and the other participant's imagination, engaging and affecting their production of meaning or reality, where indeed "here" and "there" can be experienced as a simultaneous real experience, part of their world. By organizing and guiding perception, imagination forms reality as humans sense and know it: perception

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<sup>187</sup> As pointed out in the Introduction, this understanding of aesthetics is in opposition to the Kantian sense of aesthetics, wherein aesthetics is understood as mere beauty (Meyer 2010, 743).

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becomes shaped through the imagination. It is the performance of ritual acts in the strictly staged ritual space that reveals sensations which Selvi perceives through her imagination. This, in turn “flips” the *maaveerar illam* in Oslo into a *maaveerar illam* in Sri Lanka.

Selvi’s sensing and imagination during her ritual performance must therefore be recognized as vital to the production of “being there” in which this experience is part of her reality. Throughout the ritual, which engages Selvi’s senses and imagination, she forms and makes sense of this particular experience. It becomes part of how she understands and experiences her world. Imagination is not “mere” fantasy because it is “just” imagined: the “imagined” and the “real” are not mutually exclusive (Meyer Forthcoming). Instead, imagination is “a creative, exteriorizing force that is central to the formation of being” (Meyer Forthcoming).

### *Familiar aesthetics, new belongings*

The power of aesthetics and imagination, strictly directed according to scripts developed by LTTE, is central, I argue, to understanding the strong emotional experience the ritual brings forth, enabling the “flip” between here and there. The clue is in how the sensorial qualities of the aesthetic structure are experienced. Staging and framing the *maaveerar illam*, the use of songs and music and the gathering of thousands of Tamils, the aesthetic produced in this ritual setting draws on familiar references to past life in Korte or Jaffna, of how they “used to live”. Crucial is how the directed and produced national aesthetics plays with the idea of the participants’ own personal loss of their past lives, and is able to absorb that loss and turn it into hope for the future.

In the ritual staging of *Maaveerar Naal*, a piece of the Tamil homeland is created: the gravestones of the *maaveerars* that are planted in Tamil soil in the homeland are recreated in the hall in Oslo. Also, many of the “Tiger songs” performed live as well as played over the sound-system make references to the soil. These references easily play with the participants’ conceptions of their *ur*, to their own belonging and love or felt obligation of love towards the soil in their *ur* (cf. Thiranagama 2007, 130). These references I suggest are effective in allowing participants to direct their sentiments towards the *ur* of love, obligation and belonging into strong sentiments and obligation



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towards the national soil. Thereby, the loss of the past life in the village is directed into a new belonging to the nation.

Similarly, the ritual's references to the Tamil people, *Tamil akhal*, in songs and speeches, includes the participants in a larger "we", where they belong. Having a new "we", people that are one's own, is related to the idea of *sondam*: those who belongs to oneself. The reference to *sondam* and a national community is underlined by being many together in the ritual. Almost the entire Tamil community in Oslo and surrounding areas have come together. All are dressed in their Tamil finery and everything within the ritual is, as in the song contest and the Tamil school described in the previous chapter, done in the Tamil language: speeches, songs, poems, directions given and small talk between participants. These references to the Tamil people and the experiences being staged within a large group of Tamils, I suggest play with the conceptions of being many together as they were in the *ur*. Here, the loss of living and being with *sondam* is directed into a common belonging and identification with other Tamils, outside the borders of their *ur-sondam* groups.

In the ritual, personal experiences of loss of past life are materialized, brought into play and oriented towards solutions, or new belongings. The most significant symbol of this staging is, in my view, when participants place flowers and light a candle for their own *maaveerars*. The photos of *maaveerars* that have family members in the diaspora are displayed at the graveyards in Oslo, Paris, London, Toronto and beyond and it is the families of the *maaveerars* that go first into the set up graveyard, laying down flower petals and lighting candles. These commemoration practices are similar to those done in a funeral of family members, as described in Chapter 7 for Puspha's funeral. The flower petals are similar to the flower garlands put around the dead body, and the candle is similar to the burning oil lamp at the body's head. In this process, the loss of each family that has lost a member in the war becomes a contribution to the collective nation. It is the *maaveerars* that will bring Tamil Eelam. Loss of a relative is turned into hope for the future. This can also be related to their experience of having lost their past lives, being turned into a hope for the future.

Through produced ritual aesthetics, LTTE effectively captures and concentrates individual imaginations into the social imaginary of Tamil Eelam (cf. Meyer 2015, 162).

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Similarly to Meyer's (2015) argument in relation to Ghana, material objects and the aesthetics of which they are part in the *Maaveerer Naal*, "feed" participants' imaginations through concrete sensed forms of graveyards, colours, flags, and the gathering of Tamil people. The participants are affected by this aesthetics through their senses and associate it to a wider set of ideas and thoughts to make sense of their world (cf. Deleuze 2000). The fact that LTTE use an aesthetics which plays with already familiar ideas of *ur* and *sondam*, I argue, eases the process of imagining oneself as part of the Tamil nation and Tamil people.

Moreover, imagination and sensations of aesthetics depends on former experience and learning (Meyer Forthcoming, Morphy 2007). In everyday as well as ritual religious life in Jaffna, there is a strong focus on images and objects. While religion is learned through stories told at home and in school, it largely depends on images and objects. Moreover, as pointed out in Chapter 6, the act of *darsan* or seeing is central to Hindu prayer. Staging a ritual, in which the person can see and participate with all their senses, I suggest, is vital both to Selvi's process of imagining herself as "being there" and for participants to experience and imagine themselves as part of the Tamil nation.

### Overcoming past loss with future hope

The national ritual appeals to and addresses in concrete and sensorial ways, the participants experience of personal loss, both in terms of having lost their past way of life and, for many families, having lost one or several family member in the fight for Tamil Eelam. In addition, the pre-war generation of Korte-relatives and other LTTE-supporters in diaspora often expressed guilt and frustration at being separated from the Tamil homeland in times of struggle. Expressions like "If we were there, we could have done something... helped" or "We need to do something" were commonly heard during the war years. Such feelings of guilt were mixed with an acceptance and appreciation of Oslo, London or Paris as their place of living.

Having migrated and lost their past ways of life, now living at a safe distance from the war, but constantly reminded of the struggle through LTTE-operated news, media and rituals, makes existential questions of loss, guilt and place of residence prominent

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amongst the Tamil diaspora. Among young Tamil migrants in Norway in the early 1990s, Fuglerud (1999) found that they strove to reorient themselves to their new environment during the first years of arrival. In this process the question of how to make sense of their self-identity by overcoming their separation from the homeland was central to the young migrants. Thus, in this space characterized by the new and old homelands, new and old relations, absence and presence, the question of place, relations and belonging is at the core of the process of re-creating meaning.

Selvi made clear that her experience of “being there” was an experience she desired and appreciated. On various occasions during and after the week of *Maaveerar Naal*, Selvi stressed how much she desires “to be there”, and that on *Maaveerar Naal*, in the reconstructed *maaveerar illam*, she achieved this. Just after the *Maaveerar Naal* in 2011, the third without Prabhakaran, Selvi said, “Me and Jeyanthi, we always talked about how much we wanted to be there on *Maaveerar Naal*. Now it is impossible... But on *Maaveerar Naal* I feel that I’m there.” In the ritual of *Maaveerer Naal*, the participants are given a possibility to address existential questions of loss, relations and place of living. Strictly directed and framed, these questions metamorphose into experiences of being part of the Tamil nation and community while still being in Oslo, Paris or London. The ritual, at least for a short period in the staged ritual setting, solves the dilemma of an experienced loss of past life, dispersed kinship relations and questions of place of residence. Inclusion and presence is gained in the national ritual. Homeland and place of living is bridged, and new belonging is gained as a continuation of belonging to relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*).

Selvi’s desire to “be there”, to experience being in Sri Lanka on *Maaveerar Naal*, is a desire to experience the inclusion of being part of the nation and the Tamil community which this ritual experience offers. LTTE’s nationalism offers an inclusion and a belonging to a place and a community with a future and with people with whom they share the same space and destiny. Those who participate in the ritual share a common vision and goal with all the others being present. This common goal, going beyond the individual, is what forms the basis of the unity and togetherness they experience with those others present in the ritual. To experience inclusion in such a meaningful unity is

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important in an everyday life that is also characterised by the ambivalence of loss, and potentially aloneness and an empty, meaningless present.

When we were taking down the decorations in the hall, tearing down the red and yellow materials, the children bursting the balloons, and the men carrying away the gravestones of polystyrene boxes, Selvi commented: “Now there is one year until next time... Unless we achieve Tamil Eelam before then. Then we’ll hopefully have another celebration”. Starting with the preparatory practices in the morning, Selvi reaches what she has waited for the whole year in the performance of *Maaveerar Naal*. The sad undertone from that morning in the home and the days before is gone. Selvi is at ease. She is present and together with the Tamil people in the nation of Tamil Eelam where she enacts her Tamil citizenship. This experienced belonging to the nation can enhance the meaningfulness of “being there”; it includes her in something bigger than herself. This can be achieved for a brief time once a year, when the particular staging of *Maaveerar Naal* is erected and performed, before being removed again. When the objects, light and sound equipment are taken down and picked apart they no longer produce the same associations, of taking her to a *maaveerar illam* in Sri Lanka.

Selvi’s experience of “being there” in the ritual staging heals in sensorial ways, through participation, longings for her lost life “before everyone left”. The perceptually produced reality in which she participates during *Maaveerar Naal* is meaningful and it orders and provides a possible solution to questions in her everyday life. In this moment, the loss, pain, frustrations and guilt associated with the loss of her former way of life and distance and absence from her *ur, sondam*, and what she now thinks of as the national homeland are gone. As the ritual aesthetics of beauty and hope overcome sadness and sorrow, the ritual submerges any ambivalent feelings, leaving Selvi with only positive feelings of unity, togetherness and presence with the Tamil community. As worldly signs, the assemblage of sensorial objects in the ritual thereby intervenes in the participant’s thoughts by opening and closing them to specific sets of associations (cf. Deleuze 2000, 6-7). This direction allows participants to achieve experiences of togetherness, inclusion and hope while experiences of sorrow, loss and guilt are blocked out.

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Through its sensed and concrete ways of addressing and materializing questions of loss and providing a solution to potentially threatening experiences and dilemmas, LTTE transforms personal loss of the past life and distance from family members into a collective and political belonging and contribution. By directing and organizing the aesthetic frame and participation of LTTE-supporters, LTTE receives and absorbs personal and family losses. Facilitating such participation is crucial for participants' ability to concentrate their imagination into collective imaginaries of Tamil Eelam (cf. Meyer 2015). Ingold (2012) argues that to imagine implies to participate from within, through perception and action, in the very being of things.

Imagining oneself to "be there" or imagining oneself to be part of the Tamil nation is, as argued by Ingold (2012, 3), a creative way of living in a world that is itself "crescent, always in formation". In the ritual, individual imagination, fed by the specific aesthetics, forming and addressing questions of personal and family loss, is projected into collective imaginaries of the Tamil nation. In this process, the imagination of the collective Tamil Eelam can be experienced as personal and not something that is obligatory or forced upon them. This personal imagining, I suggest, enhances desire to engage in preparing the ritual aesthetics and to participate in the event.

Through the sensed aesthetics, appealing to the participant's imagination, the ritual of *Maaveerar Naal* brings forth a meaningful whole enabling one to picture oneself within the collective national imaginary. Here, time passes easily, presenting a meaningful past, present and future. The national plot transcends personal histories as part of a space, time and story that goes beyond the participants themselves (cf. Hastrup 2007). This does not mean that Korte-relatives and other LTTE-supporters do not feel and project a belonging to their relatives (*sondam*) and natal villages (*urs*), but their belonging to their homeland may shift from an emphasis on *sondam* and *ur* towards a stronger emphasis on nation and the Tamil people. More and more Tamils find themselves in the same position as Selvi: having fewer family back in their natal villages where those remaining are aging, dying, or, if young, migrating. Picturing oneself within the nation of Tamil Eelam, despite LTTE's defeat, still offers hope for an imagined future which the static memories of *sondam* and *ur* cannot provide. This experience of a future in the present, *illusio*, gives life meaning and direction (cf.

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Bourdieu 2000). LTTE's conception of Tamil Eelam may, therefore, maintain or even increase its significance in years to come, despite the military defeat of LTTE.

Whilst family gatherings and rituals are difficult to pull together, and even then, produce feelings of distance, separation and aloneness along with feelings of togetherness and unity, the ritual of *Maaveerar Naal* transforms sadness or ambivalence into positive feelings of an inclusive future. Feelings of belonging to and being enmeshed in *sondam* and *ur* always include elements of ambivalence, whereas in the belonging to the national community, such ambivalent emotions are acknowledged, but then redirected as motivations to engage in the national project. The experience of the ritual can also strengthen the nationalist *illusio*, motivating further engagement in LTTE-activities throughout the year directed towards inculcating a Tamil identity in their children.

### The politics of senses and imaginary

The shift of emphasis from personal belonging to *sondam* and *ur* and thereby also to caste, towards inclusion into a national community, was necessary for LTTE's national project, and, given the sophistication of LTTE's propaganda operations, it seems likely that it was a conscious strategy. The turn from *ur* and *sondam* as a source of belonging, towards the imagined nation, is visible in LTTE's ideology, and military as well as ritual practice. LTTE did not only abolish the notion of caste and caste discrimination (cf. Chapter 8), but their cadres were also only given limited opportunities to visit their families. In the ritual of *Maaveerar Naal*, the *maaveerars* are honoured for their sacrifice for the Tamil nation and the Tamil people, illustrated by the recreated gravestones and enacted by the practice of honouring them with flowers and candles. Whilst in the funerals of ordinary people, the relatives of the dead are named in order to situate the dead person within their kin-group, the grave of the *maaveerar* includes only the *maaveerars* name. Sometimes only a nickname used by his or her comrades within LTTE is used, or the grave state only the soldier's date of birth and death. In such cases, the soldiers' kin-ties are completely replaced by his or her military identity. Nevertheless, the ritual of *Maaveerar Naal* achieves its effectiveness largely because it

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is built on the familiarities of belonging to *sondam* and *ur*: the ritual staging transforms memories of this kin-oriented belonging into present loyalty to LTTE's nationalist movement and future support for the imagined national community of Tamil Eelam.

As I have argued above, the ritual staging is important here. Meyer points out that “the distribution of the sensible is part of a political project of world-making that is grounded in shaping imagination and perception around particular material cultural forms” (Meyer Forthcoming, 13). LTTE's development and use of material objects and other sensory effects is thus not neutral, but shapes experiences, perception and imagination. Whilst the type of experiences that are achieved will vary between differently situated individuals, LTTE's strict framing and organization of the ritual stage, objects, effects and movement of participants during the ritual “frames” the production of experiences within a specific worldview or imaginary and creates a space for similar experiences to be produced. The persistently high numbers of participants returning each year to participate in *Maaveerar Naal*, even now, after LTTE's defeat, is an indication that most participants achieve experiences they value and appreciate. Because the ritual staging and form of performance follow the same pattern all over the world, the ritual aesthetics is likely to produce similar experiences regardless of its place of performance. This kind of ritual staging must thus be understood as part of the search for control by LTTE's leaderships, not only of the ritual experience, but also of the participants' wider imaginary and worldview.

Within the worldview enacted in the ritual, the LTTE's interpretation of the *maaveerar* successfully conveys that the positive overcomes the negative: “the heroes' death brings Tamil Eelam.” The fight and the loss of human lives are justified by the liberation of the Tamil people. Rather than experiencing the death of the soldiers as a loss of potential lifelines with which to entwine, as the death of a relative is usually experienced (cf. Chapter 7), the dead *maaveerar* is the seed from which new entwinements will grow in the future in the imagined nation of Tamil Eelam. In this hope for the future Tamil Eelam, the diaspora's financial contribution is recognized as important to LTTE's fight. The potential ambiguity of migrants' life in exile is framed and “organized” in a way that emphasizes their presence, contribution and inclusion more than their absence. Just as the aesthetic beauty of flowers and candles transcends

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the sadness represented and elicited by the pictures of the *maaveerars*, the migrants' participation in the globally enacted ritual may occlude their sorrow and guilt at being absent from the national homeland as well as soothing the loss of their past enmeshment with *sondam* and *ur*. In the ritual, beauty overcomes death and violence, joy overcomes pain, rage overcomes sorrow, and presence overcomes absence. The distance to the homeland is gone and they are part of the Tamil nation, included in a meaningful wholeness. This is a positive and inclusive unity with a projected future which the enmeshment of the person in the unity of *sondam* and *ur* cannot any longer match.

I suggest that the space that *Maaveerar Naal* gives exiled Tamils to frame central questions in their own life within a national collective imaginary and the envisioned future of Tamil Eelam is crucial to the ways that LTTE have recruited and maintained support from the diaspora. Offering a meaningful interpretation of their world to the exiled population as well as those in Sri Lanka was necessary for LTTE to continue the armed struggle. As an unelected organization, it depended upon a constant supply of soldiers, money, and ideological support, without which it could never have maintained its position for thirty years, either within the Tamil population nor against the Sri Lankan Army.

It is important to keep in mind that LTTE has monopolized this staged frame of meaning or "worldliness" (cf. Deleuze 2000). Between 1986 and 1987 they "silenced" alternative and conflicting Tamil voices and organizations through disappearances, murders, or individual emigration. As a result, no one else offers Tamils any alternative framing of sensations and experiences.<sup>188</sup> It followed from this ideological monopoly that, as described in the previous chapter, in Norway, support for LTTE was required in order to be regarded as a "good Tamil": part of the Tamil community. The organization has also used threats and fear to gain support. Thereby support for LTTE and participation in its rituals is not, as Thiranagama (2011, 39) points out, equivalent to popular support. By offering the migrants belonging to a meaningful unity, something that gives a sense of personal meaning, LTTE is able to gain, maintain and renew the

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<sup>188</sup> Routinized discrimination, arrest, torture, execution and surveillance of Tamils by the Sri Lankan army (cf. Thiranagama 2011) can also be seen as contributing to the uncontested political and economic domination of Tamil communities by LTTE. Nobody other than the Tigers was able to offer any viable alternative form of representation for Tamils.



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diaspora's financial and ideological support for the organization. Existential need therefore benefits the political cause as much as the political cause benefits personal needs. To find such meaning in LTTE's nationalism, I suggest, is easier for the generation who remember Jaffna mostly in peace time and who regard LTTE as an organization fighting for liberation rather than an organization spreading fear, and responsible for forced recruitment and death.

### **Nationalism benefiting from local familial ties**

In this chapter I have focused on the staging and framing of LTTE in their ritual of *Maaveerar Naal*. I have argued that to produce and direct the participants' sensorial experiences and imaginary into a belonging to the national collective was vital for the organization to maintain support for their war. Playing on familiar references of *ur* and *sondam*, LTTE's staged ritual is able to tap into the pre-war generations own lived and remembered past. The nationalist ritual absorbs the personal loss of past lives as well as the loss of family members in the fight. That loss is then projected into a national imaginary providing a meaningful past, present and future.

Individual persons seem to benefit from the opportunity to address such existential questions within a secure frame of interpretation. Living with the loss of their past ways of life, yet at a safe distance from the war, and more recently, an insecure post-war situation, questions of loss, belonging, presence, absence and relationships arise in their process of re-orienting themselves and re-create meaningful lives. For those who engaged with LTTE, the continuous presence of news, rumours, and political propaganda from Sri Lanka may have helped sooth the feelings raised by such questions, together with a potential guilt that others were fighting their fight. In the ritual, ambivalent emotions are overwhelmed and persons are offered belonging within the Tamil nation, a new meaningful enmeshment. In this process, the emphasis of belonging to the homeland is shifted away from *ur*, *sondam* and particularly, caste, to the national community. The national ideology draws upon the experienced, remembered and ideal of past life as enmeshment of the person, *sondam* and *ur*

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precisely as it seeks to transform those forms of belonging into a new belonging to the imagined nation of Tamil Eelam.

I have shown that the existential sensations and experiences framed within LTTE's secure worldview, wherein ambivalent feelings towards their life situation are blocked out, at least for a time, and inclusion in the national community secured, fuels the motivation for performing the ritual year after year, despite the defeat of the Tigers. LTTE's nationalism manages to emphasize positive emotions in contrast to family rituals and exchanges of money, gifts, photos and audio-visual media in which positive and negative emotions are mixed. There is, therefore, reason to believe that LTTE's rituals will live on despite the death of their founders, and that the experiences and meaning that LTTE's aesthetic objects produce will continue to maintain this national unity as a vital form of community and belonging for Korte-relatives and other Tamils in diaspora for years to come. This is likely precisely because the unity of *sondam* and *ur*, on which nationalist ritual builds, is ambivalent and its future is uncertain.

Belief in Tamil Eelam together with Tamil national identity is strongly embedded in the everyday practices of LTTE-sympathizing families. This national belonging became an essential tool by which the pre-war generation re-orientated themselves to their new situations. To shed it as abruptly as the creators and guardians of this identity were killed in the final battle of the war, would be painful, if not impossible. In processes of carving out new strategies to re-create meaningful lives after the defeat of LTTE, national belonging continues to play a vital role among LTTE-sympathizing Tamils in Norway. I suggest, therefore, that this national belonging will also continue to be reflected in and influence politics in the Tamil homeland, despite the military and political collapse of LTTE in Sri Lanka. Such a future is visible in the young generation of Tamils born and growing up in diaspora. Being socialized into the national community from a young age, most have an idealistic picture of the past life in Jaffna their parents have portrayed as well as of the future Tamil Eelam and LTTE as its founder.

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**Picture 3: Recreated *maaveerar illam* on *Maaveerar Naal* in Oslo, 2008**



**Picture 4: Honouring the ninety-nine *maaveerars* of families residing in and around Oslo, 2008**

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**Picture 5: Coffin draped with the flag of Tamil Eelam. Oslo, 2008**



**Picture 6: The coffin becomes covered with candles and flowers. Oslo, 2008**

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Epilogue:

## Generational dilemmas

Santhya finds herself on the doorstep of her parents' house. It is a cold November night in Oslo. She carries her only possessions: a bag of clothes and her cellphone. Her parents have just taken her credit-cards, cash, drivers licence, the keys for her own car, the gold she had been given when she married, and her key for their own house. They had reacted strongly when Santhya had informed them about the life decision she had made: to divorce her husband. At her parents' wish, Santhya had agreed to marry her cross-cousin at the age of nineteen. The cross-cousin had been living in India with his nuclear family after the Sri Lankan Army invaded their village in Jaffna in 1995 and had come to Oslo after he married Santhya. For more than ten years Santhya had endured a turbulent marriage and had come to realize that she could never live happily with the man her parents had chosen for her. The problem was to go through with her decision; she knew that her parents would not accept it, especially since her husband was her father's sister's son.

Nevertheless, Santhya had gone to her parents, hoping she and her son could stay with them until she found a new place to live. But when they had realized that Santhya's decision to divorce was final her father had, in Santhya's own words, become furious and her mother hysterical. Both of them had screamed accusations such as: "How can you do this to us? To your son?" and moreover threats "You will never have a good life after this", "No-one will respect you", "You have ruined your life". Finally, they had taken all her valuables, "so that I had to go back to my husband in order to make it" Santhya said. But Santhya did not succumb this time. Her parents had not been able to grab her cell-phone. She called a friend who picked her up and let her stay in her house.

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More than four years later, Santhya still struggles to forgive her parents for their hard words and for leaving her to herself with no money or valuables that night. Santhya had been nine years old when she came to Oslo with her parents and two younger brothers, and she had been, and still was, very attached to her parents. Although Santhya knew how much her parents had struggled in the new country, and although she had predicted that they would not accept her decision to divorce, at least not at first, Santhya oftentimes returned to question her parents' actions this night and the weeks and months that followed. She tried to find some understandable answers to her questions: "How could they do this to me, to their own daughter?", and moreover "How can parents want their children to live unhappy lives? How can they wish something *that* bad for their own children?" She discussed this with herself and her friends many times over the years. In particular she saw her parents' actions as incomprehensible when, as Santhya told me: "All my life I have tried to be a good daughter for them. I even married the man they wanted me to marry. They never showed any gratitude for that."

Santhya longed for her parents' approval of the sacrifice she had made for more than a third of her life and for support in the difficult time that followed the divorce. At the same time, Santhya had sympathy for her parents' feelings. She knew how different her parents' life in their small village in Jaffna had been compared to their life in Norway, and she had seen how migration during their mid-thirties had been a drastic change for them. Life in Oslo had been different from their Jaffna-life in every way: living separately from siblings, parents and extended family, a new language, the cold dark winters compared to the hot sunny days in Jaffna, not to mention the customs in this new land that they mostly observed through Santhya and her brothers: boys and girls playing together, organized over-night school trips with both boys and girls, going out after school, girls staying out late at night, going to parties, having friends from many different backgrounds – only to mention a few. Santhya's parents, and in particular her mother, rather cherished the memories of village life in Jaffna.

Eventually, Santhya's parents softened somewhat. After a few weeks at her friend's house, her parents allowed her to stay in their house and when Santhya bought a new house, her mother even guaranteed for her mortgage. After about a year, Santhya

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felt that her parents were trying to accept the situation, if not understanding her choice. They had now finally stopped their attempts to convince her to go back to her husband. But still, her mother in particular, every now and then came up with small utterances regarding how Santhya had made an immoral choice, and what a bad life she had chosen for herself.

### **Ideals, change and dilemmas**

My point in bringing in Santhya's story in this Epilogue is to shed light on the changes the pre-war parental generation of Tamils in diaspora have had to deal with and how this has impacted their family life. In my view, Santhya's story effectively illustrates how both parents and children struggle to understand each other and each other's life conditions. Parents are used to one reality which is different to that in which their children have grown up in in Oslo, London or Paris. This causes great dilemmas for both parents and children. Some children, like Santhya, experience great difficulty with the lack of support from their parents when making a life choice different from their parents' conceptions of what is good, such as divorce or marriage outside the *ur-sondam* group.

The *ur* of Santhya's family is a small village similar to Thiruppur, north of the city of Jaffna. Here, as in Thiruppur, most of the inhabitants were regarded as relatives (*sondam*) and Santhya's family belonged to a large close kin-group based in the *ur* similar to the Korte-relatives. Santhya's family lived together with their relatives in their *ur* until the war led most migrate, to India, Colombo and many European countries. Santhya's story and the generational conflicts that I am familiar with oftentimes concern selection of marriage partners, divorce or pre-marital relations. These conflicts strike right at the heart of the ideals of keeping relatives and their natal village together, as they concern questions of *sondam*, *ur* and caste. I will end this thesis by returning to the theme of how the particular enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) play a key role in the parents' quest to re-create meaning after war and migration. I suggest that this enmeshment can be regarded as an ideology in Althusser's sense, consisting of complex dynamics between lived relations, ideals, thoughts and



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imagination. This raises a question: what happens to such an ideology when its holders find themselves in a new and different setting where the ideology no longer fits the reality? This discussion will shed light on the ways ideals and thoughts persist although the practices are difficult to uphold, causing great emotional dilemmas for parents in the process of re-orienting themselves to their new situation. Ultimately, what is at stake are questions of meaning and the nature of their future.

#### ***“Migrant model” and generational conflicts***

In many ways, the Tamils’ adaptation to the Norwegian context has been successful. Tamils in Norway are regarded by the Norwegian government as “ideal” migrants, scoring high on employment rate and education (Engebrigtsen and Fuglerud 2009, SSB 2007, Fuglerud and Engebrigtsen 2006). In most families, both husband and wife are working, and among the first generation many have taken higher education in Norway as technical engineers, IT-engineers, nurses, medical doctors and teachers, just to mention a few career choices. Their children tend to aim for high-skilled work, and the professions of medical doctor, lawyer and engineer are the highest regarded among Tamils. Also, several of the Tamil parents are well-involved in local social and political life.

However, Santhya’s story is only one of many such stories of generational conflicts between parents who migrated to Norway and their children. These conflicts have major consequences for those involved. The report “Youth in Refugee Families” documented a relatively high percentage of psychosocial problems among young Tamils in Oslo. Strikingly, there was an extremely high rate of attempted suicide by girls: 22 percent, compared to 3 percent for boys (Engebrigtsen and Fuglerud 2007, 54). Since the publication of this report, the Tamil community have themselves addressed psychosocial and generational issues. The Tamil Recourse Centre, a sub organization of TCC, offers workshops on generational issues and mental health whilst a team consisting of first as well as adult second generation Tamils has been established, offering counselling to parents and youths.

Many times I have listened to the stories of young women who have fought to marry the man with whom they are in love, when the man does not belong to her

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parents' *sondam* or *ur* in Sri Lanka. Sometimes they succeed, sometimes they give up. The battle is tough for many of them. All of them recount their parents' pain and difficulty in accepting their marriage to a man from a different *sondam*, *ur* and caste to themselves. For those second generation Tamils who succeed, they say it takes time for parents to really come to term with their choice and to be confident with their husband.

To my knowledge, none of the nuclear Korte-families have gone through such a major conflict to date. One reason for this, I suggest, is that among the migrant Korte-relatives, only one couple, Siva and Raddi, were married before they migrated. Most of the relatives, then, did not have children when they arrived in Oslo, Paris or London. Most of the Korte-relatives were younger than Santhya's parents and almost every one of them who migrated to Norway attended the Folkehøyskole. Arriving without children and attending the Folkehøyskole, the Korte-relatives had more time to get to know Norwegian society and norms. This longer period of acclimatisation, from a younger age, seems to have enabled Korte-parents in diaspora to accept their daughters' ways of dressing, staying out late, and their children's friendships with the opposite sex.

Another reason for the lack of serious generational conflicts among Korte families in diaspora, I suggest, is that the eldest among their children born in diaspora are today in their mid-twenties and only a few have yet married. Although the marriages have not been *ur-sondam* marriages, the parents have accepted them, but this does not mean that there were no difficulties. Whether the marriages of the children of the Korte-parents will raise such conflicts in the years to come, when this generation reaches marriageable age, remains to be seen. Most of the parents say that they hope for and will only accept a Tamil as their children's spouse. As Selvi says "I have told them at least it should be a Tamil". This is most Korte parents' wish and what they tell their children. But in small hints and also direct comments it is also clear that they would prefer their children to marry with *engede akhal*, "our people". When I asked Selvi if she would accept any Tamil she stated her wish for a marriage that "fits" their family:

I hope it will be one of our people. I say I can accept if it is a Tamil, but I know that if it is not our people, I will feel some pain inside. Because our people we know. That will be easier for them. And for us. They have to fit with the family. With

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strangers it will be a little difficult. That will be different. We will have to accept, but I will feel some pain inside myself.

Many of the Korte-parents living abroad do not think that a cross-cousin marriage is favourable, but still wants their children to marry “their people” or people who are as much as possible “like them”. In other words, they prefer their children to marry within the extended *sondam*-group from Thiruppur or *ur-akhal* from Ariyalai. People from these places are perceived to be most like themselves, based on notions of *sondam*, *ur*, and caste. Selvi thinks she should accept, and even be happy, if her children choose to marry a Tamil. But she knows that anything other than a marriage within “their people” will cause her pain and take some time to accept. I have heard other Korte-relatives express some of the same sentiments regarding this issue. Many say that they want to raise their children to choose a spouse for themselves. Yet, they recognize that they will have to confront the ambivalent feelings produced by their own advice if their children marry someone that is not “their people”.

Although Selvi and most of the pre-war Korte-relatives in diaspora did not marry within the *ur-sondam* unity, and some also married outside Ariyalai, marriages among “their own”, or to people as close as possible to themselves in terms of *sondam*, *ur* and caste, seems to remain the ideal: the only form of a child’s marriage which will not cause them any pain or difficulties. When Selvi married Balraj from Manthurai it was the first time a marriage between a family from Korte and Manthurai had taken place. Selvi fought long and hard with her mother, and also brother Nathan to accept it. They eventually gave in when Selvi refused to marry anyone else. Balraj’s education and his highly educated and well-respected father were the factors that made it possible for her mother and brother, if not to accept it, at least to allow Selvi to go through with it.

Despite, or maybe exactly because of their own experiences, Selvi and others say they will feel pain and difficulties if their children marry outside “their people” or people “as them”. These are “inside-feelings”, and hard to admit to others as well to oneself. In their opinion, as with Santhya’s parents, marrying *sondam* will be a secure way to ensure their children a good marriage, and thus a good life. The further away from themselves in terms of *sondam*, *ur* and caste a potential partner may be, the more risk they associate with the marriage. Such distance will create feelings of uncertainty in

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regard to their children's wellbeing in the marriage, and therefore of the consequences of the marriage for the rest of the family, including themselves.

### *Emotions and meaning*

Generational issues are emotional. Pain and struggle in coming to terms with their children's life choices are oftentimes the experience of parents whose children have married outside their *sondam* and *ur*, or even worse, have divorced. Michelle Rosaldo (1984, 143) argues that emotions are structured by our forms of understanding. Selvi and other Korte-parents expect to experience pain if their children marry outside *sondam*, *ur* and caste or even marry a non-Tamil. According to Balasingam, the husband of his father's sister cried whenever he saw Balasingam and said "You should have been my son in law" (cf. Chapter 3). The disappointments and pains the pre-war Korte-relatives experience when aspects of life concerning *sondam* and *ur* do not turn out as it "should have been", give witness to the emotions that are at stake in such process of change and re-orientation. Moreover, the pain of loss in such cases confirms the emotional value, to the Korte-relatives, of being enmeshed and re-enmeshed with *sondam* and *ur* in order to experience life as meaningful.

Accepting a stranger, even a Tamil, as their child's spouse, is emotionally troublesome. It is belonging to *sondam* and *ur* that is salient in such situations, even though inclusion in the national community may be highly meaningful in other contexts (cf. Chapters 8 and 9). The practices, or the habitus, of *sondam* and *ur* condition the experience of the person who has grown up within this "world" or structure. The parents' struggle in coming to terms with the issue of marriages, and thereby *sondam* and *ur*, being practiced in a new way confirms the argument I set out at the beginning of this dissertation: that their notion of kinship, including relationships to the *ur*, and interrelationships between the person, relatives (*sondam*) and the natal village (*ur*) is not a meshwork, but an enmeshment. Enmeshment in *sondam* and *ur* remains as the ideal sociality for both present and future, even though the actual entwinements of daily life are now mostly gone. Thus the particular enmeshment found in pre-war Korte life can, be regarded as an ideology in Althusser's sense; the acting out of ideals in systems that surrounds us in material practices (cf. Chapter 2). The enmeshment contains both the

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concreteness of ideology in its actual relationships and practices to relatives and the natal village and its ideals and thoughts of these relationships. Thereby practices and ideals of *ur* must also be regarded as part of Tamil kinship.

I suggest that it is the complex dynamics between actual relationships and ideals, thoughts and language in the enmeshment of person, *sondam* and their *ur* that contributes to the “inertia” in parents’ re-orientation to their “new” surroundings and situations. Ideals and thoughts of *sondam* and *ur* do not change as rapidly as the conditions for practicing relatedness to these belongings did when war and migration abruptly altered their way of living. While the environment of Korte in which daily actions reproduced this particular enmeshment no longer is a *milieu de memoire*, that does not mean that parents do not desire to carry on these practices. These ideas are connected to an “ideology of *ur-sondam*”, of how things “should have been”, which is highly emotional. Seeking to re-entangle oneself in these relationships through practices of exchanging money and gifts and arranging rituals as *lieux de memoire* thus seems to uphold and enhance the grounding of the ideal meaningful life in this particular enmeshment.

### **Enmeshment and aesthetics in meaning-making**

Throughout this dissertation I have showed how, in different ways, the Korte-relatives involve themselves with particular objects, producing aesthetics in their quest to re-create meaning after war and migration. I have described how their process of re-creating meaning is grounded in the enmeshment of person, relatives (*sondam*) and natal village (*ur*) remembered to have characterized the good and meaningful life of the past. In the first chapters of this dissertation I showed that frequently meeting, interacting and being together in their natal village prior to migration and war are perceived and remembered among the Korte-relatives to have provided daily life with meaningful activities and relationships. Family members perceived their lives as mutually entangled, and mutually constitutive of each other and their natal village when gathering underneath the margosa tree; watching movies, cooking, eating, going to the temple or performing family rituals together; ensuring that others have eaten; watching

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each other's children; drinking the water from the well, picking and eating fruits from the trees.

These activities and relationships kept them occupied, providing them an *illusio*, and, as such, an experience of the future in the present (cf. Bourdieu 2000). The sociality of life thereby included the Korte-relatives in a larger wholeness, with a meaningful past, present and future that transcended themselves in space and time (cf. Hastrup 2007). The Korte-relatives were socialized to rely upon these relationships and activities and to expect them to continue indefinitely. I have argued, then, that for the Korte-relatives, being enmeshed in both relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*) is vital to experiencing life as meaningful. Furthermore I have argued that *ur* as much as *sondam* needs to be recognized as a vital element of kinship, central to meaning-making.

As I showed in Chapter 3, the war and consequent migration disrupted the way of life of the Korte-relatives, stretching out the tightly entwined enmeshment over large geographical distances. Within less than ten years, the Korte-relatives went from living together in their natal village to living dispersed between Korte, Oslo, London, Toronto and Paris. In Chapter 5, I described how this dispersal brought forth threatening emotions of aloneness and emptiness, leading the present to be experienced as boring, and purposeless: a period of waiting with no clear aim or end, ultimately lacking in meaning. I have shown that that such meaninglessness is detrimental to a person's wellbeing and that the re-creation of meaning becomes vital. In Chapters 4 and 6 through 9, I showed that when the *milieu de memoire* of Korte-life was lost, the relatives spent much time and effort performing objects and also dance and song in different contexts: giving and receiving gifts and remittances, arranging and participating in ritual events, producing and consuming family photographs and digital and live web-images, and engaging themselves and their children with LTTE's national objects and rituals. I have argued that engaging themselves in these practices, objects and the general aesthetics that is produced has become important to creating *lieux de memoire*; events and objects that produce aesthetics, affecting the participants, leading them to associate the objects and affects to a wider set of meanings (cf. Deleuze 2000). In these settings, a sense of the meaningful past in the present can be achieved.

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Through the ethnographic material and the discussion in this dissertation, I have thus sought to illuminate how the particular enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* requires particular objects and practices that brings forth a desired aesthetics in order to re-create meaning. Some produced aesthetic qualities play with the relatives' past life, connecting to other thoughts and actions that brings forth associations and senses of their previous belongings to *sondam* and *ur*. Such aesthetics appeals to their senses and produce emotions and experiences of meaning. Particular objects and aesthetics "work" in diaspora, because they can be associated with the particular entwining of lifelines in pre-war Korte, conveying notions of togetherness, presence of relatives and their past lives in the *ur* across distances of time and space. Such produced aesthetics allows relatives to re-entwine their lifelines with each other and the *ur*. In such moments, meaning can be re-created, and threatening emotions of emptiness and aloneness can be held at bay, and experiences of the present as boring, purposeless and without direction can, for a time at least, be avoided, dispelled or suppressed.

Significantly, however, these objects and events and the aesthetics they produce simultaneously bring forth experiences of distance from, and absence of, family members. Viewing photographs and videos, participating in family rituals, eating the food paid for by remittances or piling up gifted skirts and saris in over-filled wardrobes, brings forth experiences of both closeness and distance, presence and absence, pleasure and shame at the same time. I have argued that in understanding the processes of meaning-making in dispersed families we should not just emphasize positive effects of co-presence and proximity (cf. Baldassar 2007, 2008, Boccagni 2012, Svašek 2008, Urry 2002, 2003), but attend to such ambivalent emotions. Focusing on relationships between family members living in different locations, including those who have stayed behind, reveals the complexity of migration experiences (cf. Olwig 2007, 21-22, Schiller and Salazar 2013).

The ambivalent emotions produced in the Korte-relative's performances of objects in family-related situations and events, together with the difficulty of undertaking such practices frequently in daily life, I have suggested, opens space for other forms of togetherness to evolve. In the last two chapters of this dissertation, I have argued that the inclusion of oneself and one's children into LTTE's national ideology, practices and

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rituals has become one way to re-create meaning. Here, the pre-war parental generation find new meaningful relationships and activities in which to engage themselves. Such activities are effective, however, precisely because they are done through objects and contexts that directly or indirectly make reference to the parents' past meaningful life: their relationships to *sondam* and *ur*.

By drawing upon these familiar and desired belongings, the performance and engagement with these objects produces a nationalist aesthetics that is able to turn past loss into hope for the future, thus creating an *illusio*: a source of meaning in the present. Particularly in the national rituals, parents are given the opportunity to reflect upon central questions of loss within a carefully directed frame of interpretation. Here experienced loss, pain and sorrow are transcended by togetherness, participation and meaningfulness. By producing a meaningful aesthetics through its particular objects, activities and community, I have suggested that LTTE's nationalism provides a new *milieux de mémoire*; an on-going environment that brings forth an imagined future in which Korte-relatives can enmesh themselves in new meaningful relationships. And in contrast to the *ur-sondam* unity, the national community is a community open to all Tamils who shared LTTE's goal.

Tamils' involvement in LTTE's nationalist world-view does not mean that their belonging to the meaningful whole of *ur-sondam* loses value or meaning. Rather, I have suggested that LTTE's success in gaining such massive support in the diaspora results precisely from their ability to integrate Tamils' belonging and emotional attachment to *sondam* and *ur* into the national community and the imagined future. In this process, it might be expected that persons would become less attached to the *ur-sondam* unity and more to the national community of Tamil Eelam. As the ethnography in this Epilogue shows, however, when it comes to the vital issue of marriage, national belonging is overwhelmed by parents' feelings of belonging to *sondam* and *ur*. The new wholeness of nationalism, therefore, cannot completely heal the ruptures caused by war and migration. Loss and sorrow for the lost life of the past remains: the joy of family reunion is always followed by the bitterness of parting, and generational conflicts between the parents who grew up in the tight enmeshment of *sondam* and *ur* and their



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children who now grow up in different environments in diaspora, in which their lifelines have entangled widely with “strangers”, weigh heavily on many families.

As I have argued, meaning-making can thus be understood not only as the result of concrete sensorial relations, but also of the ways that our engagement with the world connects to wider sets of ideals, thoughts, language, memory and emotions. Life in Korte was meaningful because it was an enmeshment, and not merely a meshwork, between persons, relatives (*sondam*) and their natal village (*ur*). I have shown that the enmeshment of life in pre-war Korte did not only consist of actual entwinings with the immediate surroundings of the *ur* and *sondam* as in the meshwork (cf. Ingold 2007a, 2008, 2011). Rather thoughts, ideals and language of these relationships also influenced and were influenced by the relatives’ relationships. I have thereby argued that to understand how life in Korte was meaningful, why the loss of this life causes emotions of emptiness and aloneness and how such loss both fuels and restrains efforts to re-create meaning, the past life in Korte needs to be understood as an enmeshment. The person’s concrete and sensorial entanglements with *sondam* and *ur* have become part of the person through time and persist as important elements of the “mutuality of being” that makes the person. The person, *sondam* and *ur* constitute and are constituted by each other.

I have showed in this dissertation that the ideology of the ideal enmeshment of person, *sondam* and *ur* among the Korte-relatives is persistent and is slower to adapt and change than the concrete relationships and practices of interaction by which this enmeshment was sustained. Korte-relatives have lost the everyday life which offered the possibility and necessity of entwining one’s lifeline with *sondam* and *ur*, but this does not imply that they have lost the desire to undertake such practices. The significance of the enmeshment to processes of meaning-making thereby underlines the need for a broader analysis of human-object relationships than the one advocated by writers within the “material turn”. The “two sides” of materiality, its concrete, sensorial aspects and its wider meaning in associations to thoughts and actions, its “worldliness” (Deleuze 2000), are particular evident when some objects are able to produce aesthetics that seems to work better than others in the relatives’ quest to re-create meaning.

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Objects producing aesthetics when performed by the relatives bring forth affects and experiences that we connect to other things or worlds, a set of meanings (cf. Deleuze 2000). It is the objects and the produced aesthetics that enables Korte-relatives to feel desired emotions of belonging to *ur* and *sondam* that most successfully produce meaningful experiences. However, to transcend ambivalent emotions, the affects produced needs to be strictly directed into a certain world of meaning, such as that provided by LTTE, so that some associations are allowed and others blocked out (cf. Deleuze 2000, 6-7). Meaning-making takes place in this dynamic between the sensorial qualities of objects and persons in different events and situations, and the worldiness to which they connect. As such, the relatives' *re*-creation of meaning occurs within the world they are a part of and results in new (re-)creative creations. For example, when puberty ceremonies are turned into rituals that memorialize the family in images and projecting belongings of *sondam* and *ur* into support for the LTTE.

### ***Reorientation amongst conflicting realities***

The emotional dilemmas faced by Korte-relatives and other Tamil parents in Norway when their children marry outside the *ur-sondam* unity, or get divorced, I suggest stem from the "inertia" in the parent's processes of meaning-making. The pain and difficulties such parents experience bear witness to a co-existence of ideologies within them. Parents know they should accept such marriages outside the *ur-sondam* group, but still it pains them. To Althusser, ideology has a social function. In contrast to Foucault, Althusser was of the opinion that knowledge that contradicts ideology does not necessarily indicate the decline of that ideology. An ideological conception is neither true nor false. There can be no clear distinction between knowledge and ideology because each ideology is a "different social game with a different social function" (Pfaller 2005, 111). Althusser (2005 [1969], 234) pointed out that the ruling class and the exploited class live their own ideologies. Ideologies can thus co-exist in a society, and also within an individual because they have different social functions (Pfaller 2005, 110).

Trying to come to terms with the probability that their children will marry outside "their people", the *ur-sondam* group, the parents foresee pain and difficulties. Two

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ideologies co-exist within them: the one they grew up with of being enmeshed in *sondam* and *ur* and the one they have encountered in Norway, as well as within the Tamil national community, which denies the importance or even legitimacy of distinctions of kinship, natal village and particularly, caste.<sup>189</sup> The parents know that according to these latter ideologies, they should accept their children marrying outside the *ur* of Ariyalai, but despite this knowledge, to do so remains emotionally distressing.

Rosaldo (1984, 143) has argued that emotions give shape to thoughts and thoughts are “laden with emotional meaning”. I suggest that the thought of such a marriage outside the *ur-sondam* unity causes parents pain because its realization will confirm and contribute to a further untwining of the person-*sondam-ur* enmeshment. Moreover, the pain parents feel when thinking of their children marrying a “stranger” can be deepened by the contradiction between the emotional feeling that “this is wrong” and the cognitive thought that “we need to accept this”, the latter stemming from the dominant ideologies in both mainstream Norwegian society and the Tamil nationalist movement.

The ideology or enmeshment of person, relatives and natal village with which parents grew up had a function in Jaffna. Children growing up in Oslo or London, however, experience this ideology as having little or no function. Nor does it have the emotional grounding for them that it had for their parents. Growing up in different cities, the children of the Korte-relatives who migrated are socialized into different communities: the *ur-sondam* unity (mostly during family gatherings), the national Tamil community, and the Norwegian, British, French or Canadian community. Most of the second generation I know are closely attached to their parents and other relatives, particular those living in the same city. They also meet their relatives for family functions, and, to some degree, keep in touch with relatives living elsewhere through Facebook and Skype. Unlike the pre-war life of their parent’s generation in Korte, however, they do not meet and entangle their lifelines with close and extended relatives on a daily basis. Nor have they much conception of, or attach much significance to, the differences of castes, and to marry within kin is, to many of them, a strange idea.

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<sup>189</sup> Although LTTE opposes caste distinctions, it recommends that Tamils should marry other Tamils in order to maintain the distinctiveness of the ethnic group.

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For Kaviya's puberty ceremony, her eldest *mama* (Kaviya's mother's brother), his wife and children living in Canada came and stayed for a few weeks. Since all of Selvi's living siblings, except for Pushpa, were re-united, they decided to go for a trip together the day after the ceremony. The family of Selvi's husband's brother also came along. In the car on the way back, Kaviya, her brother Lakshan, and Vimal, the son of Selvi's brother Nathan, discussed Tamil kinship terms. In particular they were curious to why Kaviya and Lakshan term the cousins who have come from Canada *machan* and *machal*, male and female cross-cousins, while Vimal terms them *anna* and *akka*, (elder) brother and sister. Kaviya asks her mother, who answers:

That is because their parents are not the same gender. Mother's sister's children become siblings, and father's brother's children become your siblings. That is because you can marry your *machan* but not your *anna*. So you can marry Vimal or Sathes [Kaviya's mother's brother's son visiting from Canada], but you cannot marry Ajanthan [Kaviya's father's brother's son living in Oslo].

Kaviya screwed up her face and ejaculated: "iack!" signalling her disgust. Selvi laughed. The idea of marrying one of her cross-cousins was repellent and unthinkable to Kaviya. In daily life, Kaviya is as close to her *machan*, or cross-cousin Vimal as to her *anna*, or parallel-cousin Ajanthan. All live in Oslo, they oftentimes come together for birthdays and other family events, or travel on vacation together. And for Vimal, the occasion of Kaviya's ceremony was the first time he had met his *anna* and *akka* from Canada. He said that: "the first day I only talked a little with *anna*, then the next day a little more, and now we talk a lot".

The new residence patterns do not afford occasions for building kinship or entwining lines as Korte-relatives did when living in houses all adjacent to each other. Different relationships seem to result: relationships between cross- and parallel-cousins are more fluid, depending upon the frequency of interaction. And one can wonder if the relationships between cross- and parallel-cousins in the second generation living in different countries will persist to the following generation. Judging by Kaviya's reaction to the idea, it is unlikely that kinship bonds will be renewed through cross-cousin or *ur-sondam* marriages.

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The encounter with new ways of living a good life challenge the parents' established habitus. By accepting new realities, new forms of marriage and thus kinship, parents try to re-orient themselves, but this takes time. Their understanding of how things ought to be is emotionally grounded in the enmeshment with relatives and natal village, and going against it is difficult: as Selvi put it, "I will feel pain inside myself". A more extreme reaction was apparent in Santhya's parents who first rejected their daughter before later deciding to offer her some support. The slow and emotionally painful process of re-orientation and re-creation of meaning, I suggest, underlines how strongly the ideal of the enmeshment with *sondam* and *ur* has become part of pre-war parents' understanding of themselves and of a good life. Ideology indeed forms the individual as a being (cf. Althusser 2005 [1969]), and impacts on their meaning-making.

Emotions, as Sara Ahmed (2004) argues are not neutral, but generate and create meaning. This is in line with Rosaldo's (1984) view that emotions inform thoughts. To experience particular events or periods of life as painful, empty and meaningless due to the disappointment that things are not as they should have been, underlines the important ways in which materiality and relationships connect to a wider worldliness in processes of meaning-making (cf. Deleuze 2000). Actual practices and relationships, as well as thoughts and ideals involve and influence our emotions and experiences of meaningfulness. We need to recognize both sensorial affects of objects and humans and the worldliness they enter into, connecting with other objects, thoughts and actions, to grasp the complex ways that humans seek to re-create their worlds as meaningful in times of change.

### **Tamil future(s)?**

When war made Korte and the rest of Jaffna, as well as Sri Lanka, an unsafe place to live, with little hope for income and education for Tamils, migration became the only way to picture oneself and one's children as having a future. Although the guns have been silenced and the shelling has stopped in Sri Lanka since May 2009, Sri Lankan Tamil families continue to regard migration as the only way to secure a future for oneself and one's children (cf. Thiranagama 2011). The insecurities of the post-war

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situation in Jaffna and Sri Lanka are many: will the peace last? Will Tamil boys be suspected, harassed or detained again? Will Tamil girls one day be able to move freely, without fear that government soldiers will harass or rape them? Will there be action to help traumatized Tamils, so that girls do not need to fear sexual abuse from other Tamils? Will more Tamils get access to university education? Will there be employment to support families? It is these insecurities that lead many Tamils to turn to ideas of migration; they see little future in Jaffna or Sri Lanka.

Migration abroad from Sri Lanka is, however, much more difficult today than during the 1980's and 1990's. Legal ways to obtain visas are few: marriage with a Tamil already living abroad, or for the lucky few, a student visa, are the only options. Many young Tamils wait in limbo for long periods in Colombo, searching for means to obtain visas. Thiranagama (2011, 247-8) calls them "the shadow diaspora". The last intensive phase of the war brought, almost literally, a new "wave" of desperate young male Tamil refugees. Setting out on boats from the Sri Lankan coast, they tried, with varying success, to escape via India, Malaysia and Thailand to Australia or Canada. These routes have also been used since the end of the war. Refugees have reported continued abductions, torture and rape. As late as July 2014, the Sidney Morning Herald reported that Australia had received more than 8,300 Sri Lankans by boat between 2012 and July 2014 (Feneley, Koutsoukis, and Whyte 2014).

I end here with one last story from Korte, that of Sasikala. Her story demonstrates her own, as well as her husband's and her children's experience of insecurity in Sri Lanka and desperation to leave the country. Sasikala is one of the only two Kumarasamy-siblings who remained in Korte when all the other siblings, cousins and other close relatives left. When the Sri Lankan Army took control of Jaffna in 1995, Sasikala and her husband went with their children to Vanni, the area controlled by LTTE until its defeat in 2009. Here she raised her children with great difficulty in a small, leaking mud house, living from a small paddy field and a few goats and chickens, always fearing that her children would be recruited by LTTE. When they got the chance to send their eldest son to Sweden they took it and luckily none of the boys ran off with the LTTE. But in 2005, when the family moved back to their house in Korte as the ceasefire broke down, the second eldest son stayed behind, working in a shop in Vanni.

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In 2007 the conflict escalated significantly and Vanni was sealed: no one could enter or leave. Their son was trapped. And in November 2008, as he drove a car filled with goods, he was killed in a government bombing attack.

The loss of a son and brother weighs heavily on the family. As Sasikala tells it:

Because of this there is no happiness in our family [...] Whenever we celebrate any function we think of him and cry. I shed tears always. When I cook delicious meals I think of him and shed tears. Because he is not with us.

Their son's death raised Sasikala's and her husband's concern for the life of their two remaining sons. Since their brother had been killed in Vanni, the Sri Lankan Army that still controlled Jaffna might easily suspect their other two sons of being Tigers. Sasikala and her husband arranged for both sons to go to Malaysia on student visas, and in December the same year they left. From there, without the knowledge of Sasikala and her husband, one son went in a ship to Australia and the other in a ship to Canada. The boys, together with their brother in Sweden and their *mama* Balasingam in London, decided that they would take this risk, sparing their parents and sisters the worry. Later, when the two sons arrived, they recounted to their family their dangerous trips: high waves and running out of food and water after just the first few days.

In the meantime, Sasikala and her husband also got their eldest daughter married to a Tamil in London. They were troubled to have two girls at home, in particular after the sons left. The presence of the sons had given some protection to their sisters. It was Balasingam and his wife who arranged the marriage, the groom being a relative of Balasingam's wife.

Within three years, from being a family with five children, only the youngest girl Sangeetha was left. Sangeetha herself put words to the situation: "In three years, our life was changed. Everything, in three years. We were all together. Now all have gone to different places."

Sasikala also grieves over her family:

I thanked God for protecting them [my children] from joining with the Tigers. It was enough to keep my children with me. Then we all came here. But at last, everybody is scattered and I'm living with only one child. Earlier I was with six

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children but now living with only one. It's very sorrowful to think how I suffered to raise my children. Once they all have grown up I couldn't see them. I really worry that my children are not with me. In future I don't know that they will all get married. I'll live only for ten more years, no? My life is only for ten more years. I will die even before that. Before that I can't see my children.

Sasikala strongly misses her children and finds it hard to reconcile with their absence. Nevertheless, she still wants to send Sangeetha, now the only child left in the house, out of the country: "I'm scared to have her. I never let her go out alone. She is nineteen years old. When she becomes twenty or twenty-one she has to marry." One and a half year after this conversation, Sangeetha, only twenty years old, married a Tamil friend of her brother in Australia. Her parents found the proposal convenient as the marriage would secure her ticket out of Sri Lanka. Sangeetha also agreed. Within a year, Sangeetha will also leave the house in Korte. Sasikala and her husband will be alone in the house, as Parvathi and Sanjeeven have been for the past 25 years.

Tamil parents in Jaffna today, as in the years during the war, find themselves in a situation where their worries for their children's future weigh heavier than the emotional stress of being separated from their children or having children married outside the *ur-sondam* unity. The end of the war has not brought a future for Tamils within the country. While the government has built new roads, re-built the railway and improved other infrastructure in Jaffna, it has also brought more Sinhalese to the peninsula, taking over Tamil businesses. And the Army remains, spreading fear and still occupying the lands of Tamil families. Furthermore, the government has created a black list of persons they suspect of involvement in anti- Sri Lankan political activities. As a consequence, many Tamils living aboard have been detained and arrested upon visits, and many more do not visit out of fear of these consequences.

Even six years after the war ended, there has been no comprehensive commitment on the part of the government to address questions and outline solutions to issues which involve the country's minorities. This, to the majority of Tamils, would be the first step in order to reconcile with Sinhalese majority society and make it possible to imagine a future for themselves in the country. In the meantime, for many the future remains projected elsewhere; sending children away and embarking upon extremely dangerous



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journeys, or daydreaming about a life elsewhere; spending their time on smartphones and computers, staying in touch with those outside, or remaining resigned and disillusioned over their situation. The lack of future in Sri Lanka continues to separate families and untwine meaningful unities and lives. To be able to imagine a future for oneself and one's children is crucial to find life meaningful.

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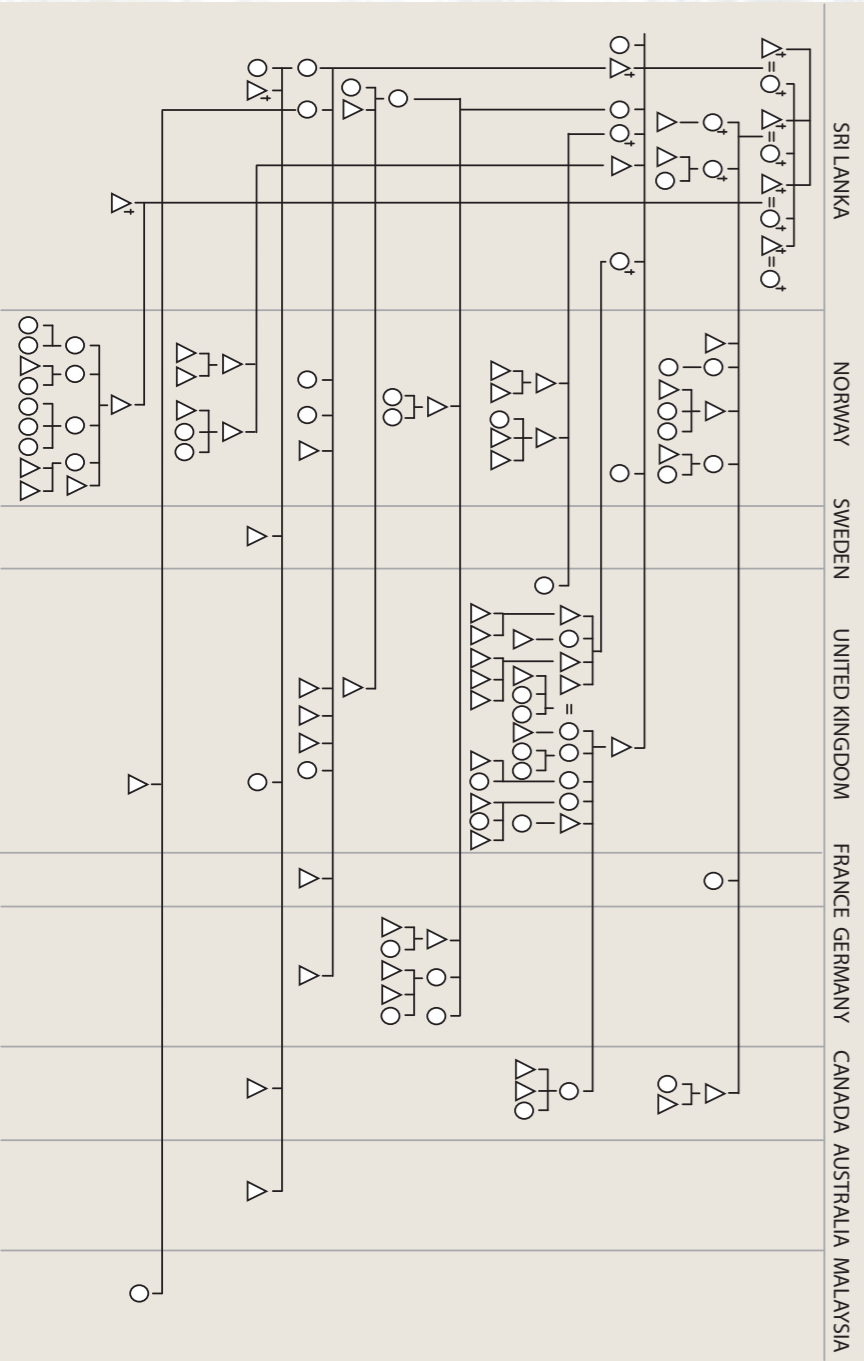
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# The Korte Family

July 2012



The Korte family divided by country of residence, July 2012





# Kinship chart of the Korte family

