

Civic infrastructure as transitional justice: the TLTE / VinMin archive as a case study in diaspora-led post-conflict accountability and the limits of stateless civic governance

Research proposal · MPhil/PhD in Politics and International Studies · SOAS, University of London · September 2026 entry

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1. Background and rationale

Sri Lanka's post-2009 transitional-justice trajectory is the most well-documented failure of the UN Human Rights Council's 30/1 framework. The UN Panel of Experts (2011) and the OHCHR Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL, 2015) recorded credible allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Successive resolutions (30/1, 34/1, 40/1, 46/1, 51/1, 57/L.1) have re-mandated accountability without delivering it. The state has, in parallel, expanded surveillance and securitisation in the Tamil-majority North-East (ICG 2022, Adayaalam 2017–2024).

In this gap, the Tamil-Eelam diaspora has built parallel infrastructures — documentation projects (PEARL, ITJP, Adayaalam), advocacy organisations (Global Tamil Forum, Tamil Guardian), and now a new generation of **civic-technical archives** that combine open-source investigation standards with constitutionally constrained workflows. This proposal takes one such archive — TLTE C.I.C., operating the docs.tite.cloud portal — as a working object of study.

The archive is unusual in three respects. First, it is institutionally anchored: a UK Community Interest Company with a statutory asset lock, audited under UK GDPR and the UK Terrorism Act 2000. Second, it is **structurally refusal-based**: it does not accept survivor intake, does not name perpetrators, does not aggregate counts, and routes every at-risk reader to a mandated mechanism (UN, OHCHR, PEARL, ITJP, UK 999). Third, it is **technically auditable**: a public citation registry, an AI assistant (Velicham) grounded on that registry, and a published eval suite at /velicham/evals.

2. Research questions

- **RQ1.** What constitutes *legitimate* diaspora-built civic infrastructure in a post-conflict context where the host state has not delivered transitional justice?
- **RQ2.** What are the methodological, legal and ethical limits of such infrastructure — and how can those limits be made institutionally enforceable rather than discretionary?
- **RQ3.** How does an archive operating under refusal rules (no intake, no naming, no counts) relate to the work of accredited international mechanisms (OHCHR, UN WGEID, UN CED, ICC complementarity)?
- **RQ4.** What does this case suggest for the wider theoretical question of *stateless civic governance* in protracted post-conflict situations (Tamil-Eelam, Rohingya, Kurdistan, West Papua)?

3. Theoretical framework

The thesis sits at the intersection of four literatures. From **transitional-justice theory** (Teitel 2000, 2014; McEvoy 2007; Gready & Robins 2014) it takes the question of who is authorised to perform accountability work outside the courtroom. From **diaspora politics** (Wayland 2004; Nadarajah 2009, 2018; Sriskandarajah 2005; Arulthas 2022) it inherits the analytical vocabulary for understanding Tamil-Eelam diaspora institutions after the LTTE. From **critical peace studies** (Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond 2014) it borrows the critique of liberal peace and the argument for hybrid, locally-rooted

forms. From **digital-rights and OSINT scholarship** (Koenig et al. 2020; Dubberley et al. 2020; Berkeley Protocol 2022) it takes the methodological standards against which the archive can be measured.

The thesis advances one constructive claim: that **refusal** — coded into the workflow rather than added as a policy — is a defensible and reproducible design principle for diaspora civic infrastructure operating in the gap between state failure and international mandate.

4. Methodology

The thesis combines three methods. None requires survivor intake.

4.1 Practice-based and autoethnographic

Two years of construction work on TLTE itself are treated as a primary research site, in the tradition of practice-based PhDs in design, architecture and applied policy. Reflective field notes, the append-only Continuity Changelog, and the public Velicham eval log are research artefacts. The auto-ethnography is bounded — the founder's role is documented, but it is not the subject.

4.2 Comparative-institutional

Three comparator organisations: **PEARL** (US-based Tamil diaspora documentation), **ITJP** (South Africa / Sri Lanka transitional-justice litigation), and **Adayaalam Centre for Policy Research** (Jaffna-based). The comparison is institutional, not investigative — mandate, governance, intake policy, citation discipline, funding posture.

4.3 Document analysis and elite interviews

Document analysis of the TLTE citation registry, MP Evidence Packs, Magalir Avai framework, Civic Protection Doctrine, and Velicham eval runs. Semi-structured interviews ($n \approx 12-15$) with **diaspora policy actors only** — Tamil-diaspora civic organisations in the UK, EU and Canada, selected MPs/MEPs who have engaged the packs, and accredited research bodies. No survivors. No named perpetrators. Interviewees informed, consented, anonymisable.

5. Ethics, safety, and the limits the archive imposes on itself

The thesis is governed by the same refusal rules as the archive it studies. Specifically:

- No survivor testimony will be collected in the thesis. Survivor evidence is cited from PEARL, ITJP, OHCHR, OISL, and UN PoE — never re-elicited.
- No serving or former security-force personnel will be named in the thesis. Names appear only as they appear in Tier-A published findings, and only where citation is unavoidable.
- Casualty, disappearance and CRSV counts will be cited from the originating body, never aggregated.
- Final-stages claims (May 2009) will be reported using only OHCHR OISL 2015, UN PoE 2011, ICG 2010, and Amnesty 2011 — never as settled fact beyond what those sources permit.
- UK Terrorism Act 2000 §12 compliance is documented in the archive and will be re-audited for the thesis.
- Ethics approval will be sought from SOAS REC; the proposed interview protocol fits within standard elite-interview categories.

6. Originality and contribution

- **Empirical:** first scholarly treatment of a refusal-coded diaspora civic-infrastructure archive of this design (institution + corpus + AI + evals).

- **Methodological:** a practice-based PhD model for civic-technical work that is auditable under Berkeley Protocol while protecting the practitioner-researcher from instrumentalisation.
- **Theoretical:** a constructive account of *institutional refusal* as a transitional-justice design principle, generalisable beyond the Tamil-Eelam case.
- **Practical:** a documented reference design and citation registry that other diaspora communities (Rohingya, Kurdish, West Papuan, Uyghur) can adapt without re-litigating the safety questions from zero.

7. Indicative timeline (3 years FT or 5 years PT)

- **Year 1:** coursework, literature review, ethics approval, comparator mapping, archive freeze for the case study.
- **Year 2:** elite interviews, document analysis, comparative-institutional chapters, eval-suite analysis.
- **Year 3:** writing up, viva preparation, dissemination to TLTE community-of-record under the archive's append-only changelog.

8. Supervision

Primary supervisor (proposed): **Dr Sutha Nadarajah**, Department of Politics and International Studies. Second supervisor (proposed): **Dr Vino Kanapathipillai**, same department. A pre-application approach has been initiated.

9. Funding posture

Application will be made for SOAS doctoral scholarships and the SOAS Research Studentship in parallel. TLTE C.I.C. (under its asset lock) will not fund the research and will not be a beneficiary of any scholarship award. Independent self-funding is the fallback.

10. Indicative bibliography (selected)

Arulthas, M. (2022). *Tamil nationalism and the politics of the post-LTTE period*, PhD thesis, SOAS. · Berkeley Protocol on Digital Open Source Investigations (2022), OHCHR / UC Berkeley HRC. · Dubberley, S., Koenig, A. & Murray, D. (eds.) (2020) *Digital Witness*, OUP. · Gready, P. & Robins, S. (2014) 'From Transitional to Transformative Justice', *IJTJ*. · International Crisis Group (2022) *Sri Lanka: Confronting the Risk of Renewed Conflict*. · Koenig, A. et al. (2020) *Berkeley Protocol*. · Mac Ginty, R. (2011) *International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance*. · McEvoy, K. (2007) 'Beyond Legalism', *Journal of Law and Society*. · Nadarajah, S. (2009, 2018) on Tamil diaspora politics and the post-LTTE order. · OHCHR (2015) *Investigation on Sri Lanka (OISL)*. · PEARL (multi-year) reports. · Richmond, O. (2014) *Failed Statebuilding*. · Teitel, R. (2000) *Transitional Justice*; (2014) *Globalizing Transitional Justice*. · UN Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka (2011). · UN HRC Resolutions 30/1, 46/1, 51/1, 57/L.1. · Wayland, S. (2004) 'Ethnonationalist Networks and Transnational Opportunities', *Review of International Studies*.