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The people in-between

IDPs, Space and (Dis)placement in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the place of internally displaced people within the Sri Lankan conflict, and specifically within the eastern district of Trincomalee. It explores the way that the spatial distribution of people has been used as an approach to governance: strengthening and controlling ethnic divisions as a tactic of war. The people in Trincomalee have been deeply affected by the violent conflict and great numbers have been forced to flee their homes and villages. Emphasis on political relations too often obscures the question of people's place in, experience of and attitudes towards 'ethnic conflict'. Taking an actor-oriented approach and based on a period of field work in 2004 this paper looks at the complexity of people's perceptions of the 'other' and changes to these perceptions due to experiences of conflict-induced displacement

Table of Contents

Abstract	0
Preface	0
1. Background	1
Introduction	1
Why study the displaced?	2
Research methods	2
Trincomalee	3
The polarisation of ethnic identities in Sri Lanka	4
The Sri Lankan Conflict and Displacement	5
Section Two: Divide and Rule	6
(Dis)placement and Dirty War Tactics	6
Ethnic Enclave Formation.....	8
Ethnic enclave mentality: Changing perceptions due to forced migration.....	10
Section Three: The Path to Peace	12
Constructing Peace: The Politics of Resettlement	12
Looking to the Future.....	13
'Ethnicised' Peace.....	14
The Role of Civilians: Inter-Ethnic Reconstruction	15
Peace Initiatives.....	16
Conclusion	17
References	18

Preface

The ethnicisation of politics in Sri Lanka has led to various forms of emplacement and displacement of civilians in conditions conducive to conflict. This paper looks at the relationship between ethnicity, (dis)placement and co-existence in the context of the Sri Lankan conflict. It is coming from the standpoint that ethnicity and (dis)placement should figure more strongly in conflict analysis and subjective analyses need to take place to inform and balance structural approaches. The point of departure is the role that emplacement and displacement has played throughout the conflict and the effects that this has had on inter-ethnic relations. Sri Lanka's internally displaced persons (IDPs) are taken as the focus of analysis. This paper takes an actor-oriented approach to the construction and re-construction of peaceful co-existence among the displaced.

The attitudes and perceptions of the displaced people were investigated over a two-week period of fieldwork in June and July 2004. This fieldwork took place during a two-month stay in Colombo, Sri Lanka during which time further primary and secondary information was gathered. I was taking part in a joint internship with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) and the Human Rights Commission (HRC) of Sri Lanka, and I am indebted to both for their support and assistance throughout this period. In particular I would like to thank Manivanam, the project officer at HRC for his invaluable guidance around the welfare centres and resettlement villages in Trincomalee district. I would also like to acknowledge the intellectual encouragement and creative stimulation of my friends Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham and Tiga-Rose Nercessian.

Before I commence this paper I would like to take a moment to acknowledge the devastation that Sri Lanka suffered on the 26th of December 2004 as a result of a Tsunami that predominantly hit its eastern and southern coastline. Trincomalee district was badly affected and I would like to bring attention to the fact that several of the IDP camps that I visited were situated on the coast. I would like to express my sympathy and condolences to those left behind and my gratitude to those that touched my life. Sri Lanka now has to cope with twice as many displaced people and vast reconstruction; I wish them all the best.

1. Background

'Between the devil and the deep blue sea'
(Tamil woman, Alles Garden Welfare Centre)

Introduction

Those people most affected by the conflict are often those that have gone unnoticed and there is a striking lack of analytical work dedicated to the experiences, perceptions and actions of those at the centre of the conflict, the internally displaced persons (IDPs) – the people in-between. Displacement and emplacement has played a crucial role throughout the Sri Lankan conflict and the effects that this (dis)placement of people has had on inter-ethnic relations needs further exploration. This paper explores the extent to which ethnic identities and inter-ethnic relations are transformed by and continue beyond the experiences of conflict-induced displacement.

Sri Lanka has a population of approximately 19.5 million people and it has been estimated that 1.7 million people have been forcibly displaced one or more times during the two decades of armed conflict (figures from the Danish Refugee Council cited in Brun 2003:3). Thus at least 10% of the population has had direct experience of forced migration while countless numbers have been subjected to the effects of displacement. In the north-east the figure is closer to 80% of the population. Although approximately 358,759 people have been able to return home to resettlement villages since the signing of the ceasefire agreement in 2003, another 373,079 of those displaced when the ceasefire began remain so (UN 2004).¹ Forced migration due to conflict not only dislocates people from their homes, possessions, livelihoods and communities, it also has profound effects on people's ways of thinking, their attitudes and perceptions. The divisions caused by conflict-induced displacement have (re)created and (re)enforced borders and boundaries between the ethnic communities within Sri Lanka.

Within popular culture, the north, east and north-central provinces of Sri Lanka have come to be referred to as the 'border regions' and it is within

these areas that people have experienced the most violent conflict. It is at the border, geographically, culturally, and politically, that the conflict is being played out and it is the people in-between that are paradoxically both central to the conflict and marginalised by it. These people live for all intents and purposes on the frontline of the war and it is over them that the war is being fought. The placement of people has become a critical tactic in the war, and the aim of this paper is to make the displaced the 'focus of enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative' (Menon and Bhasin 1998:9).

While '[m]uch ink has been spilt on the invention of nationalist histories and traditional homelands myths', the transformative processes of war and displacement itself and the changes that take place to identities, borders and territories have received little critical attention (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:68). Section two explores the way that the protracted mass (dis)placement due to war and government development schemes has changed the territorial organisation of ethnic groups in Sri Lanka and created '*de facto* ethnic enclaves and embittered identity politics' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:58). National and local level ethnic enclaves have formed across Sri Lanka and this section discusses the emergence of ethnic enclave mentality among the displaced in Trincomalee. These changes have caused the construction, negotiation and reconstruction of old and new social categories and identities, including among other things, changes to ethnic identification and constructions of the 'other'.

The Sri Lankan conflict has seen the rise of dirty war tactics that target civilians. People in Sri Lanka have been the victims of a violent separatist conflict whose very tactics have been to divide, dislocate and confine. This has not been confined to territory, but has created a society comprised of divisions: divided families, widows and widowers, orphans, amputees, divided communities and displaced people. In Sri Lanka, political and national divisions do not stay at these levels but become inscribed into people's everyday lives. Displacement and emplacement can no longer be seen as an arbitrary result of this war, but as intrinsic to it. The IDPs have become the tools, weapons and shields used tactically within the machinery of the conflict.

Section three looks at the politics and machineries of peace in Sri Lanka. It looks at the place of resettlement and ethnic interaction within the ideological construction of peace and takes an actor-oriented perspective on the role of the

¹ These figures are only estimates and change depending on the source. The difficulty of finding accurate figures for IDPs has been well documented (Bennett 1998: 6, Vincent 2001:1). These UN figures do not take into account those displaced since the ceasefire began and are based on government statistics that only take into account those IDPs that have been registered.

displaced in the production of peace. To understand local and national peaceful co-existence strategies and processes it is important to investigate how the communities in Sri Lanka interact and work to accept each other. This section looks at the importance of exploring and acknowledging local perceptions and possibilities as an essential part in any peaceful resolution.

The observations in this paper are based on fieldwork carried out during June and July 2004 in Sri Lanka and specifically within the Trincomalee district on the north-east coast. The east coast has been at the heart of the conflict, but is often neglected in favour of the high profile conflict zone in the north of the country. The paper attempts to look beyond the Jaffna and Colombo-centric views that proliferate in Sri Lanka, to analyse the inter-ethnic, cross-cultural and hybrid relations on the borderlands and specifically in the resettlement villages² and welfare centres (the official name in Sri Lanka for IDP camps) in Trincomalee district. This section will continue by outlining the approach and methodology and will offer a brief background to the conflict in Sri Lanka.

Why study the displaced?

'Displacement is a fundamental aspect of our increasingly de-territorialised world, affecting perceptions of 'place' and 'homeland', creating new kinds of identity and new sets of social relations and generating entirely new experiences and ways of thinking' (Grundy-Warr and Wong Siew Yin, 2003:93).

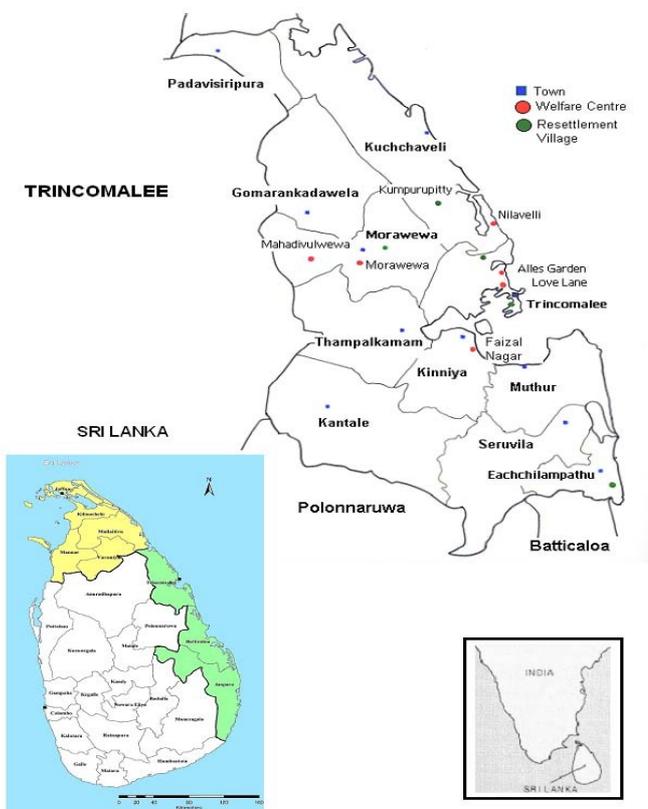
Amid all the discussions of the international diplomatic and humanitarian community on the legal, political and institutional dimensions of the IDP crisis, the roles and responses of the IDPs themselves are missing. Frequently overlooked is their ability to adapt and this absence 'reinforces the incorrect perception that the international stage [and the state institution] is the only venue for action' (Vincent 2001:1). In political, economic and humanitarian discourse the complex arena of the IDPs' possibilities, choices and compromises are often ignored. While the vulnerability of IDPs has been well documented, little attention has been paid to how they perceive or respond to displacement and the longer-term social consequences of both these perceptions and responses.

There has been a recent rise in the critique of the political and humanitarian discourse that constructs refugees and IDPs as victims, disempowered and affected by structures beyond their control (Malkki 1996; Soguk 1999; Zetter 1991). A new approach towards the refugee is emerging; it is what Nevzat Soguk calls a 'genealogical attitude' (1999:8). This emerging attitude tries to understand the refugee situation from the viewpoint of the complexity and multiplicity of experiences. Such an approach benefits this paper because it takes seriously the powers and resourcefulness of IDPs to remake their lives in displacement, despite their vulnerability. This paper will explore the perceptions, attitudes and possibilities of 'ordinary' people who have been (dis)placed by conflict.

Research methods

The fieldwork took place during 10 days of intensive visits and interviews in July 2004. It was carried out in 6 welfare centres and 5 resettlement villages in the Trincomalee district (see map 1). It included the three main social groups currently involved in Sri Lanka's 'ethnic conflict': Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims. I spoke to 28 displaced civilians (resettled and IDPs) 5 each were Muslims and Sinhalese and 18 were Tamil with approximately equal numbers of men and women. The interviews were semi-structured

Map 1: Background Map



Source: Compiled from Integrated Food Security Programme (IFSP) and Sri Lankan Government Website

² In Sri Lanka, unlike official UNHCR terminology, resettlement refers to the return of the IDPs to their original villages.

and involved the assistance of an interpreter. Half the interviewees were introduced to me through the Human Rights Commission, and the others were approached independently. A qualitative format for information gathering was used based on a semi-structured open-ended interview process.

The objective of this study was to gain culturally salient information from which to begin to construct and inform peaceful co-existence and reintegration programmes. I wanted to explore the changes in views and attitudes of those displaced by the conflict in Sri Lanka. While there are many ways of categorising people and ways that people categorise themselves and others, ethnicity is a strong organising feature for the conflict and a strong identity marker among the 'ordinary' people of Sri Lanka. The question that I wanted to address was whether these ethnic identities had changed through displacement and, if so, how. I soon discovered that while I wanted to study the effects of forced displacement rather than the conflict itself, the two were for the most part inseparable in the minds of the people interviewed.

Questions focused on the reasons for displacement and the amount and type of inter-ethnic contact before and after displacement. They targeted people's views and attitudes towards the other ethnic groups, the effects of the ceasefire and explored the political will of the displaced and their hopes for the future. Their responses were viewed in the broader context of their displacement. Due to shared experiences of displacement and life in welfare centres the term 'displaced people' has been used to refer to both IDPs and those resettled. Where appropriate, distinctions have been made between the two.

I predominantly targeted those with good memories of their experiences of displacement and those with a good memory of life before the conflict began. The date for the beginning of the antagonism varies, but I spoke to a few that had a memory of pre-independent Ceylon and others who had good memories of life before 1983. I spoke to very few children or young men and women – two groups that need further attention as they are both central to Sri Lanka's future. The majority of the interviews were carried out in a group environment as the circumstances dictated, with family members or other community members present and sometimes participating. This was beneficial, but also created a number of drawbacks. I noted down the dynamics of each interview, to keep track of whose view was really being expressed. I

secured informed verbal consent from every interviewee and I have not included any names in this paper (ages have been included to distinguish between the interviewees).

Geographically and culturally the interviewees were very diverse and this was reflected in their lifestyles before displacement and their responses to questions regarding ethnic relations, co-existence and future possibilities for peace. Class, wealth, gender and age will have affected their experiences, but for the purpose of this study I have focused predominantly on ethnic differences. Residence in welfare centres for a considerable length of time implies a similar class background and most were involved in manual work, fishing, working the land, manual services and sewing. As informative as it would be to study the differences in gender attitudes and perceptions, the focus on ethnicity and the limited space means there is no overall comparative structure; the same goes for age.³

Trincomalee

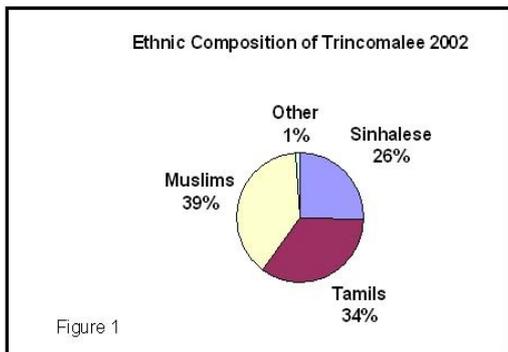
Trincomalee is situated on the north-east coast of Sri Lanka within the Eastern Province and makes up part of the territory that the LTTE calls Eelam. I chose to base my study here because it is an area that has experienced a complex process of mixing and 'violent unmixing' of people (Rajasingham 2002:60). Unlike most of Sri Lanka it is an area that has a fairly equal proportion of the three main ethno-religious communities (Figure 1) and because of this it 'has become pivotal to the island's political future [and] [m]ore than any other part of the island, it is a site for multicultural contestation and alternative ethnic futures' (McGilvray 2001:1). It has not always been this way as is shown in Figure 2: the

³ It should also be noted that the presence and practice of both myself and my interpreter may have influenced the way that people performed their ethnic identities and presented their views of the other communities. The questions themselves assumed the existence of three identifiable 'ethnic' communities and this will have caused people to respond within the same structural framework. This was a fairly controlled influence and because popular media and politics are structured along these lines too, I am fairly confident that these distinctions were already part of their narrative framework, though my questions may have reified such difference. Other influences were less controllable, my presence as a Westerner may have encouraged people to highlight global conflicts and attitudes and in particular the current racist discourse surrounding Islam and Muslims. My interpreter was a Christian Tamil man originally from Kandy, who had been living in Trincomalee throughout the conflict and had a good understanding of the dynamics and the suffering. Even so his presence will undoubtedly have affected people's responses.

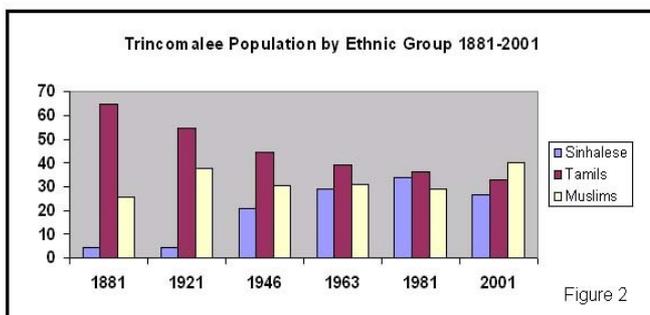
changing demographic patterns are part of a long history of population movements, free, forced and state sponsored. This history is intrinsically linked to the conflict through increasing inter-ethnic competition and tension. The three communities lived in relative peace for many centuries but feelings of antagonism and jealousy have been increasing since independence due to national strategies and local policies.

One of the reasons for this unusual ethnic composition was the state sponsored irrigation, and Sinhalese settlement schemes that began in the 1940s a process that radically altered the political demographics of Trincomalee (Peebles 1990; Sorensen 1997). Previously the east coast was a region composed of two historically interlinked, but contentious communities, the Tamils and the Muslims. Both Tamil-speaking they have a long history of conflict and co-existence (McGilvray, 1999; 2001). Because of these juxtaposed and diverse populations it is here, rather than mono-cultural Jaffna or the south, where peaceful co-existence will ultimately be tested and decided.

Figures 1 and 2



Source: District Planning Secretariat, Statistics Handbook 2003



Source: Provincial Planning Secretariat, NEP Statistical Information 2003

The terror inflicted on all three communities has led to massive population displacements. Most of these movements have taken place within the district sometimes for short periods, sometimes

long-term and often repeatedly. The displaced people in Trincomalee are scattered in 11 welfare centres in small communities in rural areas, and around Trincomalee town. The vast majority, over 80%, are classified as 'host' IDPs and live with friends or relatives or are self-settled. According to figures from the Rehabilitation Branch of the District Planning secretariat, 57,563 families in the Trincomalee district have been affected by displacement. 598 of these families are still living in welfare centres, while 6,467 remain outside camps with a total of 7,065 currently displaced and 51,282 resettled (UNHCR would describe these as returned IDPs). From this we can infer that approximately 62% of the population in Trincomalee has experienced displacement and approximately 7% remains displaced (Appendix 1).⁴ Most of those that I spoke to still living in welfare centres had been displaced for over 10 years and the majority seem to have been living in a protracted situation of displacement since 1990; one couple had been in a state of displacement since the war began in the early 1980s.

Despite the signing of the ceasefire in 2002 displacement still continues to take place in Trincomalee. In mid-April 2003 an upsurge in violence between the Tamils and Muslims displaced an estimated 35,000 people in Muthur division and in November and December a further 3,000 families were displaced in the Kinniya division (IDP Project, 2004). With figures like these it is easy to see why the effects of displacement on the socio-cultural climate need to be studied.

The polarisation of ethnic identities in Sri Lanka.

'The entire social climate has been 'ethnicized', geographically, emotionally and politically' (Schrijvers 1998: 26)

Over the past two decades crises of national identity, the sense of alienation defined in terms of race, ethnicity, language, culture or religion that challenge any sense of political or social solidarity, has produced many complex and extremely violent conflicts over the social order in both old and new states. This has been one of the main causes of internal displacement (Korn 1999:6-10). Forced migration caused by ethnic conflicts and civil strife has occurred all over the world in countries as diverse as Bosnia, Rwanda,

⁴ UNHCR statistics are more conservative, but even so, they suggest approximately 10% of the total population has been affected and 4.4% still remain displaced (UNHCR June 2004).

Sierra Leone, Colombia, East Timor, Myanmar and of course Sri Lanka.

By ethnicity this paper is not referring to a primordial attachment or an immanent cultural force, but as perceived cultural differences among groups of people. This paper subscribes to the opinion that ethnicity, and in fact all other identities, are situationally defined and socially constructed (Jenkins 1994; Eriksen 2002; Baumann 1999). Throughout this paper I refer to three different ethnic groups: the Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims. Although the term Muslim is used to describe an adherent of the Islamic religion, and is thus religious rather than ethnic in connotation, the Sri Lankan Muslims constitute a distinct community and are considered by themselves as well as by others to have a distinct ethnic identity (McGilvray 1999:218, 2001:7). While the reproduction of these identities can be dangerous, this paper will continue to use them as analytical categories for the simple reason that ideological and political structures in Sri Lanka today are inextricably tied into the concept of different ethnic communities and these ideologies are reflected in the everyday conversations of people living in Sri Lanka.⁵

Although ethnic diversity is often regarded as a leading cause for much of the recent conflict and forced migration in both Asia and Africa it should still be recognised that only some of the numerous differences in a few of the societies worldwide have given rise to conflicts. It is not the identity factor itself that causes conflict, as Francis Deng points out, 'it is never the mere differences of identity based on ethnic grounds that generate conflict, but the consequences of those differences in sharing power and the related distribution of resources and opportunities' (Cohen and Deng 1998:21). Like ethnicity, nationalism is drawn along the exclusionary lines of them and us. Ethnic nationalism seeks to create legal and political instruments that will maximise the interests of the ethnic group. Ethnicity in this light is instrumental, not simply an emotional and cultural bond, it becomes an assertion of political power and a mobilising tool that appeals to such rights as democratic representation, power sharing and self-determination (Horowitz 2000; ICES 2004).

⁵ I was conscious of such distinctions in the conversations that took place between my Sri Lankan friends and within my everyday conversations. I frequently found it was the ethnic and cultural differences of the 'other' that was highlighted, rather than their own ethnic identity, and derogatory stereotypes were unabashedly common.

Of Sri Lanka's three dominant ethno-religious communities, the Sinhalese make up 74% of the population, Tamils 17% and Muslims 8%. The country has two dominant languages – Sinhalese and Tamil.⁶ Relations within Sri Lanka were never completely harmonious and tensions between Tamils and Muslims in the east have been recorded from the early 1900s (Montani 1999:51, 83). The differences between Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslims have not always been (and arguably are still not) as clear and conflicting as much nationalist discourse or conflict analysis makes them appear. Sri Lanka has a long history of 'ethnic' hybridity, co-existence and inter-ethnic relations (Silva 2002).

Each group has internal differences and divisions, but a history of colonial and post-colonial nation-state building introduced the politics of majority and minority representation and forced members to define and fix themselves into groups defined along cultural and linguistic lines. Sri Lanka has an explicitly ethnically structured polity with each political party representing a particular ethnic community. Ethnic divisions are used as a standard approach to governance and to gain power political leaders often use an ethnicised discourse. The political and social developments during the colonial and post-colonial nation-state building era changed the way many Sri Lankans perceived themselves and their place in the world. But for many it wasn't until the armed conflict reached their world and cultural difference became a matter of life or death that these ethnic differences really became fixed in popular perception.⁷

The Sri Lankan Conflict and Displacement

Since independence in 1948 there have been numerous struggles over the direction that post-colonial Ceylon (re-named Sri Lanka in 1972) should take. In 1956, due to a rise in Sinhala-Buddhist nationalism, a coalition of Sinhala dominated parties was elected to power. Within two months of its election the Sinhala Only Act was passed making Sinhala the sole official

⁶ Although the Muslims are Tamil speaking, their language can be distinguished from that of the Tamil ethnic group by its use of various Arabic words and slightly different intonations (McGilvray 2001:7).

⁷ Many scholars have documented the complex interplay of historical, political and colonial forces in creating social, legal and political structures based on ethnic difference that created cleavages between Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in Sri Lanka (Spencer 1990; Cohen and Deng 1998; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2002).

language and rioting broke out in the east. This was followed by various other policies that limited Tamil access to university education and government jobs. Large portions of the Tamil population responded through democratic means, but in the 1970s (a period marked by economic decline and dissatisfaction with the Sri Lankan government and the Tamil political elite), Tamil frustration turned to a new kind of militancy which saw the creation of a separate state of 'Tamil Eelam' in the north and east as the only solution. Although conservative Jaffna politicians and the main Tamil political party took this on as official policy, young armed militant groups who were prepared to fight for independence took control and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) emerged as the dominant voice for Tamil Eelam.

The armed struggle officially began in 1983 with rioting across the country and organised violence against Tamils in the South. The war has been divided into three phases: Eelam Wars I, II and III. All three wars have been marked by armed confrontations between the government's armed forces and Tamil militants, massacres and mass displacement of civilians. Eelam War II, 1990-1994 is marked by mass population displacements. An estimated 1 million people were displaced between June and September 1990 in the north-east; approximately 80% of the population in these areas. Muslims at this point also became intensely implicated in the violence, specifically in the east and the government took this opportunity to train Muslims as Home Guards.⁸ In October 1990 the entire Muslim population in the north, 75,000 people, were expelled by the Tamils in the country's largest incidence of ethnic cleansing (Scrijvers 1998:17-18). The fighting and mass displacement continued into late 1999.

By the year 2000 UNHCR estimated that 800,000 people were internally displaced and another 500,000 were living outside of Sri Lanka (UNHCR 2000). In February 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the Sri Lanka Prime Minister and the leader of the LTTE agreeing to cease all military operations and attacks against civilians (Gomez 2002:15). Although the ceasefire has prevented war it has not put a stop to the continuing human rights abuses and minority concerns. During Spring 2004 there were various political developments. In early March the LTTE's eastern commander

Colonel Karuna announced that he had split from the Northern LTTE. The fighting that followed in early April 2004 led to the largest displacements since the February 2002 ceasefire (UN 2004). The recent internal struggle within the LTTE 'has further turned the East into a battle field and a testing ground for the stability of the peace process' (Collective for Batticaloa 2004:1). The change in government due to national elections in April 2004 combined with the conflict in the east has led to several insecurities and instabilities that have jeopardised the ceasefire; the situation at the moment is fairly precarious.

Section Two: Divide and Rule

'[T]hese people have seen too much war, they have become the war' (Nordstrom 1992:40).

(Dis)placement and Dirty War Tactics

'Because this is the nature of guerrilla war, you attack civilians, not the militant group' (Tamil man, fieldwork 2004).

The Sri Lankan conflict has become what Carolyn Nordstrom describes as a 'dirty war'. Such wars involve the intentional intimidation, militarisation and targeting of non-combatants 'in order to control a nation's political process' (Nordstrom 1992:27). Dirty war strategies are concerned with the creation of a culture of terror in order not only to win political victory, but to crush any perceived 'threat' and to force society into a general political acquiescence. While politicians and militants work to instil a fear of the other community or armed party they also commit violence, forced recruitment and human rights abuse against 'their' population in order to prevent insurgency. This creates a muted society in a state of constant fear and insecurity.

According to the dirty war mentality the dehumanisation of the civilian population will help to crush any political will. Nordstrom's approach is one that is unique in that it looks beyond the physical, economic, and even individual effects of the Sri Lankan war to the cultural, 'the structures of knowledge and action that give definition and identity to a population in general' (1992:28). Strategies of the dirty war are aimed at destabilising the social institutions that ground society. This involves challenges to the sanctity of the family, the torture, death or militarisation of children and attacks on the integrity of everyday life, its coherence and reality. The displacement of civilians has been used as a strategy to destabilise social institutions. Through displacement, community, family, privacy, trust

⁸ Home Guards are a form of militarised police, armed and supported by the Sri Lankan Army.

and security are all undermined and so displacement can be seen as the acme of the dirty war.

During my fieldwork I gained a sense of the processes of dehumanisation that people had been through during displacement and still suffered within the camps. People recounted stories of being given only hours to pack up and leave, of seeing dead bodies lying in the gutters, of women hiding up trees with their babies in their arms, of whole villages of men being rounded up and detained. One of the women I spoke to recounted a story of horror: of endless displacement, escape into the jungle, the death of her child, the killing of her brother and the loss of her mental peace. The violence she said had made her physically sick and still the dehumanisation continued in her life in the welfare centre where they were treated 'like chickens trapped in a cage' (Tamil woman:51, Alles Garden w/c).⁹ This dehumanisation combined with the social and cultural dynamics has led to a political apathy that I came across during most of the interviews. There was no clear political will among any of the displaced people that I spoke to. Politicians and the LTTE had let them down by not representing or protecting their needs and desires, but no one showed any will to challenge these powers. This could be due to the fact that they are in the middle of a 'dirty war' who's very target is the people's sense of human agency: 'I am a man belonging to a minority community...what can I do?' (Muslim man:74, Love Lane w/c).

Space and place are very important in many wars, but it is especially important to look at these notions with regard to the situation of civilians within the Sri Lankan conflict. The military control is over people as much as place and in particular the spatial distribution of people. The LTTE wants to create a singularly Tamil 'space' while the Government doesn't want to see its land or nation divided. Control over territory, resources and influence over the civilian population has been sought and consequently, like Colombia, 'displacement is no longer a by-product of the conflict but a key objective in the war tactics on all sides' (Loughna 1998:16). As in the recent years of the Colombian conflict the main incentives have moved from being ideological to far more strategic. Ethnic divisions in Sri Lanka have been incited and used by different militant actors in a complicated twist to

the well-documented policy of 'divide and rule'. The extent to which divisions have been provoked and physically enforced and the rumours that accompany such strategies has taken the 'traditional' divide and rule policy to an extreme of violence and confusion.

There are three key motives behind the state's (dis)placement of people: political, economic and military. Firstly, the ethnicised politics of Sri Lanka has meant that the infiltration of Sinhalese into predominantly Tamil speaking areas would change the voting dynamics and give Sinhala MPs a chance of political control in these 'border' regions. This would, therefore, also assist the stifling of counter-ethnic nationalisms and insurgency. Settlement schemes can also be seen as an attempt to assimilate 'minorities' into the 'majority' population to try to reduce ethnic nationalisms and claims to self-determination. Like Myanmar this could be described as an attempt to create union by reshaping the political map (Grundy-Warr et al 2003:99-102).

Various strategies have been employed by all three ethno-political communities to alter the ethnic demography of Sri Lanka in order to control the voting population. Many people have argued, including those I interviewed, that the state has tried to alter the demographic composition of the east through state-sponsored irrigation and settlement schemes (Sorensen 1997). The overall effect has been the resettlement of thousands of Sinhalese in the Tamil dominated centres of the north-central and eastern zones. This was one source, Spencer tells us, for 'the characteristically Tamil concern with space' (1990:10).

Concerns over ethnic colonisation still exist amongst the Tamils and Muslims in Trincomalee. The displaced Muslim community living in Love Lane welfare centre informed me that although they had been displaced by Tamils it was the Sinhalese that had occupied their land and renamed the village. The village had been taken by the Buddhist monks and given, they said, to people from outside Trincomalee. This, I was told, was the root cause for their displacement because it has made it problematic for them to go back since 'it will cause more problems' (Muslim man:74). The government recognises this and has allocated them land near to the welfare centre. Other Tamils that I spoke to voiced a concern that the government was supporting the colonisation of Trincomalee by the Muslims. A Tamil man in Faizal Nagar welfare centre told me about an incident in which the Muslims had built a mosque next to the Hindu temple while the Tamil-

⁹ w/c is an abbreviation of welfare centre.

Hindus were still displaced. He believed that they were trying to capture the land for the Muslims, saying, 'these are the tactics that people use' (Tamil man:27).

Populations have also been displaced for military reasons. The Sinhalese that I spoke to in Mahadivulwewa welfare centre told me that the LTTE had come and moved the Tamils that were living nearby. There had been no attacks on the Tamils, but the LTTE wanted to move them because if the Sinhalese and Tamils are living in one place it is difficult to launch an attack, so they forced the Tamils to leave (Host Sinhala woman:20). The Sri Lankan army has tried to cut the LTTE and other paramilitary groups off from their civilian bases by displacing whole villages into welfare centres. Military bases were also often positioned very close to these camps and the government has received a lot of criticism for using civilians as shields. In fact, both parties have used displaced persons as shields during military campaigns (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:62).

Another aspect regarding the control of people and land that must be acknowledged is the place that the camps or welfare centres play in the machineries of war. The confinement of civilians in camps and to certain territories benefits all armed groups to extort money and to propagate ethnic chauvinism and nationalist rhetoric. Militant groups who infiltrate camps have very little difficulty in recruiting new cadres and this is also true of areas hard hit by Government restrictions, such as Eachchilampathu. The disruption to life, education, and mobility caused by displacement and restriction within camps results in the frustration and restlessness of the local youth. As in the case of the Karenni refugees in Thailand and the Hutu Camp refugees in Tanzania displacement and forced migration has led to the formation of strong collective identities, an occurrence that has to be taken into account for any conflict resolution (Grundy-Warr et al 2003, Malkki 1995).

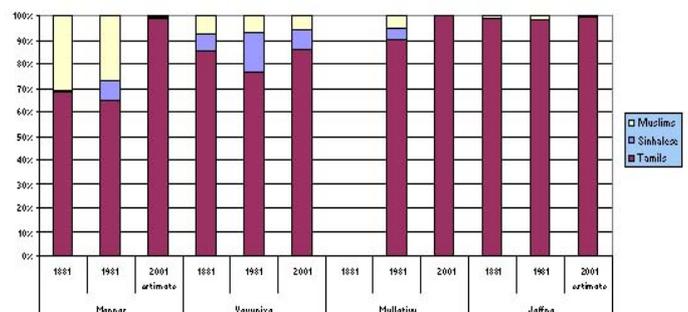
Ethnic Enclave Formation

Colonial and post-colonial nation-state formation and two decades of armed conflict has clearly 'destroyed much of Sri Lanka's mixed cultural geography and pattern of settlement' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:66). Violence and displacement has created ethnic enclaves and polarised collective identities in the previously hybrid border areas between the South and the North. While the government has been involved in moving people to infiltrate and control Tamil

areas, the LTTE has been moving people in order to demarcate the national territory through the dispersal of the population. With the movement of displaced people the demographic composition of areas within Sri Lanka has changed. This section looks at the changing face of Sri Lanka and draws a brief picture of the changes that have occurred to the ethnic demography of the island and Trincomalee in particular.

Map 2 (below) shows net loss and net gain of IDPs by ethnic group in each district to give an impression of the extent and pattern of ethnic enclave formation caused by the conflict (The exact figures can be found in Appendix 2). The district of Mannar, for example, experienced a net loss of 45,306 Muslims while gaining 23,863 Tamils, (its Sinhala population, already very small, lost 1,073 people). This district, which was already a majority Tamil area and was affected by the Muslim ethnic cleansing in 1990 has now become a Tamil 'ethnic enclave'.¹⁰ The surrounding areas received these Muslims, but they predominantly fled to Puttalam or were moved there by the government after fleeing to Colombo city. Puttalam has consequently become a majority Muslim district having received a net total of 58,845 Muslim IDPs. Other divisions in the north-east show similar changes. These UNHCR statistics do not take into account other population movements, but using data from the Provincial Planning Secretariat for the North East Province (NEP), Figure 3 shows overall changes in ethnic composition between 1881 and 2001 in the North. This graph reveals an overall increase in the percentage of Tamils in the northern districts with a corresponding decrease in both Sinhalese and Muslims.

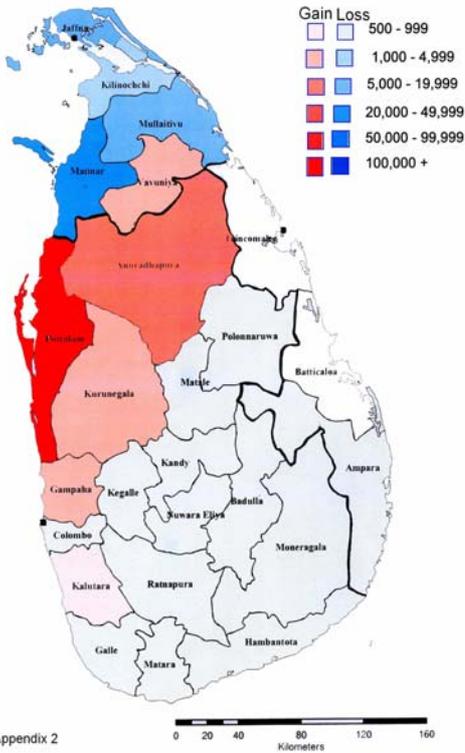
Figure 3 Changing Ethnic Composition in the North



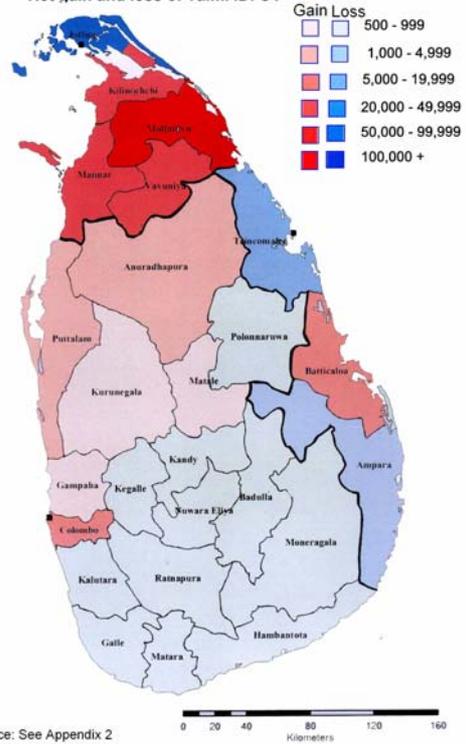
¹⁰ Ethnic cleansing is process that leads to the strengthening and solidification of ethnic divisions and is 'a process associated with the drawing of boundaries, labelling and reallocation of people' (Brun Footnote 4: 4).

Maps 2 and 3: Ethnic Enclaves

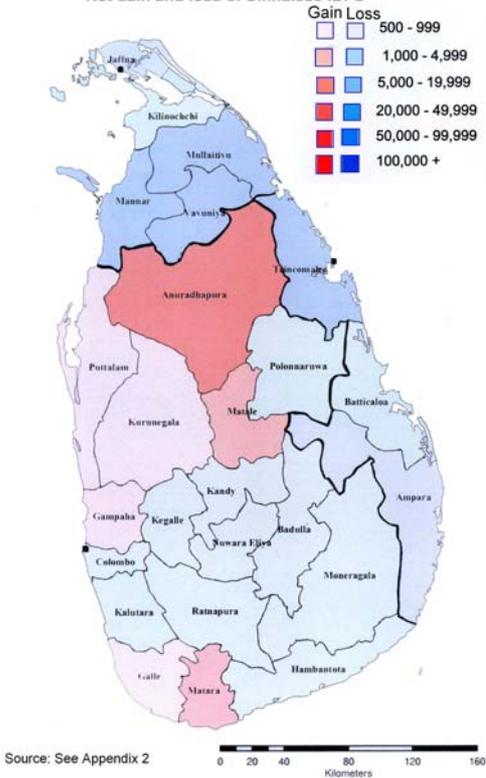
Map 2: District Level Ethnic Enclaves
Net gain and loss of Muslim IDPs.



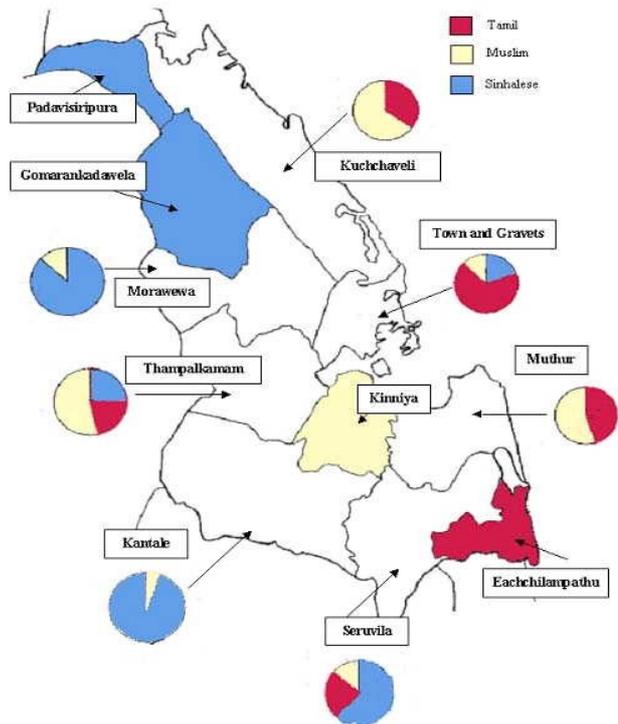
Map 2: District Level Ethnic Enclaves
Net gain and loss of Tamil IDPs.



Map 2: District level Ethnic Enclaves
Net gain and loss of Sinhalese IDPs.



Map 3. Ethnic Composition of Trincomalee by Division, 2002.
Regional-Level Ethnic Enclaves.



(Source: Compiled from District Planning Secretariat, Statistical Handbook 2003)

Although Trincomalee is not a district that represents a single majority ethnic community, like for example Puttalam or Jaffna, we can see that small ethnic enclaves have developed over the years. As mentioned before, the east coast has historically been a very multi-ethnic community surviving on strategies of co-existence and experiencing much inter-ethnic interaction. The creation of ethnic enclaves here, as in the once multicultural border regions in the Vanni, is thus just as striking as the enforcement of already majoritarian areas. Map 3 (above) shows the divisional level ethnic enclaves in Trincomalee district.

In Trincomalee, Tamils make up the majority of the displaced, but it also has one of the highest incidents of Sinhala displacement and outside Mannar and Jaffna has the highest cases of Muslim displacement (Appendix 2). In most other regions a single ethnic group can be identified as having experienced most displacement. Trincomalee is an unusual district because each community has been considerably affected by the conflict and the corresponding displacement. It is also an area where the majority of the IDPs have remained within the district. This is reflected in the relatively high incidence of registration of displaced people and again this reflects a fairly even ethnic distribution, although Tamils still represent the majority. From these figures we can see that a net total of 670 Muslims, 3,444 Sinhalese and 5,550 Tamils have left the district. Figure 4 shows what this means as a percentage of the ethnic populations in Trincomalee. This could account for one of the reasons that the Muslim population in Trincomalee is increasing as a percentage of the total population and the Tamil population is decreasing. With the Tamils and Sinhalese leaving on a much larger scale the ethnic conflict appears to be opening up a space for the growth of the Muslim population within Trincomalee.

Figure 4 Movement of IDPs out of Trincomalee by ethnic group.

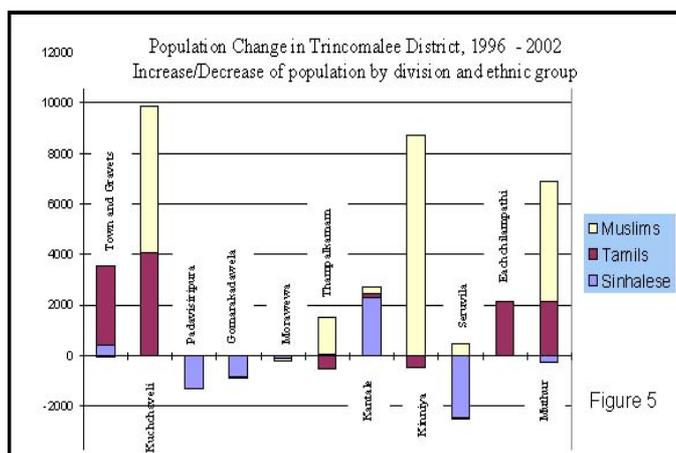
	IDPs registered in Trinco	Net Loss caused by Displacement	Loss as a % of ethnic group
Sinhalese	2,754	3,444	4.02%
Tamils	8,252	5,550	5.95%
Muslims	5,458	670	0.89%

*Using 1981 population statistics with the assumption that most were displaced before 1996

Source: Compiled from UNHCR map and Provincial Planning Secretariat NEP, Statistical Information 2003

I have explored the extent to which changes in population distribution in Trincomalee has created

ethnic enclaves and Figure 5 shows the changing ethnic composition of each division within the district between 1996 and 2003. The formation of a Tamil enclave is very clear in Eachchilampathu. Kinniya has seen the formation of a Muslim enclave, while the majority of the Sinhalese already exist in majority Sinhala areas. The Sinhalese have experienced the greatest reduction in population numbers and those that haven't left the district appear to have moved to Kantale division where there has been a marked increase in the Sinhala percentage. Figure 5 also shows that some divisions have experienced depopulation, which will have badly affected the economy, people's livelihoods and feelings of security. The increase in population in other areas has put pressure on land and employment, which often causes conflicts.



Source: Compiled from the statistical Handbooks 1996 and 2003, Divisional Secretariat, Trincomalee

Ethnic enclave mentality: Changing perceptions due to forced migration

'No one talks now, no one trusts now, not even their own family...Both sides fight not by killing each other, but by killing us...I don't know who I am any more, and I don't know what to do about it. No one does.' A Sri Lankan 1988 (Nordstrom 1992:35)

What makes this conflict new, Rajasingham-Senaniyake tells us, 'is the extremities of violent unmixing of peoples' (2002: 60). In a conflict supported largely by the intimidation, recruitment and displacement of large numbers of civilians it is especially important to look at how displacement affects people's perceptions. The strategic movement of civilians and the intense mobilisation of political ethnic identities has produced mono-ethnic, mono-cultural identities in once multicultural communities. There has been a growth in 'ethnic enclave mentality that presumes people of different cultures cannot

share the same neighbourhood, village, city, place of religious worship, or public space' (Rajasingham-Senanyake 1999:66). Having ascertained that district level ethnic enclaves have formed across the country and among the different divisions of Trincomalee it should also be noted that, since welfare centres themselves have been divided along ethnic lines, regionalised ethnic divisions need not take place for enclaves and enclave mentalities to develop. This is especially true for those living in relatively large camps with little or no movement out. Many displaced people have spent some part of their lives in these welfare centres so it is important to investigate the extent of ethnic enclave mentality among the displaced people.

The movement of people away from an area was noted on at least four occasions as placing a strain on inter-ethnic relations. A woman in Mahadivulwewa welfare centre told me that 'the relationship was broken here' not only because of the violence, but also due to the movement of Muslims and Tamils far away, creating a great gap and placing strains on the relationships (Sinhala woman:40). A Tamil man living in Faizal Nagar welfare centre who had already spoken about his resentment towards the Muslims, also told me that 'the isolation of the two communities has increased friction, it is strained'. He believed that this would be lessened if there was only one camp because ill feelings come from the fact that one community is well off, while the other suffers, 'the Muslims are 100% alright, we are in abject poverty' (Tamil man:27). There needs to be more contact he told me, there needs to be a bridge of understanding, friendship and cooperation. These cases among others showed that the formation of ethnic enclaves was a reality for the displaced people. A couple of the women that I spoke to in both Alles Garden and Nilavelli welfare centres had practically no contact with people outside the camp, rarely leaving its confines. They therefore had very little interaction with other ethnic communities.

There was a lot of inconsistency regarding people's attitudes towards living with other ethnic communities. One Muslim man that I spoke to had felt that it was unsafe to live close to Tamils and had asked the Tamil families living in the welfare centre to leave. The same man told me that he would be happy for Tamils and Muslims to live together in the future (Muslim man:49, Love Lane w/c). There were sharp distinctions made between the present circumstances and future possibilities. A Tamil woman living in Faizal Nagar welfare centre who had not been displaced, but had moved into the camp to marry was very

forward about the need for a separate Tamil territory. She also told me that she felt psychologically safer here because she was surrounded by Tamils, but when asked about her vision for the future she told me that each community must get together and work in peace and harmony (Tamil woman:23). Most people highlighted the continuing uncertainty and insecurity as reasons for separation, but there was also a general belief that the communities could not live in isolation: 'we can't live separately' (Tamil woman:32, Nilavelli w/c), 'just Tamils is impossible' (Tamil woman:22, Alles Garden w/c).

The Tamils that I spoke to revealed a much stronger ethnic enclave mentality than the Sinhalese or Muslims, but this is not surprising. The Tamils in general had been the targets for much discrimination and also an ideological discourse that highlighted a history of colonisation and the need for self-determination. Those living in Alles Garden welfare centre had suffered a lot of violence and a lot of displacement and voiced a fairly unambiguous ethnic enclave mentality. In response to the question of whether the Tamils should have a separate territory one man replied, 'yes, of course' (Tamil man:59). He told me that he would like the Tamils to be separate in order to protect their identity as distinct. He talked about his concern over Sinhalese colonisation of Trincomalee and told me that while he had no objection to the Sinhalese living with the Tamil population, he had no confidence in them either. Two other Tamil men voiced the opinion that 'something separate and own is good' (Resettled Tamil man:75, Kuchchavelli division): 'Most people won't like the Sinhala coming ... I think, because of the cruelty done to Tamils. They can't forget the violence and discrimination' (Resettled Tamil man:76, Trincomalee).

Over half of the Tamils that I interviewed in Trincomalee showed resentment, fear, anger, suspicion or distrust towards a different ethnic community, while only one Muslim voiced these attitudes and that was towards the Sinhalese. The Sinhalese did not express these feelings and often replied that there had been no changes of opinion and there were no feelings of fear or anger.¹¹ The group of Sinhalese in Morawewa welfare centre who recounted stories of violence, suffering and loss also told me that they are

¹¹ I spoke to a disproportionate amount of Tamils and this may be the case for the huge distinction, but there were clear differences and these were also noted by Schrijvers in her fieldwork.

sympathetic towards the Tamils and although they have a psychological fear when the Tamils come they are still willing to live with them.

Among the displaced Sinhalese that I spoke to there did not appear to be the formation of an ethnic enclave mentality, this is likely to be true among a majority of Sinhalese in Trincomalee, who may still have a minority complex and thus the desire for peaceful co-existence and acceptance would still be an overriding consideration. The Sinhalese I spoke to were eager to rebuild relationships and were the most likely to mention the movement away of the other ethnic communities as a negative consequence of the war. The group in Morawewa welfare centre agreed that the country should not be divided, 'who are we, who are the Tamils, who are the Sinhala – we are the children of one family' said the spokeswoman (Sinhala woman:60).

Apart from a few accounts of Tamil enclave mentality the majority of all those I spoke to seemed to believe that barriers should be broken down, as one woman put it 'all must get together and live together' (Muslim woman:45, Faizal Nagar w/c). The experiences and perceptions of those displaced living with friends and families, or integrating into urban centres will probably be very different. Even those who have not moved have been affected by changing ethnic compositions that may limit the extent of their interaction with people from other communities. Due to limited time this paper is unable to make a study of the attitudes and perceptions of those left behind, nor those of the 'host IDPs' who have integrated into society. This would be interesting for a further study to find out if changing ethnic demography has created ethnic enclaves and ethnic enclave mentality among the rest of society. The experiences of living in urban areas, especially major towns and cities will be very different and interaction between the different communities will probably remain quite high. For displaced people moving to cities and urban areas, this move may just as well increase personal interaction and inter-ethnic contact. So while displacement on a large scale appears to be creating district or regional ethnic enclaves, on local and individual levels displaced people may also be confronted with the opposite.

Section Three: The Path to Peace

'If everyone is dead who is going to rule the country? Are the tombs going to rule the country?' (Sinhala woman, 60, Morewewa w/c)

Constructing Peace: The Politics of Resettlement

The Government is currently putting a lot of emphasis on the resettlement of people in their original homes. During the peace talks in 2002 the main focus of both the Government and the LTTE was on the urgent humanitarian need to improve the lives of those living in the north-east with both sides agreeing on an accelerated resettlement programme (UNHCR 2003, Mohideen 2004). While resettlement is high on the Government's agenda and has a high profile in the public domain there are still many obstacles to face. Although solutions need to be found for those people displaced by the conflict this paper argues that the emphasis placed resettlement in Sri Lanka is unhealthy and the motivations behind it need to be re-evaluated.

Resettlement is another form of population movement that has failed to escape the manipulative effects of 'ethnicised' and militarised politics. A combination of land appropriation, land mines and structural damage means that people's land is rarely available for them to return to, but this has not stopped the government from 'encouraging' return. Schrijvers was informed of an occasion when a Tamil community was forcibly returned to their village by the government: 'We were forcibly brought here. They said if you want your rations you should go to your own village...We were brought in lorries and just dropped by the road side. The whole place was like a jungle' (Schrijvers 1998:24-25). It has been argued by both displaced people and human rights bodies that the Government is using resettlement as a cover to settle greater numbers of Sinhalese and Muslims than were initially displaced. Many Tamils complained that the Muslims were being given preferential treatment from the Government when it came to resettlement and rehabilitation. This was a particular problem in the south of Trincomalee where relations between the two have been most strained.

In Faizal Nagar welfare centre one of the Tamil IDPs that I spoke to mentioned what he saw as a joint Government and Muslim party tactic aimed at increasing the number of Muslim residents in the area. While only 20 Muslim families were displaced, he believes that 400 have been registered for resettlement. The LTTE, I was told, was strongly opposing this and would try to drive them out - without violence (Tamil man:27, Faizal Nagar w/c). Evidence for these concerns is hard to determine although other sources have also represented such concerns (UTHR 1993; Ruiz 1994; Seneviratne and Stavropoulou 1998:379). While the Government seems to be pushing for

return, often against the will or desire of the IDPs and some humanitarian agencies, the LTTE appears to be stalling the process.¹² What we come to see is that it is not necessarily the welfare of the citizens (or the peace process) that is being taken into account, but a continuation of the struggle for control.

The Government seems to believe that, the 'movement of the displaced population is central to restoring social and economic normalcy and, therefore, to resolving the political conflict' (Refugees International 2003:2). I found that this emphasis was present in all of the discussions that I conducted with NGO or government workers and was also a frequent issue in the newspapers.¹³ One NGO officer in Puttalam district, when asked why the government was so keen to return the displaced Muslims to their homes, laughed and replied 'East, West, home's best' (NGO Consortium Interview). His answer did nothing to explain the emphasis on return in a district where a vast majority of the IDPs have admitted that they do not want to return.

This ideology of resettlement seems to be based on 'implicit political and cultural perceptions of a natural link between people, identity and territory' (Pedersen 2003:4). This emphasis assumes that return will bring 'normalcy', forgetting that many of the effects of violence and displacement cannot be undone by the return home. What is missing is a critical approach of the notion that 'return home' means a return to stability, security and the past. By putting so much emphasis on return the Government brushes over the deeply felt and experienced problems of insecurity and instability in many of the places of origin and instead assumes that the return of the IDPs will not only facilitate peace, but will in and of itself create peace.

This view needs to be reassessed and instead an emphasis must be placed on the lived experiences of those affected by war. Return does not mean the end of the 'refugee cycle', rather a whole new process of reintegration begins (Black and Koser

1999). This 'return home' is not enough to create peace. The homes that the IDPs left no longer exist, both literally and metaphorically.¹⁴ Places, perceptions, social relations and cultures all change with conflict and time. This needs to be addressed when looking at the return of IDPs after periods of brutal violence and intense insecurity. What is it that 'home' will offer that can undo these experiences? If we are to put so much emphasis on 'home', it must be as movement into the future and thus never distinguished from the need for development, reconstruction and, most importantly, reform on many levels. The importance of return for most IDPs should not be undermined, but the security of areas hard hit by the war needs to be addressed first.

Looking to the Future

An important question in all discussions on resettlement and repatriation is what does 'home' mean for the IDP. We must take into account the cultural dimension of refugeehood when looking at the way IDPs structure their future. Displacement often creates a disjunction between familiar ways-of-being and a new reality. There has been a lot of discussion about the way refugee self-identity suffers from discontinuity and is thus often anchored in the past and in mythico-history to combat this (Malkki 1992, 1995, Bose 2000). The general feeling among the IDPs interviewed in Trincomalee was that hopes for the future did not necessarily pivot around the desire to return to a physical and ideological home. The emphasis was most often placed on conflict resolution.

The protracted nature of displacement along with proximity to continuing conflict and knowledge of the national situation may be three reasons why the IDPs emphasised conflict resolution and removal of displacement inducing problems rather than return itself. In each district the reasons may be different, but for those currently in welfare centres in Sri Lanka there is a considerable reluctance to return. For a more detailed account of this reluctance see Appendix 3 (UN 2004, UNHCR 2003). In Trincomalee it could also be suggested that experiences of violent and multiple displacements challenged the ideology that links land, home and security. The future was not always envisioned as a return,

¹² UNHCR is unwilling to promote return yet as it considers the situation too unstable. The University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), on the other hand, believe that the LTTE is stalling the process because they do not want the credit for reconstruction to go to the government, UTHR, 7 March 1997, Special Report No. 8 'Trincomalee: State ideology and the politics of fear'

¹³ For example see, *Sunday Observer* June 27, 2004 M.I.M. Mohideen Feature article 'Resettlement of IDPs: North East Muslims Ignored' p. 45

¹⁴ As Rushdie tells us, home is a place we can never return to, it 'is not that "there's no place like home", but rather that there is no longer any such place as home' (Rushdie, 1992: 56-57).

because for many, 'home' was associated with conflict, displacement and insecurity. First and foremost, among all those I spoke to, was the desire to move into a peaceful and economically stable future, return to communities and land was seen as secondary to this.

Many of the IDPs were unwilling even to consider return until there was security and, for some, peace itself had to be unambiguous – a literal guarantee from both sides and all communities. 'No one is willing to return home because of fear. They must come to a concrete conclusion; there must be no more fighting. This needs to be proclaimed by the LTTE, the cadres and the government; and all the people too' (Sinhala woman:60, Morawewa w/c). Security was high on the agenda of every IDP that I spoke to about their possible return; '[w]ithout security...home, houses, and fields are useless' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:63-4). Many displaced people have returned in the past only to be displaced again and others have been displaced several times from different settlement areas. Unless security can be guaranteed and the IDPs decide themselves to return, then resettlement could be premature and disruptive.

Tensions between the army and IDPs need to be reduced before resettlement can successfully take place. The ceasefire has helped by easing security restrictions around the welfare centres, but even so one IDP believed that the state of insecurity is the biggest obstacle faced by Sri Lanka and there is insecurity because there is no trust between the civilians and the army (Tamil man:59, Alles Garden w/c). This said, the ceasefire has contributed to improving the lives of all those I spoke to. Many reflected on the freedom of movement and feeling of security that it brought. Only since the ceasefire have IDPs been able to resume normal activities such as school and work, and the fear of arbitrary arrests has been removed. Although freedom of movement is guaranteed, it was twice mentioned that this does not constitute complete freedom.

'Ethnicised' Peace

The ceasefire has also brought increased inter-ethnic contact and eased tensions for a few of the communities I visited. There has been a lot of debate regarding the relationship between ethnic interaction and ethnic conflict. Some have argued that greater interaction between different ethnic communities increases understanding and empathy and reduces stereotypes, ethnic tension and conflicts. In opposition to this, some academics and politicians have argued that higher

levels of ethnic interaction increases friction and fears and creates more opportunity for conflict. Chaim Kaufmann represents the latter perspective and argues that the 'severity of ethnic security dilemmas is greatest when demography is most intermixed, [and] weakest when community settlements are most separate' (1996:148). Kaufmann argues that separation is the only solution to ethnic conflict. His argument is very fatalistic and reactionary and he does not consider the human consequences of geographically dividing or partitioning ethnic communities into 'mostly homogenous regions' (Kaufmann 1996:150).

Devolving on the basis of ethnic demographics makes the ethnic enclave or ethnic homeland mentality official and thus perpetuates feelings of difference, fear and suspicion. As in the case of both Bosnia and India, devolution that is 'not properly envisioned to protect local minorities [can] actually become a blue print for more war' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:66). Ethnicised peace, Rajasingham-Senanayake believes, is a recipe for a new cycle of war 'and this is what the peace industry is going to do, it's going to institutionalise ethnic cleansing, which I absolutely deplore' (Interview 23/06/04).

My results unravel at least one strand of Kaufman's argument because it would seem that ethnic tensions have been eased and co-existence improved in the communities where interaction has increased. An NGO official in Eachchilampathu Tamil resettlement village, mentioned that since the ceasefire there have been no problems with the Sinhalese. Barriers have been removed, people can move freely and the distinction between the two groups has been reduced.¹⁵ In Nilavelli welfare centre I was told that feelings of fear towards the Sinhalese had eased and they no longer felt threatened (Tamil husband and wife: 33 and 32). In Morewewa, Tamils and Muslims have started coming back since the MOU was signed, 'people are beginning to move closer again' and cultivate the paddy together (Sinhala woman:60, Morewewa w/c). Research done by the Centre for Policy Alternatives on the attitudes of the Sri Lankan public towards the peace process revealed that support was greatest among those with the most contact with other ethnic groups (CPA 2003:8, 22-24); and support for the peace process would seem to imply greater 'ethnic security'.

¹⁵ This is not the case for the Tamil-Muslim relations, which appear very strained.

Kaufmann also argues that the experiences of intense violence, fear, misery and loss lock people into a group identity and enemy relationships that cannot be undone making it impossible to persuade survivors of ethnic war to adopt an overarching identity (Kaufmann 1996:153-155). The construction of ethnicity and the reality of mixed-marriages, inter-ethnic friendships and cross-ethnic sympathisers among the displaced makes it clear that 'the main narrative which rests on the violent polarization of the two ethnic groups does not give us the total picture' (Coomaraswamy 2003: 6). These findings provide a challenge to the mainstream narrative by highlighting the complexity of the divisions and distinctions, the prejudices and friendships that exist, not in a simple polarisation, but in a complex web of shifting signifiers. While conflict and displacement has caused a severance of 'the bonds of humanity', these relationships are not stable and absolute (Coomaraswamy 2003:6). This paper challenges Kaufman's belief that identity reconstruction is impossible. Both my own research and Schrijvers fieldwork in 1993-4 (1998) notes a situation in which survivors of ethnic war are in the process of re-establishing inter-ethnic and cross-cultural links that discourage such hypernationalism. Not only did people want peace they were also actively creating peaceful relations.

While language and religion are very important in constructing difference and similarity, it would appear that conflict and difference does not arise because of these differences, but that difference is constructed around such cultural traits. It seemed to me that definitions and differences relating to the 'ethnic other' not only changed depending on location and specific experiences, but also throughout the course of an interview. One woman put it very well, when she said 'it is a matter of contact' (Resettled Tamil woman:27, Trincomalee). It is the amount and type of contact that each community has with the other combined with their contact with larger ideological discourse that appears to affect and shape individuals and communities' perception of the 'other'.

The Role of Civilians: Inter-Ethnic Reconstruction

As Dennis McGilvray asserts, 'any solution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict will be affected by the social resilience, cultural adaptability, and political wisdom of the Tamil and Moorish communities in this multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-religious region' (McGilvray 2001:22). To this it is now imperative to include the Sinhalese as a vital constituent in the complex socio-cultural web that

comprises society in Trincomalee. While there are still signs of disquiet and tensions there are also signs of peace and reconciliation. In the town, members of different ethnic communities are now trading side by side in the market. According to the group University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), after a brutal and tortuous history of communal relations, this is something to be recognised, and acknowledged as 'the culmination of initiatives coming from and taking shape in the hearts and minds of ordinary people' (UTHR 1993).

All have suffered at the hands of the 'other', but most showed a great willingness to begin the process of mending. War was never the choice of the people and this has become increasingly apparent since the ceasefire began in 2002 and not least through the simple determination to resume everyday life and socio-cultural relationships. Resistance to the reproduction of a culture of violence is often approached through a focus on re-establishing valued cultural traditions and innovation in their application. I came across a number of different strategies for this taking place predominantly in the resettlement villages and on more individual levels in some of the welfare centres. This was especially true of those who had experienced a great deal of cross-ethnic interaction before displacement, such as the Sinhalese in the west and the Tamils and Muslims that lived in and around Trincomalee town. Most of these strategies involved the employment sector. This is not surprising, as the history of co-existence on the east coast has historically been focused around employment or trade.

In Trincomalee a small multi-ethnic fishing community called Kasthurinagar, which had experienced two episodes of conflict and displacement, set up a fishing co-operative that successfully gained funding for its multi-community approach and co-existence strategies. One of the first to access this funding the community was very proud of its developments. There was also evidence of recent inter-ethnic marriages among the displaced and cross-cultural celebrations. I was told about cross-ethnic participation in events such as funerals and weddings that had occurred only months before. All the Sinhalese mentioned participation in Tamil celebrations, and, sometimes 'even the Muslim ones' (Sinhalese man:50, Mahadivulwewa w/c). The dynamics of social interactions were very dependent on the locality. Proximity and inter-ethnic employment structures were often foregrounded as reasons for good community relations.

My findings, I believe, reveal that private views are possibly the most positive aspect of the present situation in Trincomalee, although I uncovered an undercurrent of prejudice, distrust, resentment and fear and one or two people were bitter and fairly negative about future peace, this is not surprising. More surprising was the strong current of positive and open attitudes towards members of 'other' ethnic communities. Many of the interviewees were remarkably reflective and non-partisan. While there were signs among the displaced of the formation of ambiguous but distinct ethnic enclave mentalities, there was also evidence that efforts were being made to re-establish peaceful inter-ethnic relations. In many cases inter-marriages, inter-faith worship and shared cultural practices were cited as examples that 'we are all children of one family'. The response strategies of the displaced are not simply about reproducing pre-conflict societal patterns, but contributing to and creating a post-conflict society. It is the responses, attitudes and perceptions of the displaced that need greater appreciation and more integration into the peace process as a whole. These views are important to the future of peace in Sri Lanka and the quicker inter-ethnic bonds can be rebuilt, the more difficult it will be to create a society based on the division of power and thus the division of people.

Peace Initiatives

Rehabilitation and the rebuilding of Sri Lanka requires more than the mere dependence on official patronage from an indifferent government. It is a 'multi-layered reality' and the process entails a negotiation between past and present and must be recognised as a site where 'identities are produced, consumed, regulated, sustained and invalidated' (Bose 2000:5). The Peace Process has been very top-down in its approach to the conflict and has recognised only military or powerful political groups as participants in the negotiations. Peace cannot and should not only come from the top. In Sri Lanka the military and political groups are at a stalemate in the struggle for power. To find a solution we must either look wider to the international community or go closer, looking to the people to recognise the power they have as a community to put pressure on the government. Camilla Orjuela discusses the role that civil society can play in the Sri Lankan conflict resolution and peace building (Orjuela 2003). What needs to be developed are ways of supporting resistance at a local level, '[t]he government should realize that its ultimate constituents are the country's people and not the diplomats in Colombo' (Abeysinghe et al 2003).

To create peace and understanding at the local level is to challenge the power that the militant and political groups have created through divisions, dislocations and displacements. Socio-cultural transformations have taken place during and after displacement and they will continue to take place through the process of rehabilitation. The Sri Lankan state and many development and humanitarian agencies do not appreciate the 'sheer complexity of building or rebuilding a community' when the displaced return or resettle (Vincent 2001:6). The international community and local civil society must develop creative responses and viable programmes of reintegration and reinstatement of a peaceful, supportive and democratic society. My vision would be to create as many cross-cutting identifications as possible, what Coomaraswamy (2003:6) calls 'humanist bonds' that cut across ethnic boundaries in employment, commerce, education and other socio-cultural practices (see also Baumann 1999). These projects have begun, but many of them are still structured around the ethnic dimension of the conflict and do not deconstruct the ethnicisation of society.¹⁶

There are three areas that can be highlighted in order to improve the position of civilians in the fight for peace. First, there needs to be awareness raising. The Centre for Policy Alternatives looks at the way that the Peace Process has not reached out to the people of Sri Lanka and what needs to take place is a public awareness campaign informing people about the peace process. This would create a greater awareness of the positions and attitudes of the different communities reducing the opportunities for Sri Lankan elites and politicians to engage in demagoguery, using ignorance to create fear (CPA 2003:44-52). Education also has a role to play in the changes that need to take place in order 'to inculcate values suitable for a multiethnic society' (de Silva 1999:116). Dialogues need to be established between different groups of people to break down and reform social, political and militant constructions that present the 'other' as the enemy (Orjuela 2003: 197).

Secondly, education and language play key roles in promoting peaceful co-existence. Unfortunately the current structure of the education system heightens ethnic and linguistic differences. Connections have been made for a

¹⁶ I came across three peaceful co-existence projects in Sri Lanka two of which were based in Trincomalee, all three worked along lines of ethnic difference and thus perpetuated ethnicised social relations.

long time by Sri Lankans themselves between changes in the education system and increased ethnic tension (de Silva 1999:109). The divisive education system was mentioned by two of the displaced people I spoke to. I was told that before 1959 everyone went to school together, regardless of ethnicity. In 1959 a free education system was introduced, English was taken out of the syllabus and schools were divided along linguistic lines. In the 1970s the government rewarded Muslims, for what was seen as their pliant political behaviour, with the establishment of a separate system of government schools for Muslim students (McGilvray 2001:10). This has increased ethnic tensions by restricting direct contact between members of different communities and limiting people's linguistic capabilities. Very few of the displaced people that I spoke to could speak the language of the other community, but most told me that they wanted to learn. After a quarter of a century of linguistically segregated educational practice it will not be easy to integrate the two, but positive steps need to be taken to increase interaction from an early age and increase inter-ethnic communication skills. This is not only true in the multi-ethnic east, but across the country.

Thirdly, peace initiatives should involve a public resistance to the operations of the war machinery. During my fieldwork I did not find any evidence of strategies moving beyond an interpersonal level to the formation of social movements. The people I spoke to, in general, lacked a political will or worldview that saw them as possible actors in the process of conflict resolution. Due to the highly politicised and militarised nature of society there is little space for a creative civil-society and there are no mass mobilizations against the war. It is difficult for people trapped in a dirty war to act politically and showing support for peace can be dangerous (Orjuela 2003: 196-198).

Even so, there is reason to believe that displaced people have the ability to resist the culture of violence. In July 2002 there were petitions and protest marches on the streets of Jaffna over the resettlement of the displaced people of Chavakachcheri (Abeyasinghe et al 2003). More recently these resettled IDPs in Northern Jaffna began a fast-unto-death campaign in order to resist the movement of the army back onto their land (Liyanaarachchi 2004). Families and particularly mothers in Batticaloa have shown great courage in resisting the forcible recruitment of their children (Batticaloa Collective 2004). There are also examples from across the globe where people have resisted the militarisation and politicisation of their society by declaring

themselves Peace Communities (Colombia, Pax Christi: 2000) or Peace Zones (Philippines, Garcia: 1992). These civilians have been able to build a space for peace in the midst of conflict and have set an example of how popular participation at a local-level can contribute to conflict resolution. These allow us to envision a path for communities to overcome helplessness and to empower themselves to decide on a common future. These communities can then put pressure on political leadership, both at local and national levels. Whether Peace Communities can be developed in Sri Lanka or not, a massive proportion of the population in the north-east has been displaced by the conflict and it is time that this population mobilised for peace.

Conclusion

It is easy to blame the violence in the east over the last two decades on the population mix, however, a "mixed" population is not a sufficient condition, let alone an explanation for the extremes of inter-ethnic violence and terror in the early 1990s' (Schrijver 1998:19). It is not the ethnic composition of Trincomalee that led to the violence, but instead, the hypernationalistic rhetoric that did not allow for such social diversity. Massacres and displacement were the result of well-planned, systematic disruption carried out by the LTTE, Home Guards and the Army. They were not the result of civilian riots and emotions that could no longer be controlled. In fact there are few inherent reasons for conflict between the communities. While this is true, it should not be forgotten that due to years of displacement, violence, and ethnic enclave formation, the attitudes of civilians must be addressed and considered seriously, both as possibilities in conflict resolution and as obstacles.

When I started my research I approached the conflict from a national and then a district level, only to discover that it functioned on a far more intricate scale. Those that I spoke to, displaced by specific situations, had very distinct and context specific views of the 'ethnic' conflict. There was a multiplicity and complexity of attitudes towards, and constructions of, the different ethnic communities. Local experiences, combined with national and sometimes international discourse, created a plethora of localised attitudes. My interviews drew attention to the situational and structural nature of the ethnic categories within Trincomalee. The constructions of identities were fluid, dynamic and situational and none were mutually exclusive.

What became clear during my fieldwork was that while the political and social world in Sri Lanka had become 'ethnicised', ethnicity had become militarised. Ethnic divisions on the ground were not as clear-cut or as bounded as politico-military discourse implied, but people had often come to imagine ethnic groups as constructed along militant lines. Invasion, land appropriation and political opportunism were key themes within the narratives of the 'other'. These distinctions, however, were undermined by social and cultural practices and constructions of the 'other' that cut across ethno-religious identities. Many of the displaced people I met where in the process of re-establishing these inter-ethnic cross-cultural relations.

The (dis)placement of people has been at the centre of the struggle over place and space in Sri Lanka and this paper has focused its attention on the lives of the IDPs who live on the border but exist at the centre of the conflict. This paper has begun to explore the effects of conflict-induced (dis)placement in relation to inter-ethnic co-existence and attitudes towards the ethnic 'other'. Overall, the paper has sought to promote a greater awareness and understanding of the complexities and possibilities of local and district level inter-ethnic relations among the displaced and to recognise the place of the displaced in the reconstruction of the path to peace. It is not only time to adopt an actor-oriented approach to peace building, but also to understand that listening to the people is not simple, or rather, that 'underneath the silence [is] not a voice waiting to be liberated but ever deeper historical layers of silencing and bitter, complicated regional struggles over history and truth' (Malkki 1996: 398).

Historically, popular mobilisation and public opinion in Sri Lanka has been used to stoke the fire of the conflict. It is now time for Sri Lankans to begin the process of re-imagining themselves, to find ways to expand the horizons of where identities are created and to accept the multiethnic nature of their society. Inter-cultural, inter-ethnic dialogues need to take place in order to question the construction of militarised and politicised identities. As Spencer concludes 'the need for some unifying ideology is apparently over-whelming' and an alternative ideal of unity needs to be found from which to critique the divisive strains of ethnic nationalism (Spencer 1990:12).

According to Rajasingham (1999:66-67): 'For devolution to work the magic of peace in Sri Lanka, it must turn the clock back on the

displacement and ethnic segregation of mixed communities caused by armed conflict.' While theoretically I agree with this statement I am aware that the realities and possibilities of this have not been properly addressed that it does not take into account the violent history of ethnic relations and the complex of attitudes that this produces. What Sri Lanka should be wary of is any over-idealisation of the past or simplification of the complexity of identities created by the war. The clock cannot be turned back, but the effects of the conflict can be changed if we address realistically and locally the perceptions, needs and desires of those at the centre of the conflict – the people in-between.

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Appendix 1

Source: Rehabilitation Department of the District Planning Secretariat, Kachcheri, Trincomalee district.

Rehabilitation Statistics

Up to 30-04-2004

Trincomalee District

D.S.Division	Displaced Affected	Families Resettled	No. of welfare Centre	No. of families in the Camp	No. of families Out side the Camp	No. of Houses Damaged	No. of Houses Commenced	No. of Houses Completed	No. of Houses in Progress	S.I.A. Paid	P.E.G. Paid	Tem.Hut Paid	Implements Paid	Details of After M.O.U. Returnees Up to 25-09-2003				
														Staying at Refugee Camps	Staying with Friends/Relatives	U.S. Paid @ 25,000/-		
															U.S. Paid	U.S. Paid Part		
Town & Graves	15,262	10,947	5	382	4,315	10,568	4,870	3,047	1,823	10,050	10,250	10,004	8,983	43	387	513	485	125
Thampatagamam	3,650	3,392	-	-	258	4,050	1,770	1,238	532	3,010	3,050	3,227	2,710	-	254	-	122	106
Muthur	12,701	12,660	-	-	83	7,021	3,184	2,705	479	12,150	12,180	12,366	10,992	-	424	-	151	137
Kinniya	10,964	10,483	2	58	625	4,317	3,101	3,040	61	9,682	9,750	10,004	7,758	-	74	-	37	7
Kuchchaveli	7,645	6,729	1	119	916	5,626	1,124	917	207	5,834	5,344	5,778	4,676	309	1,169	179	413	642
Eachchelampathu	2,250	2,169	-	-	81	1,793	179	54	125	2,001	2,001	2,009	2,001	-	167	-	56	-
Gomrankadawela	1,880	1,794	-	-	86	1,620	928	846	82	1,821	1,821	1,824	1,821	-	133	-	286	3
Morawewa	998	1,104	3	39	(106)	1,577	560	412	148	983	983	983	983	-	238	-	402	-
Kantalai	420	417	-	-	3	3,000	2,460	1,586	874	415	415	415	415	-	2	-	-	-
Padavisripura	245	227	-	-	18	202	202	202	-	207	207	207	207	-	74	-	-	-
Seruvila	1,548	1,360	-	-	188	3,122	1,895	891	1,004	1,340	1,340	1,347	1,340	-	20	-	-	7
Total	57,563	51,282	11	598	6,467	42,896	20,273	14,938	5,335	47,493	47,341	48,164	41,886	352	2,942	692	1,952	1,027

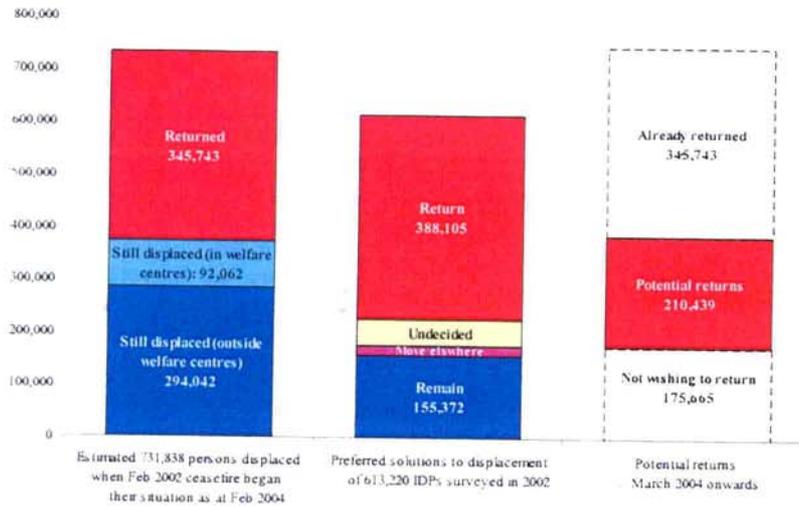
Appendix 2

Net Gain and Loss of IDPs by District and Ethnicity				
		Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim
EAST				
Trincomalee	net loss	3444	5550	670
	net gain			
Batticaloa	net loss	473		
	net gain		16185	753
Ampara	net loss	505	2312	
	net gain			94
NORTH				
Mannar	net loss	1073		45306
	net gain		23863	
Vavuniya	net loss	4037		
	net gain		34974	3690
Mullaitivu	net loss	1692		6275
	net gain		79756	
Kilinochchi	net loss	37		1765
	net gain		28227	
Jaffna	net loss	936	158593	14681
	net gain			
NORTH-CENTRAL				
Polonnaruwa	net loss		96	
	net gain	464		251
Matale	net loss			
	net gain	1711	774	317
Kurunegala	net loss			
	net gain	766	280	2616
Anuradhapura	net loss			
	net gain	7019	1854	6502
Puttalam	net loss			
	net gain	912	2747	58835
UP-COUNTRY				
Kandy	net loss		9	
	net gain	38		112
Kegalle	net loss		9	
	net gain	6		52
Nuwara Eliya	net loss	2		
	net gain		4	2
Badulla	net loss		96	
	net gain	183		18
SOUTH				
Ratnapura	net loss			
	net gain	128	5	38
Gampaha	net loss			
	net gain	902	563	2068
Colombo	net loss			
	net gain	151	5483	84
Kalutara	net loss		45	
	net gain	64		809
Galle	net loss		12	12
	net gain	538		
Matara	net loss			
	net gain	1214	12	24
Hambantota	net loss		11	9
	net gain	72		

Source: Compiled from UNHCR Registration of displaced persons Map (2002)

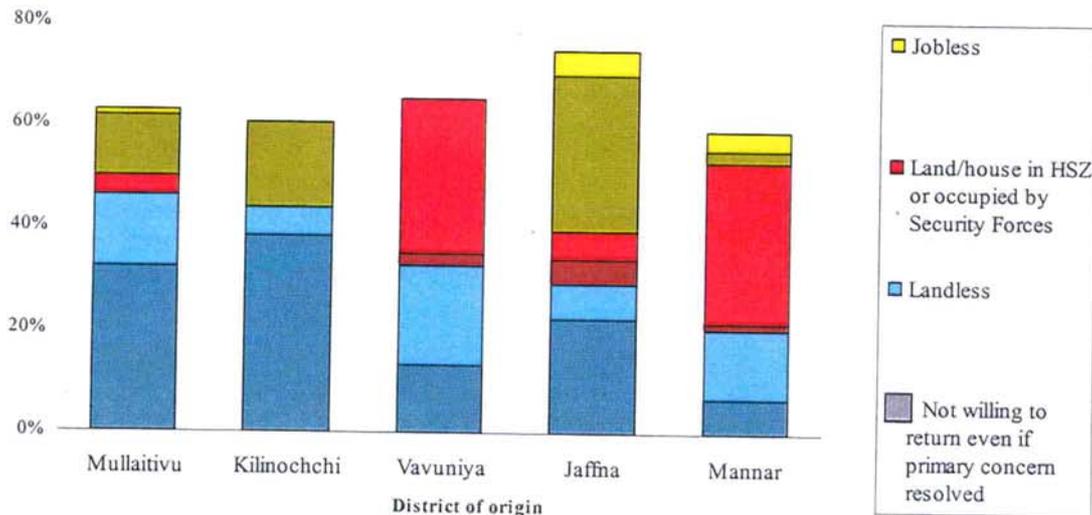
Appendix 3

IDPs and Returnees



Source: UNHCR 'UNHCR's operations in Sri Lanka 2003' (Colombo)

Primary reasons for residents of welfare centre in the north not to return home (top three reasons only).



Source: The Bulletin of the UN Inter-Agency IDP Working Group, 'Durable Solutions Progress Report No. 15', Sri Lanka, 29 April 2004