



ANTICIPATORY STATES: Tsunami, War, and Insecurity in Sri Lanka

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On December 26, 2004, a massive earthquake of 9.1–9.3 on the Richter Scale—the third-strongest earthquake in recorded seismological history—rocked the Ring of Fire, a seismic belt of volcanoes located just west of the Sumatra coast of Indonesia. The earthquake also had the longest faulting duration ever observed, between 8.3 and 10 minutes. No part of the planet remained unaffected: the earthquake caused the entire earth to vibrate as much as half an inch (Lay et al. 2005). The earthquake also triggered several devastating tsunamis along many landmasses bordering the Indian Ocean, killing more than an estimated 230,000 people in more than fourteen countries. Indonesia was the hardest hit, with more than 160,000 deaths, and Sri Lanka was the second most devastated, with over 35,000 dead or missing and 500,000 displaced (World Bank 2005). More than three-quarters of the island nation’s shoreline was affected, mostly the eastern and southern coasts.

Before the tsunami grabbed the world’s headlines, Sri Lanka was perhaps best known for being engaged in what was Asia’s longest-running civil war, in which the Sri Lankan government had been battling an insurgent militant group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), for more than twenty-five years. As the country engaged in an arduous project of national reconstruction in the wake of the tsunami, it also initiated a renewed militaristic approach to end its “terrorism problem,” or the LTTE. In this article, I trace how the devastation of

the tsunami and the logics of disaster risk management that followed it offered a political opening for new techniques of state power and projects of nation-building in Sri Lanka. As Naomi Klein's conception of "disaster capitalism" points to the way disasters open the door for corporate and free-market reorganization, I highlight a different but related phenomenon that has taken shape in Sri Lanka amid the ruins of both the civil war and the Indian Ocean tsunami, what I call *disaster nationalism*. Because the Sri Lankan government functioned as the obligatory passage point (Callon 1986) through which disaster management practices and reconstruction programs were conceived and executed, post-tsunami reconstruction efforts were refracted as nation-building projects, enabling new forms of population and territorial management (Deleuze 1992; Foucault 2007; Collier and Ong 2005). Specifically, I show how the reassertion of state practices and power after the tsunami gave purchase to nationalist imaginations and visions of Sri Lanka, in turn leading to a vigorous military campaign by the government and a controversial victory over the Tigers in May 2009, nearly five years after the tsunami.

The Sri Lankan government's response to disasters could not be more clearly illustrated than by the speech delivered by the then Sri Lankan Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights, Mahinda Samarasinghe, at the second session for the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, Switzerland, on June 17, 2009. After discussing the merits of mainstreaming a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) framework in national planning, he concluded his speech by shifting his focus from the tsunami to the recent end of Sri Lanka's human-made disaster, the civil war:

My country—Sri Lanka—has just overcome a human-made disaster of a magnitude unparalleled by any similar recent events elsewhere. We have overcome the scourge of terrorism that has beset our island nation for well over two decades. From a humanitarian standpoint we have now moved into a "care and maintenance" phase, which is the initial phase of early recovery.

The Government of President Mahinda Rajapaksa has taken on the task of reconstructing a nation which has suffered much in its efforts to reunite its people ensuring that all Sri Lankans are now able to lay claim to one, undivided territory as their common Motherland. . . .

All our efforts at renewal, rebuilding and resettlement, however will be put at risk if the cause factors of the conflict and terrorism are not

addressed and our President has committed himself to evolving a home grown political response to those factors.

Borrowing from DRR methodology, our political response will reduce the risk of a renewed human-made disaster, i.e. terrorism and conflict, through systematic efforts to analyse and manage the casual [sic] factors, evolve consensual responses and improved preparedness for adverse events. We do not for a moment think that Sri Lanka's national renewal will be quick or easy.

There are ever-present threats that we must, and will, guard against, including the threats of new violence and destabilization. (Samarasinghe 2009, emphasis added)

Samarasinghe's address in Geneva illustrates a significant political response to disasters, both natural and human-made, in Sri Lanka. That is, the Sri Lankan government's response does more than suggest that disasters are not just natural: the conceptualization of natural disasters and terrorism, even after their supposed ends, as "ever-present" threats to the stability of the nation articulate a new regime of security in Sri Lanka. While the Sri Lankan state's extrajudicial and violent history toward insurgency would suggest, perhaps, that this security regime was not new, I offer that the tsunami did provide fresh opportunities for national and social restructuring on the island.¹ The war did not merely constitute the social context in which the tsunami played out. Rather, the tsunami leveraged a certain logic of managing uncontrollable threats, including war and terrorism.²

This logic of disaster risk management and control is one built around an *anticipation* of disasters. Anticipation might evoke a familiar structure of feeling in our contemporary security moment and looming era of the Anthropocene. Turning on a notion of futurity, and in particular a future rife with risk and insecurity (Beck 1992), anticipation also works as an apt heuristic to examine new modes and logics of governance, security, and subjectivity (Adams, Murphy, and Clarke 2009; Adey and Anderson 2012; Anderson 2010; Appadurai 2013; see also Tironi, Rodriguez-Giralt, and Guggenheim 2014). Literature in anthropology and science and technology studies on risk illustrate as much, focusing on the practices of experts and expertise, technoscience, and state-based securities that deal with the production of anticipatory knowledge and practices—from the speculative life sciences (Fortun 2006) and health (Dumit 2012) to Wall Street (Zaloom 2004), imagined pandemics (Lowe 2010), and biothreats (Lakoff 2008).³ Risk management and anticipatory action result in a variety of preparedness and

preemptive actions (Collier and Lakoff 2014; Cooper 2006; Massumi 2005; Stewart n.d.; see also Foucault 2007), soliciting new technical band-aids: warning systems, infrastructure, evacuation drills, and event simulations and overall attempts to increase government management and control. The impetus of such programs and collaborations is to invoke a continual state of readiness and maximum security of state territory: it is not a matter of *if* a disaster strikes, but a matter of *when*. Anticipation thus is productive. It reorganizes and restructures lives, nations, and economies; it generates new biosocialities, ethical plateaus (Fischer 2003), technologies, and orientations to the future and to the past. Anticipation is profoundly political, even “psychopolitical” (Orr 2006), bringing together new regimes of fear, hope, and governance (Masco 2008).

In Sri Lanka, the anticipation of disaster has proven no less productive in restructuring the nation. Recent scholarship by anthropologists on regimes of preparedness and biosecurity—or what has been termed “vital systems security”—pinpoints infrastructure and territory as what is maximally securitized by the state (Lakoff and Collier 2008). In Sri Lanka, however, while certain war-related infrastructures were in place—the checkpoint being exemplary in this regard—other everyday, practical infrastructures had long been neglected or affected by the war.⁴ It was therefore not as if Sri Lanka had an ideal state of normalcy to restore after the tsunami. War had long scarred the social and political landscape. As one development official pointed out, in the war-affected regions of north-eastern Sri Lanka, it was difficult to decipher if the destruction was caused by the tsunami or war-related bombing. Hence the Sri Lankan state’s technologies of disaster nationalism were not only aimed at protecting and maintaining existing infrastructures, but also sought to build new ones.⁵ The ruins of the past would have to give way to a new vision of the nation: a Sri Lankan nation prepared for disaster and finally freed from the scourge of terror. The construction of new buffer and border zones, national disaster early-warning systems, the maintenance of military checkpoints⁶—these state-employed technologies of control cemented the construction of the newly liberated, “undivided Motherland.”⁷

Yet these governmental attempts to control the future remain in constant tension with the attitudes and opinions of people affected by both the tsunami and war. These collective relations, practices, and infrastructures of feelings are what I refer to as “anticipatory states.” My use of the plural “states” is deliberate, to foreground the ways in which anticipation has multiple valences and resonances in Sri Lanka. From the calculative risk management projects and the anticipatory practices of the Sri Lankan state to the everyday state of being ready and aware

in the spaces of disaster, anticipation weaves into and out of experiences and encounters, its different forms and possibilities shaped by complexly layered histories and landscapes of disaster and violence. For the people I knew in eastern Sri Lanka, the possibility of a disastrous future depended on what they knew and had experienced in the past. For while an anticipatory logic of preparedness conjures up an imagination of a catastrophic future, for them, one could say, the impossible, the unimaginable, had happened already. As the rest of this article will make apparent, their anticipatory actions critique and illustrate the limits of the anticipatory Sri Lankan state. The unified and securitized Sri Lankan nation as the medium of state power exists as a “fragile equilibrium” (Aretxaga 2003), an order susceptible to disruption when a place, person, or event remains unaccounted for in its control and order. That is, crucial to the imaginarity of the nation, as Minister Samarasinghe pointed out in his speech in Geneva, is the always dangerous future that must be harnessed to maintain peace. As we will see, the fantasy of total control is not susceptible just to the threat of disaster but also to its own impossibility—a Nervous System indeed (see Taussig 1992).

ONE NATION, UNDER DISASTER

The securitization of the nation (see Hyndman 2007) following the tsunami was not necessarily an unexpected project and force in Sri Lanka. The country, after all, had been engaged in decades of civil war, the starting point of which is generally recognized as July 1983, when riots broke out in many cities on the island. Most of the rioting, looting, and killing was targeted at Tamils, a minority ethnic group in Sri Lanka, perpetrated mostly by the majoritarian ethnic group, the Sinhalese. Most strikingly, the riots, disorder, and violence were sponsored by the state: police, if not partaking of violent acts themselves, stood by and watched as the injustices unfolded before them (Jeganathan 2002; Manor 1984). Leading up to these horrific events, tensions between Tamils and the government of Sri Lanka had been growing. After independence and through the 1970s, a period of intense Sinhalization took place, including the implementation of education quotas in the university system. Tamils faced increased marginalization and racism in Sri Lankan politics, giving rise to the notion of an independent state of Tamil Eelam, which included the northern and eastern parts of the island. Though some Tamil organizations, such as the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), were committed to a non-violent resolution, a group of young, militant Tamil men who called themselves the Tamil New Tigers had begun to commit acts of robbery and violence toward Sinhalese police officers. The notion of an indepen-

dent Eelam and the growing power of the Tigers roused enough suspicion within the Sinhala-dominated government to create the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act of 1979, which granted the state exceptional police powers (UTHR 2001; Tambiah 1986); it is still in place today.⁸

After 1983, the war would take several twists and turns, characterized by waves of violence and several failed attempts to reach a peace accord or resolution. The Tamil New Tigers, led by Villupillai Prabhakaran, would eventually become the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, killing off other Tamil political parties and claiming to be the sole representative of all Tamils in Sri Lanka. Over the years, both the government and the LTTE would commit atrocities, but the Tigers especially would come to be recognized as a ruthless organization that forcibly recruited child soldiers and was credited with suicide bombing tactics, earning terrorist status in more than thirty-two countries (Bhattacharji 2009). The most hopeful moment for a peaceful negotiation came in 2002, when the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government signed a cease-fire agreement mediated by the Norwegian government, leading to temporary abatements of security and safety checkpoints throughout the island. Yet the break in fighting would not last long, for relations had begun to sour between the two warring parties when the tsunami struck Sri Lanka's already embattled shorelines.

At first the tsunami was seen as a great equalizer. The tsunami did not care if people were rich or poor, Sinhalese or Tamil, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. Hopes sprung up that the destruction might lead to a unified effort between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government to rebuild the nation together. Moreover, under international pressure and to receive \$3 billion in U.S. aid conditioned on a resumption of peace talks, the former president, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, attempted to push forward a joint aid-sharing mechanism, the Post-Tsunami Operation Management Structure (P-TOMS) with the LTTE. The P-TOMS would facilitate reconstruction in the northern and eastern parts of the tsunami-affected country that were under the control of the Tigers.⁹ The Tigers insisted on as much autonomy as possible from the government in the distribution of aid, stirring the ire of Sinhala Buddhist chauvinist groups. The aid mechanism eventually was struck down by the Sri Lankan Supreme Court as unconstitutional. So while the tsunami did result in a temporary reprieve in open hostilities between the government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE, disputes over the P-TOMS cast the final blow to the already tenuous 2002 cease-fire agreement. The only way to unify the nation, it seemed, would be through war.

Following the failure of the P-TOMS, in November 2005, Sri Lanka elected a new president, Mahinda Rajapaksa, who offered a plan “towards a new Sri Lanka.” “Mahinda Chinthana” or “Mahinda’s vision” consisted of a new strategy toward the war, which faulted the previous majority parliamentary party for allowing foreign countries to dictate national politics. Rajapaksa pledged to bring a swift solution to the war, with an agenda that “renounced separatism” and looked to the creation of a national security policy foregrounding the sovereign and territorial integrity of the island. The post-tsunami Disaster Risk Reduction logic of national preparedness seemed to articulate well with Rajapaksa’s vision. By 2006, the LTTE and the government were engaged in low-scale warfare. In 2007, the government gained control of the east. And by January 2008, the Sri Lankan government declared the cease-fire officially over: year 2008, the government proclaimed, was the year for war in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka’s disaster “Roadmap towards a Safer Sri Lanka” was being paved in the increasingly volatile context of war.

“Mahinda’s Vision” was abundantly clear when I arrived in Colombo in 2008 to begin my fieldwork. The city and its suburbs were decorated with billboards (figure 1) illustrating the government’s proclamation for the year of its sixtieth anniversary of independence: “The Year for War.”



Figure 1. “The Year for War in Sri Lanka” billboard. Photo by Vivian Y. Choi.

The representation on the far-left image demarcates in bright red the areas controlled by the LTTE in 2005 and reads, “areas under terrorists.” The center image illustrates the “areas where terrorists are hiding at the end of 2007.” In 2007, the government seized control of the eastern bloc of Eelam, leaving only the LTTE stronghold of the north under the control of the supposed terrorists. The final map on the right shows an all-green, glowing Sri Lanka—a nation freed from the clutches of terrorism. The text reads: “Let us build a country where all nationalities can live in freedom.” This billboard was displayed for Sri Lanka’s Independence Day celebrations, and at the top it said, “Let us celebrate 60 years of Independence with pride.” Though the government did not necessarily fulfill its goal of ending the war in 2008, it did finally proclaim victory over the Tigers on May 19, 2009.

While this free, unified vision of Sri Lanka did not necessarily depict a new imagined community, its ostentatious re-articulation was galvanized by the logics of disaster management that emerged following the tsunami—specifically, the logic of risk reduction and preparedness implemented in national disaster management projects that categorized both tsunami and terrorism as risks to national security.¹⁰ Anyone living in Sri Lanka, or with an interest in the country’s politics, knows that nationalism and authoritarian forms of state power are hardly subtle. Yet, studying the tsunami and the civil war together in this way illustrates new technologies and techniques of state power employed in the protracted and persistent issue of nationalism in Sri Lanka.¹¹ The simultaneous militarization of nature (see, for example, [Kosek 2010](#)) and the naturalization of terrorism in Sri Lanka found further legitimacy with the global war on terror, justifying military actions in areas impacted by both the tsunami and the war, eliciting even more insecurity. While disaster nationalism has had particular cohesion and force in the Sri Lankan context, it also suggests how political power may unfold in other contexts of disaster. Certainly, in line with several ethnographies focused on the social and political conditions leading up to disasters and their aftermaths (e.g., [Fortun 2001](#) on Bhopal; [Adams 2013](#) on Katrina; [Farmer 2011](#) on Haiti; [Petryna 2002](#) on Chernobyl),¹² the persistence of insecurity in Sri Lanka shows that the beginnings and endings of disasters cannot be easily demarcated. In Sri Lanka, the ongoing disaster, it might be said, is state-sponsored nationalism.

ANTICIPATORY STATES

I spent fifteen months in Sri Lanka during the government’s aggressive military campaign between 2008 and 2009, and was living in a bustling coastal town

in the Eastern Province of Sri Lanka when the war came to its dramatic end. The eastern coast, referred to as a “crucible of conflict” (McGilvray 2008), was a particularly intriguing area in which to examine the intersections of security, tsunami, and war. The east is characterized by complexly layered social and political histories of violence, migration, displacement, and resettlement. For many years, and especially during the 1990s, the Eastern Province constituted much fought-over territory, as it was considered part of the LTTE’s imagined homeland, until 2007, when government forces liberated the region.¹³ Moreover, the eastern coastal region was the area hardest hit by the tsunami: not only is the eastern coast the area located closest to the epicenter of the tsunami-generated earthquake of 2004, it is also the most densely populated area on the island.¹⁴ In this section I bring together the different ways in which anticipation, as a logic of state power crucial to processes of disaster nationalism in Sri Lanka, plays out in this disaster-stricken area. Preserving and upholding Sri Lanka’s newfound freedom enabled the moral justification for increased militarism and securitization of areas in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and after the war, in turn leading to a palpable lack of social and political change.

Following their commitment to Disaster Risk Reduction and as outlined in the “Roadmap towards a Safer Sri Lanka,” the Disaster Management Centre and the Sri Lankan state implemented new forms and spaces of knowledge and security building. One major project set up a national early-warning system for natural disasters. Initially, the warning system consisted of the construction of multi-hazard warning towers dotting the Sri Lankan coastline—a total of fifty in all, with twenty-five more slated to be built in the newly “freed” northern part of the island.¹⁵ The towers are all connected; they communicate with each other via satellite from the village, to the district, and all the way up to the national level. The main Disaster Management Centre is located in the capital city, Colombo. The towers deliver warning messages to the coastal communities that live around them. According to the Disaster Management Centre, the sirens can be heard within a five-kilometer radius. The Department of Meteorology in Colombo is first to get word of an earthquake or a potential tsunami from its information sources—the Japanese Meteorological Association and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii. It then contacts the Disaster Management Centre, and the center can either directly send a message to the towers to signal a warning or it can instruct district-level coordinators to manually turn the warning sirens on. The messages are recordings, spoken first in Sinhala, then in Tamil, and lastly in English. The first message issues a warning. If evacuation is necessary, an evac-

uation message will be broadcast. Finally, when the danger passes or if there is no need to worry, a cancellation message will be issued.

To ensure the system's functioning, the government staged several tsunami evacuation drills. On July 20, 2009, I found myself staring up into a cloudy blue sky to observe the technology and warning system in action. My friend, a disaster coordinator working with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Disaster Management Centre invited me to the drill. I wiped the sweat from my brow and shifted my feet standing in the muggy late afternoon. We turned and faced east, toward the ocean, although tall trees and homes obstructed our view of it. Behind those trees and homes stood a newly erected disaster-warning tower. This new one in Thirrukkovil, a town in southeastern Sri Lanka, stood above rooftops, bright and shiny, red and white (figure 2). In just a few minutes, at 3 p.m., it would be wailing its warning siren as part of a national, government-mandated tsunami evacuation drill.

I glanced behind me down the quiet, empty street lined with the houses of the locals who would be evacuating their homes once the warning siren went off. They had been given advance notice by the local disaster management coordinator. Over the sound of silent anticipation, the din of drums and music at the nearby temple festival could be heard. It was July, the season for the annual Kataragama festival and the Pada Yatra, an annual walking pilgrimage that starts in May in northeastern Sri Lanka and ends in July in Kataragama, a city in southeastern Sri Lanka famed for its multi-faith temples and festivals. The Chitra Velayudha Swami Temple in Thirrukkovil marks a resting point for those making their way to Kataragama.

I looked at my watch: 3 p.m.

I looked towards the tower: silence.

Back to my watch again: 3:05 p.m. Still, nothing.

At 3:15 p.m., I sent an SMS to my contact at the district disaster management office: "What's wrong?" I asked.

"Just wait," he texted.

So we waited.

And still: no siren.

I stood there waiting for the action to begin: How loud would the siren be, on a day like today, with no wind, when the siren could supposedly be heard within a five-kilometer radius?

I turned back to the street behind me, which was no longer empty. It was becoming slowly populated by people trickling out of their houses with their



Figure 2. Multi-hazard warning tower, Thirrukovil. Photo by Vivian Y. Choi.

emergency bags. Some brought out plastic chairs in front of their homes so that they could sit while they waited for danger to be signaled.

I switched my gaze back to the tower.

We were all ready.

Finally, at around 3:30 p.m., the local disaster officer answered his cell phone, nodding his head, and appearing to take directions. On hanging up, he quickly picked up his bullhorn, climbed atop his colleague's motorbike, turned on the decidedly less-dramatic-sounding bullhorn siren, and raced down the

street. Understanding this cue, the designated evacuees began their movements toward the tsunami safe site—a small Hindu temple, about one kilometer inland. Some ran, shouting, carrying their disaster bags, acting as if danger lurked closely. Others strolled leisurely, laughing and talking along the way.

This, actually, was not the first time the siren had failed to sound, either as scheduled or during a real tsunami scare in Sri Lanka. In 2007, another massive earthquake had rocked the Ring of Fire off the coast of Indonesia. Could another tsunami be making its way to Sri Lanka again? At that time, the government had erected three pilot warning towers. In a different eastern coastal town, one of those towers stood steadfast and . . . silent. The local disaster management coordinator, after multiple failed attempts to contact emergency operations at the National Disaster Management Centre for instructions, climbed up the tower and manually switched the siren on. At that point, nearly everyone in the surrounding areas had already evacuated inland and to higher ground.

At the Disaster Management Centre in Colombo, I had been informed that the incident in 2007 was seen as a success. An official informed me that he was “proud” to say that “without harming [sic] to any single human, we [had] evacuated people in coastal areas within 30 minutes.” He prefaced this statement by saying that Sri Lanka was “lucky,” as the event was “good practice.” The role of the Disaster Management Centre (DMC), as he further explained to me, was to get the correct details. At the moment and during the time of the tsunami and the tsunami scare, the DMC continues to be dependent on information from other sources; it simply does not have the accurate equipment available. The DMC collaborates with the Department of Meteorology to monitor for tsunamis and cyclones, while the Irrigation Department monitors for floods. The official went on to tell me, “We must give correct information and then let people know who are affected.” Accordingly, he told me that the DMC now had “confidence about people; now they will not react without the proper information from the DMC.”

“Yes, I received a call from my brother in Trincomalee that a tsunami was coming,” Fathima¹⁶ relayed to me (Trincomalee is a town roughly 175 kilometers north.) Her brother, a fisherman, had been listening to the radio and had heard some news about an earthquake in Indonesia, which immediately prompted him to call his sister, who lives in the area most affected by the tsunami of 2004. Fathima’s home stands roughly ten meters from the warning tower. She said she did not wait to hear it ring, but instead gathered her family members, made some phone calls to relatives and close friends, and began to spread the word to her neighbors. She said that in a matter of half an hour, nearly everyone in her village

had begun to make the journey inland to the main road. On visiting other towers in other coastal regions of the island, people informed me that the warning towers had sometimes gone off at unscheduled times, occasionally inciting moments of fear and panic.

Sentiments toward these towers were ambivalent at best. As I sipped a warm Coke near the cooling breeze of the ocean, Mohamed, a local owner of a small *kadai* (shop) on the beach, relayed to me that he was happy about the tower. In fact, because of the warning tower, he had felt comfortable enough to reopen his shop near the beach. “At night I can sleep better,” he said, looking toward the expanse of ocean. He blinked slowly, “Before I could only listen to the sound of the waves, listening for the way the waves sounded the day of the tsunami.” Still, others were skeptical: at a local tea stall, near the same tower to which Mohammed referred, I asked some villagers what they thought. Raheem took a sip of his tea, smiled, and told me, “It is there.” Laxmi informed me: “We are always alert.” She, like many others living near the shoreline, takes note of the slightest shift in wind, the gray color of the sky, and the behavior of birds. The day of the tsunami, the sky was gray and engulfed in clouds. On cloudy days, Laxmi often felt nervous, avoiding going to the sea. Sometimes false alarms and rumors of tsunamis spread on days with high winds. On those days, many fishermen would stay home. Temple and mosque loudspeakers also now double as potential community warning broadcasters. Alongside and beyond the preparedness rationale of the government, people consider the possibility of another disaster, using their own modes of communication to get relevant information.

The staged evacuation drill took place two months after the government’s declared end of the war, but could such a proclamation be so easily celebrated? Especially on the eastern coast, military presence several months after the war continued unabated. The Eastern Province had already been freed from so-called terrorism in 2007, yet an official state of emergency remained in place.¹⁷ The state of emergency granted special military powers to the Special Task Force (STF), an arm of the police. In the months following the proclaimed end of the war, military checkpoints, like the warning towers, dotted the physical landscape of the east. These checkpoints were located on main roads, stopping vehicles to check for bombs and hidden terrorists. Gun-wielding military men and women checked IDs, bags, and sometimes patted people down. These checkpoints constituted an anticipation of violence, the possibility of a bombing, and also, quoting Pradeep Jeganathan (2002), the “not-so-diffuse” tentacles of the state. The STF continued to monitor roadblocks and checkpoints, while also conducting neigh-

borhood and house checks, making sure that random strangers—or potential terrorists—were not taking refuge in the area. The officers could be seen roaming the streets, entering homes, and then lounging at the local tea stalls. Indeed, as an interview with the commanding officer of the STF revealed to me, “The war is over, but terror is there.” He continued to inform me that the division that I was researching, and in which I was living, was deemed a “vulnerable” area—an area vulnerable to lurking terrorists; it only made sense to increase the number of troops to counter terrorism and “secure the situation.” Shortly after this conversation, the Sri Lankan army began rebuilding an old camp that had been run down for more than a decade. Here the anticipatory practices of the military state attempt to purify the region of potential terrorists, while creating a system of national vigilance. This form of state power was predicated on ensuring security, the future of the nation characterized by the possibility of another disaster.

With the ever-present STF conducting checks in the east, my friend Parvati explained to me how she stayed alert: “As long as we have all our documents and have registered all of our family members with the police, the STF will not give us any trouble when they are doing their household checks.” The fear of arrest or violence remained palpable after the end of the war, when people would confess to me in hushed tones their disbelief that the LTTE leader Prabhakaran was really dead. A rumor went around about a boy on a bus, who, unaware of the presence of a police officer, proclaimed he did not believe Prabhakaran had been killed and was smacked and threatened with arrest for making such a statement. My friends could only tell me, with resignation, that “inside, we feel sad”; there was a lingering sense that the resumption of war was possible. People commented on my seeming naïveté when I probed them about the end of the war: “Who told you the war was over?” asked Ravi, who had come home for just three months, on holiday from his job in Qatar. In conversation, I mentioned that his visit had coincided with a historic moment in Sri Lanka’s history. I asked him if he would return for good from Qatar and stay in Sri Lanka? He said his plan was to go back Qatar, perhaps to return to Sri Lanka only if he got married and had a family. For now, he informed me, he felt that the east remained unsafe. He further explained, “The government says the war has stopped, but there is no full freedom for people to roam and move about freely. When that happens, we can say that the war is finished.” After hearing about my research project, he remarked, “If you release a fact about what is happening here that makes the government unhappy, the next day you can’t come back here. If there’s no safety for foreigners, how can there be safety for locals?” Fawzi, who was living in a

block of post-tsunami flats, challenged me: “Have the food prices gone down? Are there new jobs? If they [the government and the LTTE] want to start up the war again whenever they want, they can.” Sitamma explained the demise of the LTTE to me like this: “In the sea there is a lot of fish, but can you catch all the fish? Any little thing can start things up all over again. And if they [the government and the LTTE] want to start something again, they can.”

So no easy peace had come to settle over Sri Lanka. The rebuilding of the nation requires constant vigilance, and the past hovers restlessly over daily life. How do realities and experiences merge and emerge amid national orderings, out of the past and into the future? Here, I offer that vigilance is not merely a technique of self-disciplining for those living near the shorelines and in the spaces of potential and past terrorism. Living in eastern Sri Lanka requires a type of anticipation that sees neither the past nor the future as closed (Bloch 1995; see also Jameson 2002). This anticipatory state offers a conscientious recognition and critique of the contradictions of the material and social conditions in which many continue to live in Sri Lanka, and it enables people to go about their daily lives—carrying worries with them, but not being debilitated by them. For the people I came to know, their experiences of and engagements with tsunami and war resulted in an anticipatory platform for living and enduring through times where the possibility of another disaster looms. Anticipation, for many exposed to the ongoing insecurities of disaster management, is a recognition that the “ends” of disasters lead to neither a stable peace nor emotive complacency, but also not despondence (on the “ends” of war, see Nelson 2009; Nelson and McAllister 2013).

These experiences and sentiments, these anticipatory states, speak to the reaches and limits of the government’s anticipatory measures. Anticipation is not only evidenced by the ways in which people are prepared: bags and ID cards safely packed with a change of clothes. Security articulates differently when considering how people rely on their neighbors, the sound of the ocean, the color of the sky, the tug of memory, the blackness of the rising ocean tide, past warning failures and hasty evacuations from danger—the conditions that shape how people are attuned to the future *and* the past. Sri Lankans know very well the fragility of peace. They anticipate that something could always be—a condition of living in a place that has proven sometimes cruel and often difficult. These encounters and exchanges of what I call, then, *anticipatory states* highlight not only the changing structures in which Sri Lankan disaster nationalism manages the risks of tsunamis and terrorism but also how anticipation, as a state of being, a being that has long

been a way of life in Sri Lanka, coalesces and pulls back on the anticipatory state. Anticipation is a persistent awareness that also works to critique the social conditions reproducing ongoing forms of insecurity that must be negotiated. Everyday anticipation wrests the total control and management of the nation away from those dangerous forms of state power that still lurk and have long been a part of life in Sri Lanka.

Yet just as state power lingers and lurks, it is upheld by its own nervousness, its own fragility. Returning to the evacuation drill: The day we stood under the hot late afternoon sun in July, waiting for the alarm bell to sound, was special. The National Disaster Management Centre had actually moved the date of the evacuation forward, because two days later a monumental total solar eclipse would occur—the longest solar eclipse in the twenty-first century, in fact. Scientists and other excited observers clamored around different parts of Asia, where the eclipse would be visible. Local and international astrologers recognized the exceptionality of the eclipse as well. It was predicted that with this eclipse and following it great catastrophes could befall the world—from catastrophic natural disasters to another world war. The predictions were printed in the local newspaper, and people were on high alert: rumors of another tsunami began to emerge before the July 22, 2009, solar eclipse. Although these rumors had no scientific basis, even the government and the Disaster Management Centre could not ignore the hype. The government still moved forward with the evacuation drill, as if there were something to actually fear, or perhaps to allay fears and anxieties being expressed, especially by coastal populations. And so schools were closed the morning of the eclipse. In anticipation of something great, the government decided to stage the evacuation drill. It also had its local offices (rather than just the central one in Colombo) staffed twenty-four hours a day the day before, the day of, and the day after the eclipse.

Astrology is a social force that cannot be ignored in Sri Lanka. It is put to use in everyday practices from marriage pairings to auspicious dates for travel and wedding days. Even politics is steeped in this tradition; all political players have their personal astrologers, seeking appropriate days to make speeches and travel plans, including President Rajapaksa. He takes astrology so seriously that about a month after the war had been declared over in June 2009, authorities arrested one of Sri Lanka's most popular astrologers, Chandrasiri Bandara, for predicting that Rajapaksa would be ousted from office on September 9, 2009. This did not sit well with the administration. The president's spokesperson, Lucien Rajakurunayake, stated, "We have to wonder why an astrologer would say such a thing.

In Sri Lanka, astrologers are not just for fun. They play powerful roles in steering outcomes. Saying it can make it so.” Bandara, the “opposition” astrologer, on his arrest responded, “The Sri Lankan Government arrested and imprisoned me, but they could not prison [sic] Saturn” (Wax 2009).

And then, on one of my visits to the village where the first tsunami-warning tower was built, I sat in the small community center built after the disaster with Najeema. The warning tower stood next to the center, protected by metal fencing. Playing children screamed and laughed around us: she ran a small village Montessori program here. We were discussing how the warning towers had been working, and as I began to talk about the complex communication network of experts, scientists, and meteorologists involved, she interjected, “The scientists, the experts, they can know about earthquakes and the tsunami after they happen, but only God knows if they will happen beforehand. And only God knows if the tower will work.”¹⁸

ABSTRACT

In 2004, a tsunami caused unprecedented damage and destruction in the Indian Ocean region. For Sri Lanka, the second-most affected country, with over thirty-thousand deaths and five-hundred-thousand displaced, the tsunami resulted in the introduction of new disaster management institutions, logics, and technologies. The formation and implementation of these new institutions, logics, and technologies must be understood alongside a human-made disaster: the decades-long civil war between the Sri Lankan government and the militant insurgent group of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). I outline the ways that the tsunami opened the door for national and social restructuring in Sri Lanka: the devastation of the tsunami and the logics of disaster risk management that followed it offered a political opening for new techniques of state power and projects of nation-building—a process I call disaster nationalism. This governmentality of disaster risk management plays out through an anticipation of disasters, in which disasters, both natural and human-made, are ever-possible future threats that justify ongoing practices and technologies of securitization. Yet state attempts to control the future remain in constant tension with the attitudes and opinions of people who have been affected by both the tsunami and war. These collective relations, practices, and structures of feelings are what I refer to as anticipatory states. From the calculative risk management projects of the Sri Lankan state to the everyday state of being ready and aware in the spaces of disaster, anticipation weaves into and out of experiences and encounters, its different forms and possibilities shaped by complexly layered histories and landscapes of disaster and violence, and, even, forces beyond the control of the anticipatory state. [disaster; disaster nationalism; state power; 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; war; anticipation; preparedness; security; risk; Sri Lanka]

NOTES

Acknowledgments To Usha and Nitharshini, my research assistants, my friends and confidants, without whom my research would not have been possible. To Fajru and Muradh, disaster experts and coordinators extraordinaire; their dedication to their communities was inspiring. To the Bartholomeusz family for a real home in Sri Lanka. I was humbled by those who shared their memories and lives with me in Sri Lanka. They persist in my own memories and heart, and hopefully in these words. This article benefited immensely from earlier presentations: the AAA meetings in 2010; the Sri Lanka Graduate Student Conference in 2011; the Department of Anthropology and the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Cornell University; the Society for the Humanities Conference on Risk at Cornell University; the Hurford Center for the Humanities, Haverford College; and the Department of Anthropology at the University of Tennessee. At various stages, the comments of the following were invaluable: Tim Choy, Nicholas D'Avella, Joe Dumit, Maria Fernandez, Kim Fortun, Durba Ghosh, T. J. Hinrichs, Alan Klima, Nidhi Mahajan, Rachel Prentice, Sara Pritchard, Smriti Srinivas, Michelle Stewart, Sharika Thiranagama, Marina Welker, Wendy Wolford, the patience and insight of the editors of *Cultural Anthropology*, especially Dominic Boyer, and the generous comments of three anonymous reviewers. Lastly, I dedicate this article to my dad, whose spirit and fortitude I missed, but, I like to think, watched over me as I revised this piece.

1. Although, to be sure, in Sri Lanka's postwar climate, the so-called peace dividend and the reconstruction of the war-torn northeastern regions of the island are seen as blank slates of development and economic reconstruction. So, alongside disaster nationalism, we have disaster capitalism, which are certainly interrelated. As Naomi Klein (2008) outlines in *The Shock Doctrine*, "disaster capitalism" is the modus operandi of expanding free market capitalism—that is, the radical privatization of war and disaster. In Sri Lanka she highlights the primacy given to the reconstruction of tourist hotels along the coastline—"resorts as recovery" (Gunewardena 2008) in addition to the privatization of fishing. See also Gunewardena and Schuller 2008.
2. Joseph Masco's (2010) tracing of how Cold War logics enabled the translation of Hurricane Katrina into nuclear terms (i.e., Hiroshima), and the language of the war on terror prove helpful in thinking through this point.
3. Lakoff 2008 and Collier and Lakoff 2014 build off of Michel Foucault's (2007) work on disciplinary biopower to discuss how "vital systems" rather than population become the focus in preemptive techniques of disaster management. Stephen Collier and Andrew Lakoff (2014) suggest that apparatuses of vital systems security are a form of reflexive biopolitics that have emerged in response to the risks of modernization (see also Beck 1992). In light of new modes of networked technologies of power, I would add to this discourse Gille Deleuze's (1992) proposal that we are moving beyond a disciplinary society into a society of control.
4. See Winslow and Woost 2004 on how unending war became the grounds on which to fashion lives, for as the war grew into its own reality, its reproduction could be less and less tied up with the politics of ethnicity and more dependent on the politics of profits and making a living.
5. Celia Lowe (2010) offers a different perspective on how biosecurity plays out in Indonesia, where vital systems and infrastructure differ markedly from the United States.
6. For work on the anticipation of danger and insecurity at checkpoints in Sri Lanka, see Jeganathan 2002 and Thiranagama 2011.
7. Following scholars of technology and technocracies, the construction and implementation of infrastructures and technologies reveal much about politics, state power, and nationalism (Pritchard 2011; Scott 1998; Mitchell 2002; on Sri Lanka, see Tennekoon 1988).
8. In the late 1980s, the Sri Lankan government put down the antigovernmental insurgency of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a formerly Marxist turned Sinhala Nationalist group, through extrajudicial killings, death squads, and kidnappings.

9. In southern Sri Lanka, many people felt that those affected in the north and east deserved tsunami aid, but they were deeply suspicious of aid being funneled through the LTTE and thus, they feared, used for warring purposes rather than to help people (Gamburd 2013).
10. Here is an interesting twist to the “modern constitution” (Latour 1993), in which nature and culture, or science and politics, remain separate spheres, never to be intertwined. In Sri Lanka, the state, the modern political formation par excellence, manages nature (natural disaster) and culture (war) together. This is possible, however, not because the Sri Lankan state is attempting to make a contentious ontological claim, but rather because the figure of the terrorist has obtained an exceptional juridical status outside humanity, and is thus excluded from the realm of the political or of culture. The figure of terrorism, thus, is also cast into the realm of the “non-human” (see, in a very different context, de la Cadena 2011 for a discussion of how nature and other-than-humans became occluded from the realm of the political).
11. Thus I add a critical dimension to the rich literature on Sri Lankan nationalism, beyond the lens of ethnicity and religion.
12. On expertise and disaster, see Button 2010; Bond 2013; Knowles 2013; and Frickel and Vincent 2011. *American Anthropologist* dedicated a special issue to Hurricane Katrina (Paredes 2006). On Katrina, see also Dowty and Allen 2011. For a discussion on the politics of conflict and tsunami reconstruction in Sri Lanka and Indonesia, see de Alwis and Hedman 2008. See also Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002.
13. That the LTTE nationalists proclaimed the northern and eastern parts of the island as solely for Tamils problematically suffused a mono-ethnic imagination with the territory, thus eliding the long history of both Tamil and Muslim settlement and sociality in those regions (McGilvray 2008). The coastal part of the eastern district is majority Muslim and Tamil, while the interior of the district is predominantly Sinhala-Buddhist, and much has been written on the national redistricting policies and government resettlement projects of the area (Hasbullah and Korf 2009; McGilvray and Raheem 2007; Spencer 2003).
14. When I left in late September 2009, Sri Lanka’s postconflict situation remained tense. The state of emergency had just been extended by Parliament, Tamil civilians were still interned in northern camps, and the government had increased the military budget by 20 percent and the size of the military by 50 percent, all in the name of protecting its fragile security. Since the war, Sri Lanka’s defense budget has increased each year.
15. This was the goal as outlined in 2009, when I was in Sri Lanka. As of 2012, the goal was to construct one hundred towers; currently, seventy-seven have been built. See Ministry of Disaster Management n.d.
16. I have changed names to preserve the anonymity of my informants.
17. The state of emergency was finally lifted in Sri Lanka on August 31, 2011, but the government has retained some of its emergency powers by proscribing them into existing Public Security Ordinances and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. For a legal explanation, see Weliamuna 2011.
18. On the readjustments of popular religious beliefs in Batticaloa, eastern Sri Lanka, see Lawrence 2012.

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