The People In-Between

Inter-ethnic relations among internally displaced people Trincomalee District, Sri Lanka

Jessica Skinner

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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. Looking at the extent to which ethnic identities and inter-ethnic relations are transformed by and continue beyond the experiences of conflict-induced displacement.

The paper looks at 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 and ethnic divisions strengthened 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 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. Based on this research a report was written regarding future prospects for peaceful co-existence and the positive role that people can play in relationship building. This report has been included at the end of this book to offer an overview and a summary to the issues raised in this paper.

The attitudes and perceptions of the displaced people were investigated over a period of fieldwork in Summer 2004. 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.

Chapter One:

Background

'Between the devil and the deep blue sea'

Tamil woman, Alles Garden Welfare Centre

Part One: Introduction

Sri Lanka's beauty, the image of the tropical paradise, has been frequently juxtaposed with the image of its vicious and violent 'ethnic' war. Its landscape is described as intrinsically peaceful and idyllic while its people are represented as violent aggressors and voiceless victims. This paper challenges that stereotype. The beauty of Sri Lanka is embodied within its people, it is multifarious and multivocal, and it is time to listen to these voices.

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 affects 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 affects on people's ways of thinking, their attitudes and perceptions. The divisions caused by conflict-induced displacement have (re)created and (re)inforced 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 study is to make the displaced the 'focus of enquiry, a subject of the story, an agent of the narrative' (Menon and Bhasin 1998:9).

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 villages and welfare centres (the official name in Sri Lanka for IDP camps) in Trincomalee district.

The paper is divided into four chapters and the first three chapters are divided into two parts. The first chapter outlines the approach and methodology of this paper and sets out the

background to the conflict in Sri Lanka. 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). This paper will therefore only offer a brief introduction to the rise of ethno-nationalism in Sri Lanka, which has been widely discussed and debated.

Chapter Two looks at the place of civilians in the conflict. 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. Part One looks at the rise of dirty war tactics that target civilians. 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.

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). Part Two looks at the formation of national and local level ethnic enclaves and 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'.

Chapter Three looks at the politics and machineries of peace in Sri Lanka. Part One looks at the place of IDPs, resettlement and ethnic interaction within the ideological construction of peace and Part Two takes an actor-oriented perspective on the role of the 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 part looks at the importance of exploring and acknowledging local perceptions and possibilities as an essential part in any peaceful resolution. The final chapter comprises a summary and conclusion to this paper and is followed by a report that outlines several recommendations.

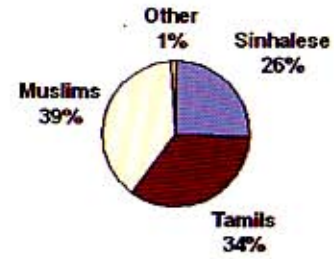
Trincomalee

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 (see 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 and the 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 resettlement 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. The region has a history of complex, intertwined

Figure 1

Ethnic Composition of Trincomalee 2002



Source: District Planning Secretariat Statistical Handbook 2003

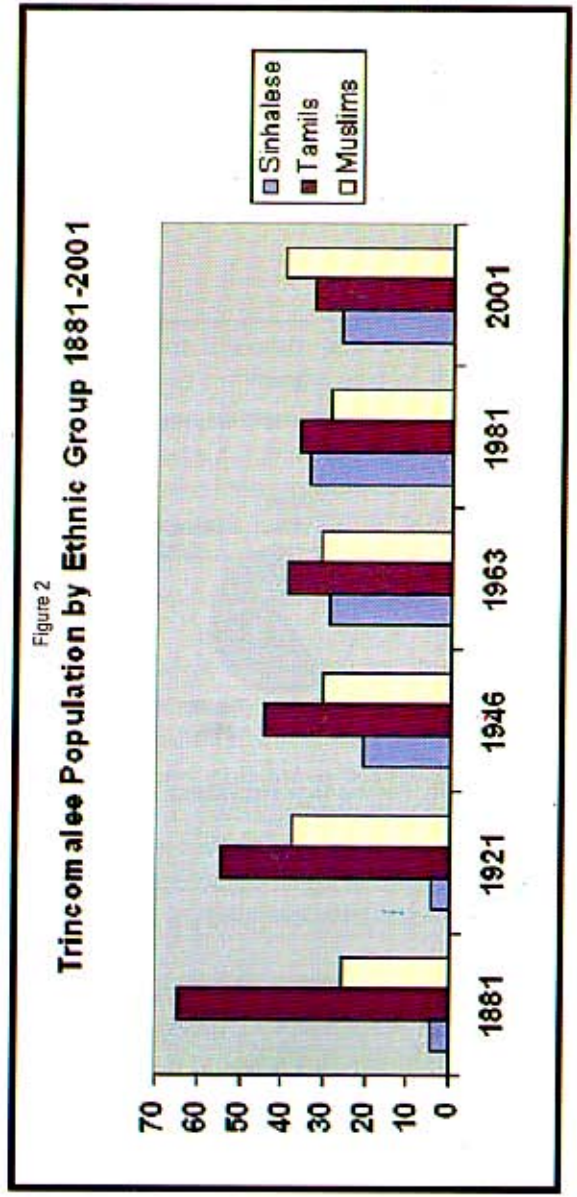


Figure 2

Source: Provincial Planning Secretariat, NEP Statistical Information 2003

and ambivalent local politics and cultural traditions that are played out on very local levels (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.

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. From this we can infer that approximately 62% of the population in Trincomalee has experienced displacement and approximately 7% remains displaced (See Appendix 1).[2] 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.

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). 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.

'Agency' is a term frequently used to describe a positive action taken by a member of a community in defiance of structural mechanisms, but it must be acknowledged that it is a loaded term and dependant on individual value judgements. Individual agency frequently offers a very ambivalent form of empowerment. It is not inherently positive and may not intrinsically benefit or influence greater social, cultural or political structures. Many actions taken by the IDPs can be considered response mechanisms, but some of these may have a negative impact on the individual, the community or communal values. Mob justice or the decision of children to join militant groups could be considered actions taken in response to displacement. The question of 'agency' is to what extent actions are signs of individual agency and what extent they are signs of manipulation by repressive structures.

The danger in ignoring agency is that we will slip once again into the familiar narrative of 'victimhood', which fixes people into static and passive categories used by institutional structures to control populations. This is not to argue that people have not been displaced by a complex articulation of national power struggles,

but to look at them purely as victims and pawns will render them incapable of becoming agents of change. In political, economic and humanitarian discourse the complex arena of the IDPs possibilities, choices and compromises are often ignored.

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). Within this discourse is the assumption that refugees and IDPs have short term and unsustainable outlooks. 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. It is important to see refugees as

active agents, as subjects with their plans, desires, conspiracies, piety, folly, intrigues, revenge, and spirit of reconciliation. Revolutionists, restorers, fatalists, - refugees are of all types. They are victims no doubt...But they are agents also, playing their bit.

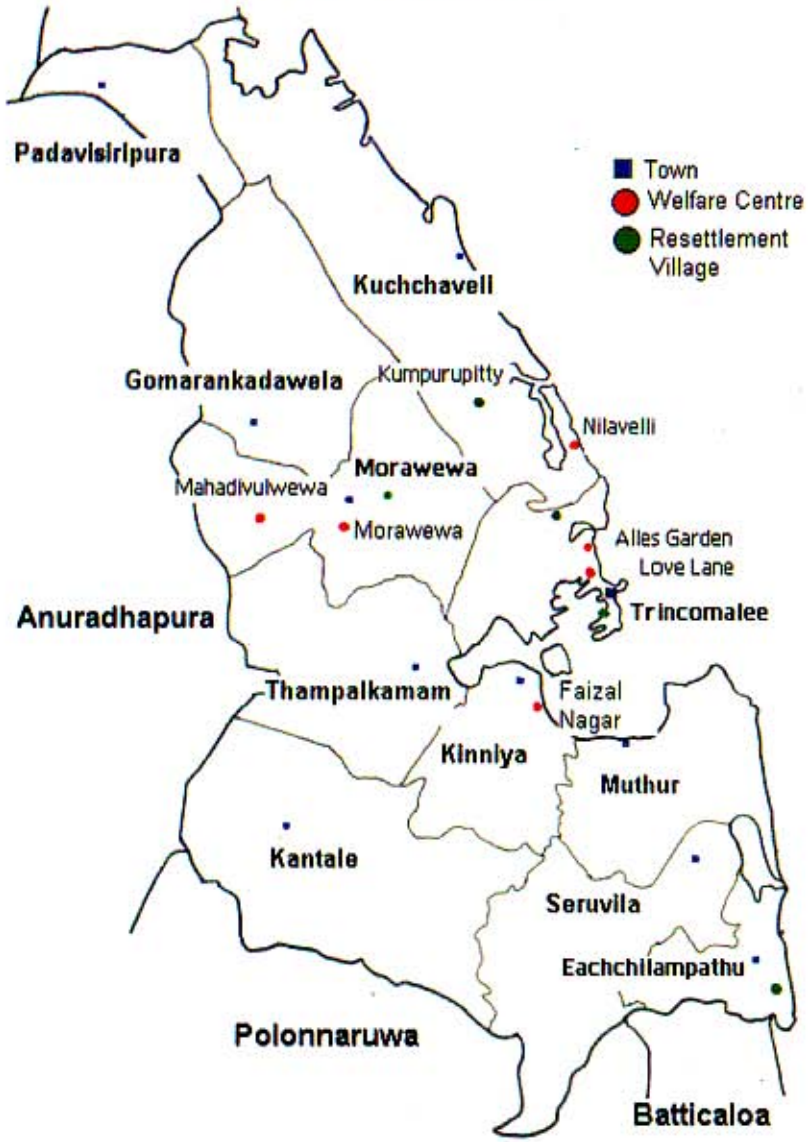
(Samaddar 2000:203-4).

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 explores 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 'DPs) 5 each were Muslims and

Map 1: Trincomalee



Source: Compiled from Integrated Food Security Programme (IFSP) Trincomalee Map

Sinhalese and 18 were Tamil with approximately equal numbers of men and women. The interviews were semi-structured 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 displaced cannot be treated as a homogenous group, even within the same conflict zone, so it is important to look at individual stories. 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.[3]

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.[4] 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.[5]

Part Two: 'Ethnicisation' and 'Militarisation' of Sri Lanka

The global rise of ethnic nationalism

> *[W]hat has succeeded the last age of empire is a new age of violence. They key narrative of the new world order is the disintegration of nation states into ethnic civil war...and the key language of our age is ethnic nationalism.*
>
> Igantieff 1994:2.

It is important not to forget that events in Trincomalee are related to the wider national context and that events in Sri Lanka are affected by international intervention, military, economic and ideological. Among other international factors that contributed to the violent crisis was the global economic decline in the 1970s, the political and military intervention of India, the pressure of the World Bank and the economics of war and 'peace talks' (rather than peace itself). Global modernising processes and ideologies associated with nation-state formation also played a key role in the 'ethnicisation' of Sri Lanka, politically, geographically and socially.

During the twentieth century a new discourse on globalisation was increasingly the focus of much research and became a common word in popular and public communication and policy. The common consensus was that the world was opening up (and had been at an increasingly rapid rate since the turn of the century) and borders surrounding territories, markets and identities were falling away at a greater rate and on a larger scale than ever before (Smith 1990; Beck; 2000; Giddens 2002; Hopkins 2002; Legrain 2003). It was assumed that the world was moving beyond ethnic identification, beyond nationalism, and beyond territorial boundaries of belonging towards a new era of liberal democracy (Ignatieff 1994:2). Instead a phenomenon of ethnic and national revivalism has been taking place; a resurgence in the 'politics of differentiation' and this is the paradox of globalisation (Basch et al 1995). Modernist homogenisation and ethnic and cultural fragmentation are not two opposing views, but 'two constitutive trends of global reality' (Friedman 1990:311). Such a phenomenon has been tying people ever more securely to certain constructions of the past, to imagined homelands and to mutually exclusive ethnic identities.

Since the 1970s issues of nationhood and minority problems emerged with unprecedented force (Eriksen 2002:3). Over the past few 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. (When nationalists make claims to all territories and peoples they directly bring about the creation of counter-nationalisms). These counter-nationalisms have often led to the demand for self-determination or political autonomy either within a separate state or as part of a federation. 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, Sierra Leone, Colombia, East Timor, Myanmar and of course Sri Lanka.

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. Both ethnic and nationalist ideologies become more far-reaching and dynamic once they find support and legitimacy in each other. 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).

The meanings of terms like 'ethnicity', 'ethnic conflict' and 'ethnic nationalism' are very ambiguous. Ethnicity is a self-conscious collective identity that naturalises cultural or physical attributes and attaches them to collectivities as part of their mytho-historical legacy

(Tambiah 1996). The central components of the primordialist claim are ideas of ancestry, descent, inheritance, kinship and territory of origin and this identity is believed to be bounded and enduring (Smith 1997; Geertz 1996). By ethnicity this paper is not referring to primordial attachments or immanent cultural forces, but 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 essay 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.[6]

The polarisation of ethnic identities in Sri Lanka

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

Although the political environment can influence the emergence or diminution of ethnic identity, it does not create difference where it did not already exist (Horowitz 2000:5). 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). We must also recognise that ethnic conflict is not simply a primordial phenomenon and 'people do not just kill

one another because of their customs' (Cohen 1996:84). 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).

Before the colonisation of Sri Lanka the country was not divided between the Sinhalese and Tamils in the modern sense of the terms, but was demarcated by the division between the Kandyan kingdoms in the highlands and those living on the coast (Schrijvers 1998:15; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2002:60). Boundaries and frontiers have changed over time, and through post-colonial state building processes they became 'racially' defined; the 'majority' Sinhala regions in the south and the 'minority' Tamil regions in the north and east. One of the greatest flaws of post-colonial politics worldwide was the confusion of the term 'nation' in relation to political state perimeters, which were in most cases a composite of many different homelands, interacting and overlapping. With Western colonisation came 'the era of fixed line boundaries' (Grundy-Warr et al 2003:98). Areas that were previously fluid frontiers with considerable cultural interpenetration and sometimes overlapping sovereignties became fixed under a centralised control. 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). Modern nation-state building processes introduced the politics of majority and minority representation and forced members to define and fix themselves into groups defined along cultural and linguistic lines.

Radicalisation along ethnic lines has taken place as a direct result of discriminatory politics. Jonathan Spencer records the development of 'ethnicised' politics and notes that it began as far back as the late 1800s. Victorian racial theory was transported by the British to Sri Lanka, not only introducing the idea of a distinct hierarchy of races, but also a racialised system of governance that

assumed each section of the population could only be represented by the same 'kind'. When Universal franchise was granted in 1931, communalism and divisive strategies along ethnic lines was already common practice (Spencer 1990:8-10). 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. Politics provides the platform for ethnic chauvinism and the incitement of inter-ethnic conflict and violence. 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.

Background to the Conflict

Sri Lanka is composed of three dominant ethno-religious communities. The Sinhalese make up 74% of the population, Tamils 17% and Muslims 8% and the country has two dominant languages – Sinhalese and Tamil.[7] Each group has internal differences and divisions, but a history of colonial and post-colonial nation-state building cemented the three groups into distinctive and conflicting ethno-political identities. Since independence in 1948 there have been numerous struggles over the direction that post-colonial Ceylon (re-named Sri Lanka in 1972) should take. There was a growing political competition during the 1950s for recognition and influence and the state apparatus became increasingly dominated by chauvinist interests. 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 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, 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 when the LTTE killed 13 Sinhalese soldiers in the north. These attacks were followed by organised violence against Tamil residents in the south and rioting across the country. The war has been divided into three phases Eelam War I, II and III. Eelam War I, 1983-1987, was marked by armed confrontations between the government's armed-forces and Tamil militants and massacres of civilians in border regions. During Eelam War II, 1990-1994 the fighting devolved even further into a 'dirty war' affecting civilians more than ever before. This period 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. In summer 1990 Muslim civilians living in the east, specifically Batticaloa, were also the targets of Tamil violence and massacres. Incidents of Muslim mob violence against Tamil civilians followed this and the government also 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). During Eelam War III, 1995-1999, the Government adopted a new strategy of 'War for Peace' and launched a series of attacks. As a result millions were forced to flee and find refuge outside the battle zones. In November 1999 the LTTE launched several surprise attacks and hundreds more civilians were displaced (Sorensen 2001; Spencer 1990).

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 lead to the largest displacements since the Feburary 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.

Chapter Two:

'They Have Become the War'[9]: The Place of People in the Conflict

Part One: The 'Dirty War'

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). In Sri Lanka this is reflected in the transformation of political violence from riots to systematic and organised massacres, disappearances, torture, rape, random searches and other human rights abuses (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:58). While this paper agrees with Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake's assertion that the conflict has moved beyond its original ethnic cause, it would also argue that from its very inception it has been about a fight for profit and power (1999:58).[10] The difference is that over time the ideology that supported this quest has broken down. After independence there was a situation that could be described as 'ideological over-production' with the creation of ethnic nationalisms and counter-nationalisms.[11] A move has taken place away from a discourse that highlighted ideologies of nation and national belonging to one that has simply tapped into people's prejudices and fear of the 'other'. Ideological production also seems to have lost force and attacks on people both physical and emotional seems to have taken its place. Less time is spent trying to win people over and more time is spent

in the creation of 'a culture of violence where the control of fear has increasingly become a component of political process' (Nordstrom 1992:40). The conflict has moved from one in which the 'hearts and minds' of the populace were an important part of gaining support to one in which the people's hearts, minds and bodies are under constant attack.

Ethnicity is still a strong organising principle in the conflict, if for no other reason than the structure of politics in Sri Lanka, and the culture of terror and violence in Sri Lanka is organised around communal ideologies. Like the 'culture of terror' that has been created on a global scale in the world at present this terror has been mobilised around a demonisation of an 'ethnic Other'. While state bodies or armed militants perpetrate violence and terror, the 'enemy' is represented as any member of the 'ethnic' community that these groups 'represent'.

As the violence has progressed the distinction between civilian and military has been increasingly blurred in 'a context of widespread militarization of civil society' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:58). Neloufer De Mel has studied the way militarisation of popular culture has taken place in Sri Lanka. People are controlled by the military and become socialised into believing that they are dependent on it. Military images and solutions are embedded in popular sub-conscious and popular culture reinforces this as songs, religion, films and dramas all start to demand patriotism. Even in advertising peace the grammar often echoes that of war. Peace slogans often perpetuate militarised slogans without interrogating them, representing war as the norm and peace as the other. War is also capitalised upon and used to sell. In advertisements for products unrelated to the conflict the language of war, of bombs, weapons and explosives are frequently used (De Mel 2003). Along with more sinister forms of militarisation, such as child recruitment, intimidation and terrorism, the whole population becomes militarised and politicised, leaving them little option of escape or space from which to actively condemn the war. Civilians become highly entangled and implicated in the war, far more than their actual involvement would seem to allow.

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 recruitment of children by the LTTE is a powerful tool used to control the civilian population. It is very strategic, because the employment of children also ties the family into the war allowing infiltration into homes and protecting loyalty to the LTTE through fear. In late 2003 and early 2004 thousands of children were released, but since the instability within the LTTE there has been a crack down on parents to return their children and vociferous recruitment in Batticaloa and Kinnyia districts (Collective for Batticaloa 2004). The forced displacement of civilians has also been used as a strategy to destabilise social institutions. Through displacement, community, family, privacy, trust 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 massacre 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).[12] This dehumanisation combined with the social and cultural dynamics has led to a political apathy that I came across during most of the interviews.

The displaced people often placed the future of the country and its peace in the hands of the politicians while simultaneously undermining the politician's capabilities. People generally did not know how to respond when asked about their views on future solutions. As one man answered 'the government has to decide on what happens' (Tamil man:38, Nilavelli w/c). A Sinhala man living in Mahadivulwewa welfare centre told me that, 'it is political, it is down to the politicians and so whatever decisions arise we will accept' the same man told me that the politicians behave like 'little children' (Sinhala man:50). This shows a clear ambiguity and political apathy, while he seemed to have little faith in the political system he is resigned to accept whatever decisions are made. 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).

Dirty war strategies are aimed at creating a climate of fear that will break people and prevent any resistance or allegiance to the 'enemy'. But they often backfire (Nordstrom 1992:30). This can be clearly seen in the case of Sri Lanka, where the dirty war tactics used by the Government – random searches and indefinite detentions, torture, restrictions on movement and attacks on civilian villages – has led to the militarisation of many Tamil civilians. As one of the cadres in Eachchilampathu told me, many children have

been orphaned and have no other option than to join the LTTE. Eachchilampathu is LTTE controlled and was thus the only place I visited where support for the LTTE could be openly shown (and had to be shown). In 1990 the village was bombed by the government, most of the men were arrested, killed or went missing and some women were molested. Army camps were set up and young men were forced to work for the Army unpaid. The occupants clearly continue to feel discriminated against by the Government and the willingness of the men to fight for the LTTE is not surprising. The LTTE has created the same resistance among the Muslims who remained relatively neutral for a long period until they were targeted by the LTTE in the east and driven from their homes in the north. The alleged reason for this was security, but instead the LTTE helped to create and enforce a new enemy, rather than breaking its back.

Divide and Rule

Ethnic divisions have been incited and used by different militant actors in a complicated twist to the well-documented policy of 'divide and rule'. Many people that I spoke to referred to the politicians as the trouble-makers purposefully making trouble between the communities to gain power. The twist in this 'post-colonial' perspective on 'divide and rule' is the participation of not one ruling party, but at least four different players. Firstly, the Sinhala-dominated Government, which is riddled with its own internal divisions has set out to create rifts between the Sinhala and the Tamils and the Tamils and the Muslims in order to rule all three. Secondly, the Muslim politicians highlight differences and divisions between the Tamils and the Muslims, undercutting linguistic links in order to mark themselves as aloof from the conflict and more recently in order to gain support from the Government. Thirdly, the LTTE has encouraged the distinction between the Tamils and the Sinhalese in order to physically divide the country into two distinct regions, over one of which it will have increased control. It has also been accused of creating divisions between the Tamils and the Muslims in order to gain support for its ethnic cleansing campaign. Fourthly,

the breakaway Karuna-led faction of the LTTE (which is now trying to enter politics as the representative of the Tamil people), brought to the fore the division within the LTTE between the Northern and Eastern Tamils accusing the LTTE of discriminating against the east. Thus Karuna took hold of such a distinction in order to gain support in the east and a gateway into political leadership. Also working against Tamil-Muslim cordiality have been various armed 'ex-militant' groups who 'have implemented the Sri Lankan Security Forces' strategy of divide and rule' (McGilvray 2001:20). 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.

The Government and LTTE have been accused of creating divisions between the Tamils and the Muslims in eastern Sri Lanka. The women from Eachchilampathu resettlement village blamed the break down of good relations between Tamils and Muslims on the politicians. A man who had been listening told me that with Tamils and Muslims living together the strength of the Sinhalese would go down. The Sinhala leadership did not want the Tamils and Muslims to join forces and so they caused these divisions (Resettled Tamils, Eachchilampathu). In 2003 violence broke out between the Tamils and Muslims in Kinniya division, in this instance a political analyst blamed the LTTE for provoking the Muslims into attacking the Tamils in order to raise a Tamil army in the east. The LTTE claimed that it wasn't behind this violence and alleged that the clashes were engineered by politicians insecure about the dialogue between the LTTE and the Muslim representatives in Kinniya (Liyanaarachchi 2003).

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). 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. The LTTE cadres that I spoke to in Eachchilampathu resettlement village talked about the way that roads and electricity had been connected as far as the Muslim village, but had not reached the Tamil villages. This can be seen as part of strategy on the part of the Government, keen to cultivate good relations with the Muslims and to discourage political collaboration between these two Tamil speaking communities (McGilvray 2001:22).

(Dis)placement – The place of civilians within the tactics of war

> One paradox of the nation-state is that for all its emphasis on people, it is happier to give up, displace or even destroy populations, than to give up land.
>
> (Grundy-Warr 2003:99).

There are 20 to 25 million internally displaced people in the world today due to conflict and human rights violations (Deng 2001:xiii). One factor that has contributed to increasing internal displacement is the rise in communal violence in which civilian displacement has increasingly become a military or political objective (Vincent 2001:2). 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. As in the recent years of the Colombian conflict the main incentives have moved from being ideological to far more strategic. 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).

The Sri Lankan Government is not the only government to try to strategically move and detain members of its civilian population in order to protect its sovereignty and control of its peripheral areas. Myanmar has seen the 'Four Cuts' military practice and also the implementation of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP). Both implemented with the objective of changing the human landscape and national reconsolidation. The 'Four Cuts' was a counter-insurgency measure that involved mass displacements and in the process thousands died and many human rights abuses occurred. The BADPs have been a vehicle for oppression and domination of the ethnic minorities. They have been associated with military offensives, forced labour, tighter military control, close surveillance and efforts to depoliticise ethnicity (Grundy-Warr et al 2003:99-102). The targeting of civilian bases blurred the line between 'rebel' soldier and civilian, and like the Tamils in Sri Lanka, all ethnic zones were considered insurgent and became targets of military action.

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.

Secondly, (dis)placement is economically motivated for reasons of development projects and the control of border taxation. Restrictions are placed on the freedom of movement of people and goods; taxed by the LTTE and curtailed by the Army with its hidden economy of corruption. Paramilitary groups have also gained a

monopoly on trade and taxation. Thirdly, displacement is militarily motivated in order to counter insurgents, maintain 'unity', preserve 'peace' and ultimately prevent any uprisings. In Sri Lanka the army has tried to cut the LTTE and other paramilitary groups off from their civilian bases by displacing whole villages into welfare centres. These camps were under tight surveillance and restricted movement of both people and goods. 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).

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

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. As Rajasingham-Senanayake notes, the 'confinement of people in camps constitutes a profitable exercise for armed groups', once confined to the camp the groups can exert terror and taxation over the population to produce 'an economy of terror, scarcity and fear' (1999:61). All warring parties benefit from this restriction on movement to extort money and to propagate ethnic chauvanism 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).

Part Two: Ethnic Enclaves

Ethnic Enclave Formation

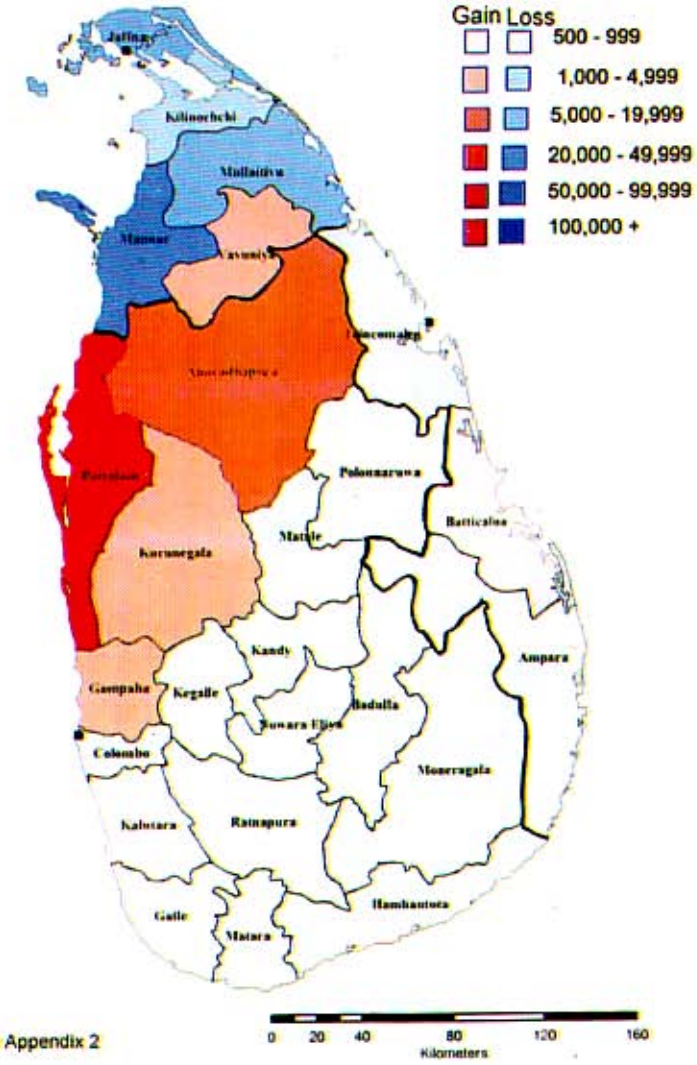
Colonial and post-colonial nation-sate formation and two decades of armed conflict has clearly 'destroyed much of Sri Lanka's mixed cultural geography and pattern of settlement' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:66). Violence and displacement has created ethnic enclaves and polarised collective identities 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 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'.[13] 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.

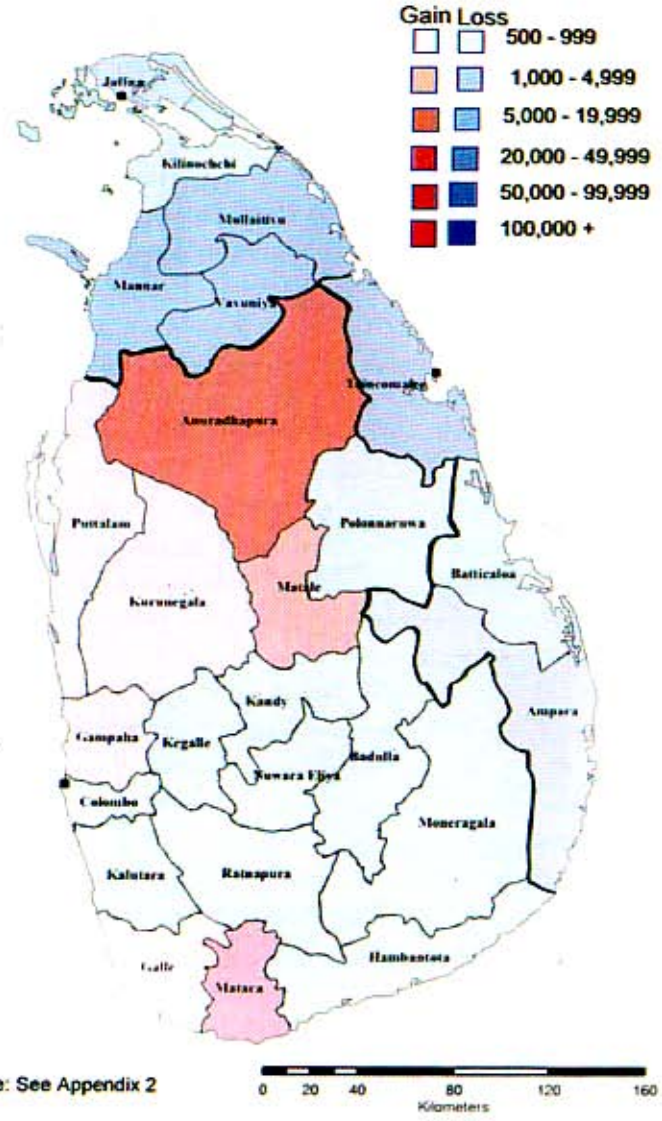
Although Trincomalee is not a district that represents a single majority ethnic community, like for example Puttalam or Jaffna, we can see that small ethnic enclaves have developed over the years. As mentioned before, the east coast has historically been a very multi-ethnic community surviving on strategies 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 shows the divisional level ethnic enclaves in Trincomalee district.

Map 2. District-level Ethnic Enclaves: Muslim IDPs Net Gains and Losses



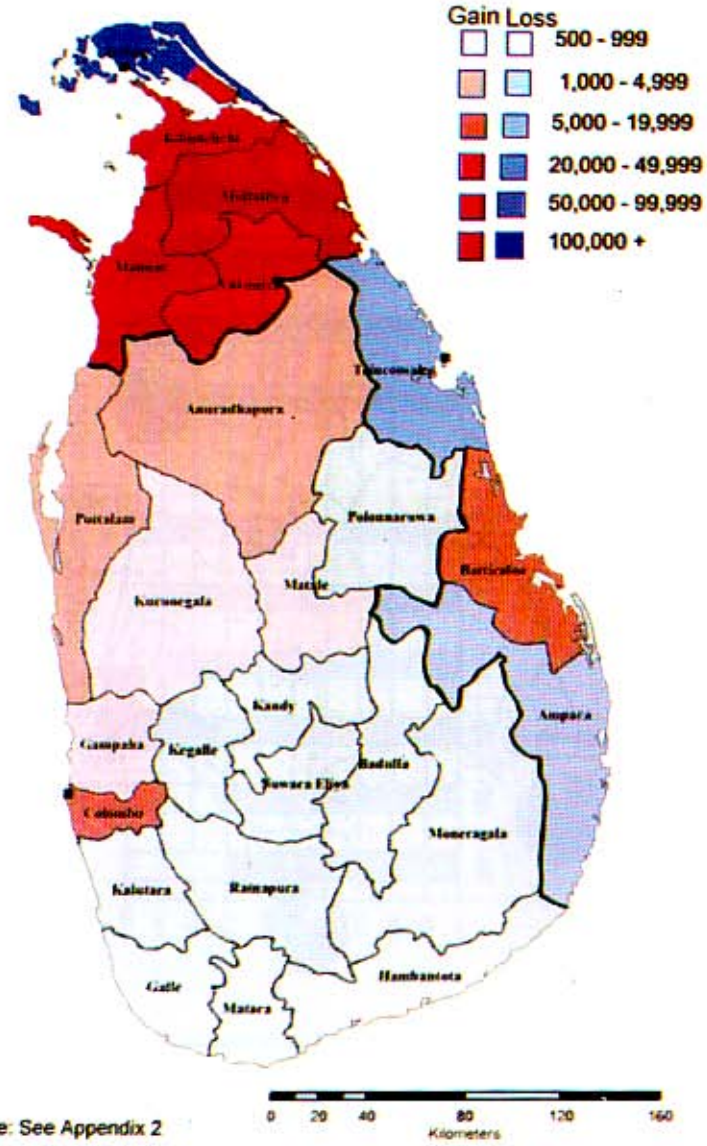
Source: See Appendix 2

Map 2. District-level Ethnic Enclaves: Sinhalese IDPs Net Gains and Losses



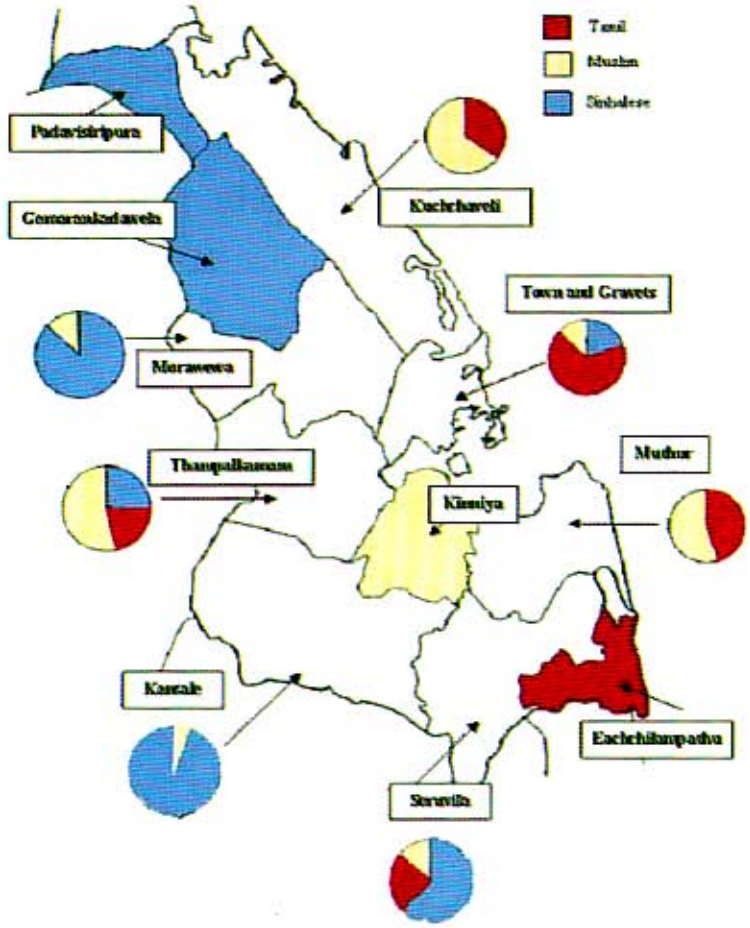
Source: See Appendix 2

Map 2. District-level Ethnic Enclaves: Tamil IDPs Net Gains and Losses



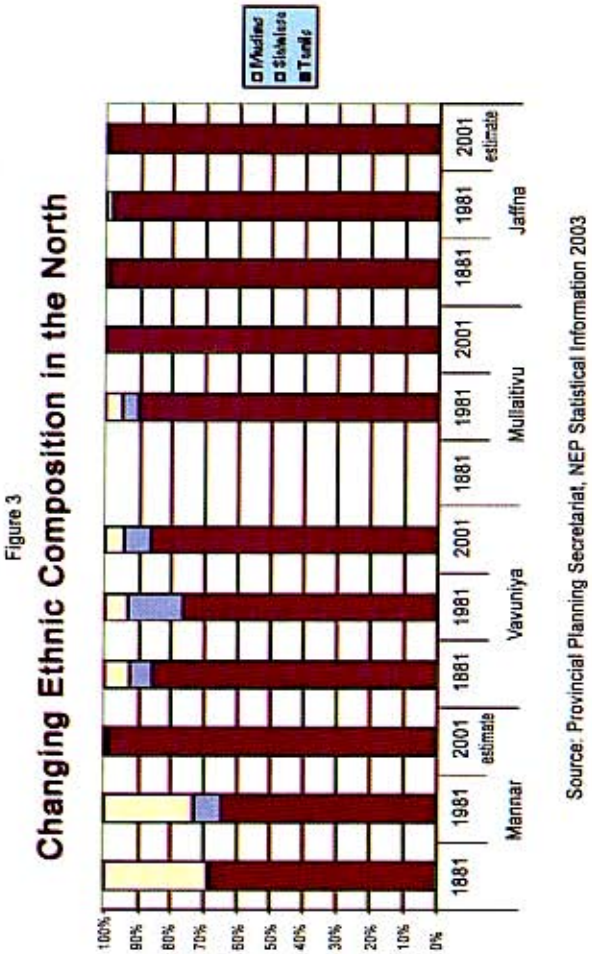
Source: See Appendix 2

Map 3. Regional-level Ethnic Enclaves: Ethnic Composition of Trincomalee District by Division, 2002



Source: Compiled from data in the District Planning Secretariat Statsitical Handbook 2003

Figure 3



Source: Provincial Planning Secretariat, NEP Statistical Information 2003

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 one of 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.

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.

Figure 4

Movement of IDPs out Trincomalee by ethnic group

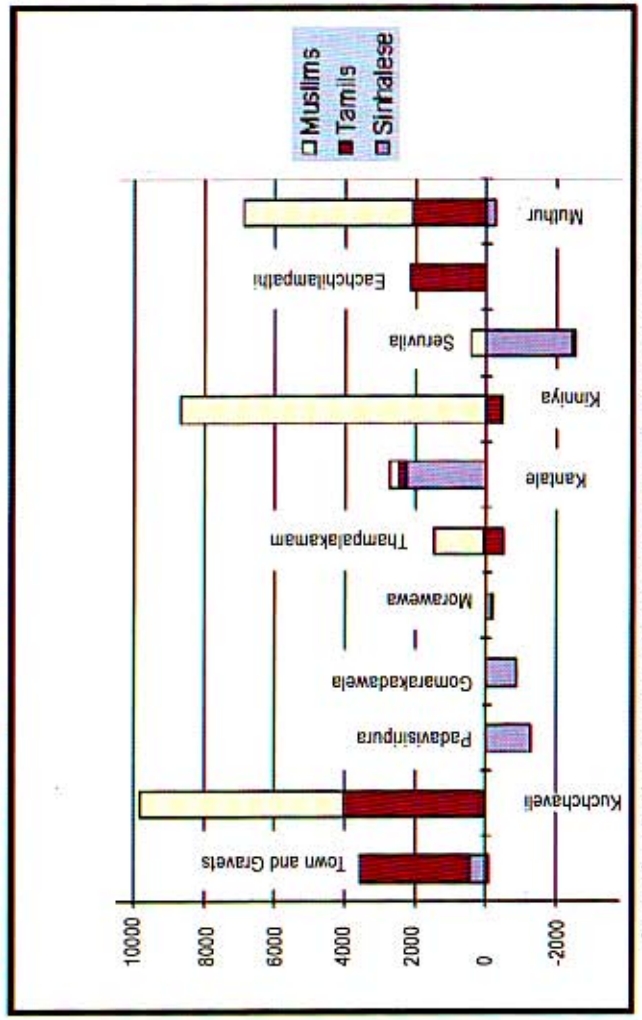
	IDPs registered in Trinco	Net Loss caused by Displacement	Loss as a % of ethnic group
Sinhalese	2,754	3,444	4.02%
Tamil	8,252	5,550	5.95%
Muslims	5,458	670	0.89%

* Using 1981 populations statistics withe the assumption that most were displaced before 1996

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

Figure 5

Population Change in Trincomalee District, 1996 - 2002
Increase/Decrease of population by division and ethnic group



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

Changing Perceptions: Ethnic enclave mentality

> *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-Senanayake 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 after marriage 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. Other Tamil men voiced the oppinion that 'something separate and own is good' (Resettled Tamil man:75, Kuchchavelli division): 'Most people wont 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.[14] The group of Sinhalese in Morawewa welfare centre who recounted stories of violence, suffering and loss also told me that they are 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.

Perceptions and Attitudes Towards the Ethnic 'Other'

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.

The dominant discourse in 1993, notes Joke Schrijvers, implied that all Tamils were terrorists, while on her return in 1998 a systematic distinction was being made by most Sinhalese between Tamils and 'Tamil Tigers', while the dominant discourse on Muslims had become much more antagonistic and racist (1998:12). I also noticed this widespread prejudice. Muslims were frequently described as two-faced, untrustworthy, selfish and aloof by both the Sinhalese in the south and the Tamils in Trincomalee. 'The Muslims are like eel fish' they are two faced, supporting whoever has power (resettled Tamil man:75 Kumpurupitty). They were presented as opportunistic and advantaged due to favours that they received from the government. On several occasions the Tamils would use negative ethnicised discourse to describe the Muslims and juxtapose it with a positive statement regarding the Sinhalese: 'Muslims are not trustworthy people - the Muslims are trouble makers in the world...Sinhala are trustworthy people – they will attack you, but the next day they are good' (Resettled Tamil man:75 Kumpurupitty); 'The Muslims are so selfish here...the Sinhala are more sympathetic' (Resettled Tamil woman:27, Trincomalee).

The Tamils were not the only people in Trincomalee to voice a negative typecast construction of the 'other' ethnic community. One Muslim man during a discussion about the relations with the Sinhalese, made a forceful distinction between the southern and Kandyan Sinhalese who were 'good people' and the Sinhalese here, who 'chop people like they chop fish' (Muslim male:74, Love Lane w/c). When I asked for the reason for this difference he referred to the Sinhala colonisation of Trincomalee and made a clear connection between land and belonging. The relations between the Tamils and the Muslims in Trincomalee were good, he told me, because they were both born here.

In discussions with displaced Tamils, the topic of ethnic conflict and inter-ethnic relations was time and again tied to issues of land, colonisation and political representation. Narratives of

invasion and fear of ethnic domination were common in social constructions of the 'ethnic other'. The apparently high fertility rate of the Muslims was seen as a threat and Muslim leaders were accused of encouraging a fast population growth in order to colonise areas. These narratives of colonisation were also applied to the Sinhalese by both the Tamils and some Muslims.

Two Sinhalese men that I spoke to on two separate occasions on the south coast also used the narrative of invasion. Both men represented these two communities as foreign to Sri Lanka. One man told me that the Tamils had come from India to work and had settled in the north, and 'there should be no division this is Sri Lanka, why should they have a separate land. If we give them some land they will try to take more and more' (Sinhalese man:26). The other man described Muslims as 'crazy people' and he associated the Muslims living in this small town in the South with the Al-Qi'ada Terrorists and the destruction of the Buddha of Bamiyan in Afghanistan. His language implied that Muslims were outsiders invading the pure Sinhala country (Sinhalese man:27). The effects of larger ideological frameworks can be clearly seen in the constructions of the other and in the perceptions of the Muslims. Even global discourses and attitudes have been absorbed by the general population and used to support their own prejudices and to explain the events in their locality.[15]

In comparison to the Tamils I found a different approach to the construction of ethnic difference among both the Muslims and Sinhalese. Schrijvers notes that the Muslim women were much less likely to construct images of 'the ethnic other' that presented them as a 'natural' enemy than their Tamil neighbours (Schrijvers 1998:25). I also found this to be true among the Sinhalese. Both the Muslims and Sinhalese that I met were much less likely to form a negative image of the 'ethnic other'. Most of the Muslims and Sinhalese that I spoke to were happy to wish the Tamils well in their quest for some form of self-determination. This could have been because of the proximity of the LTTE, both in time and space and fear of blaming the community that had done this. It could also have been a strategic move. Schrijvers believes that where the

Muslims are concerned it is a difference in discourse that does not include 'ethnic' stereotyping (1998: 25). What Schrijvers has left out of the equation is the Muslim discourse surrounding the Sinhalese in which I found clear examples of negative ethnic stereotyping. I would therefore come to a more instrumentalist conclusion, that the Sinhalese and Muslims were making (sub)conscious decisions not to say anything negative against the community that had until recently wielded the sword.

What struck me most was the general lack of 'ethnicisation' in the discourse of all three communities. There was a clear distinction made by all three communities between the general population of an ethnic community and those parties that perpetrated the violence. In many of the narratives the violence was described as coming from outside and perpetrators were often referred to as 'thugs'. A lot of emphasis was placed on the role of politicians and leaders in the cause and perpetration of violence. There were of course some striking exceptions, but in general people were very aware and keen to explain that 'there are good people and bad people' (Resettled Tamil woman:27, Trincomalee).

Shifting Constructions of Ethnicity

In each situation the construction of the primary 'ethnic other' changed and reasons for conflicts and differences between the communities switched between religion and language, depending on the narrator and the situation. The conflict in Sri Lanka has been classed as having both religious and linguistic roots. I wanted to find out what it was that each community based its construction of the conflicting 'other' on, but the more I probed the deeper I sank. It seemed to me that definitions and differences not only changed depending on location and specific experiences, but also throughout the course of an interview. The emphasis changed a lot depending on the location and situation of the people.

I was frequently met with statements such as 'language is not a problem...religion here is the problem' (Resettled Tamil male:26, Eachchilampathu). While in the same village I was told

Muslims and Tamils speak the same language and 'religion is not an issue', while later in the interview I was told religion is a problem between the Tamils and the Muslims and this is why there is no intermarriage, whereas, as far as the Sinhalese are concerned only language is a problem; 'the religious issues is not a problem' because the Sinhalas, I was told, worship the Tamil's deities (Resettled Tamil women, Eachchilampathu). In other situations I was told that intermarriage took place between Tamils and Muslims because of the language connections, but not between Tamils and Sinhalese. Some Tamils included the Muslims due to language (Tamil man:38, Nilavelli w/c) while others excluded Muslims because of religion (Eachchilampathu resettlement village). While some Sinhalese told me that 'language is not a problem' (Morewewa w/c) others told me that it is (Mahadivulwewa w/c).

The insightful comment of one resettled Tamil woman explained it very well when she said 'it is a matter of contact' (27: Trincomalee). 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 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 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).

A dual process occurred after the 1983 riots, Kanapthipillai tells us, the sharpening of conflicts and the creation of new

intimacies. Few of the displaced people's narratives offered such clear distinctions. There was a marked ambiguity; friendships and sympathies were often recounted alongside fear, anger or resentment. Often this paradox was addressed by distancing the fear they felt from their everyday lives and reactions to others. Many of the women, especially the Sinhalese, insisted that their fear or bitterness was deeply psychological and not related to their actions. The narratives of most of the displaced people were caught up in a complex of contradictions and complexities that evaded a simple dualism. My point is that on one level cross-cutting relations disturb the simple polarisation theory, and on anther, people's very construction of their place in this narrative is not stable, but relational and shifting. People are locked into narratives that can be as confusing to them as it is to the question of peaceful co-existence.

This is not to assert that people do not know their own minds, many people forcefully asserted their views of the 'other' whether positive, negative or indifferent. Instead it is to open up a space of analysis that will allow us to look at the 'agency' of the displaced in the construction of a discourse of the 'other' which is relational and processual. The presence of dialogical and processual discourse does not mean the end of reifying discourse, '[p]eople need and use both' and there are certain 'goals one can only reach by reifying cultural difference' (Baumann 1999:132).[16] People are not 'the dupes or clones of one cultural identity or another', to be socially competent they must know when best to reify and when best to relativise difference (Baumann 1999:132).

Chapter 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)

Part One: 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 agreeing on an accelerated resettlement programme (UNHCR 2003, Mohideen 2004). While return and 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 on return and 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. In Faizal Nagar welfare centre one of the Tamil IDPs that I spoke to mentioned what he saw as 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.[17] 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.[18] 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.[19] 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 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, 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, because as Rajasingham-Senanayake says, '[w]ithout security...home, houses, and fields are useless' (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).

One problem with ethno-nationalist majoritarianism like Kaufmann's, is that there exists an internal diversity that never really goes away, it is an 'infinite regress that will go nowhere' (Rajasingham-Senanayake Interview 23/06/04). There will always be another minority. The core value for a post-conflict settlement in

Sri Lanka should not be the building of ethnic enclaves, but rather a recognition that Sri Lanka is a historically multicultural land with a unique settlement pattern and that every ethnic community is a minority somewhere else. Every region has different minorities, what Rajasingham-Senanayake calls 'local minorities', and if devolution is to work there needs to be a balance of power so that minorities are protected in every region. This process of thinking locally allows us to 'think beyond abstract constitutional strictures to their relevance and applicability to current realities and political cultures' (Rajasingham-Senanayake 1999:67). In order to deconstruct exclusionary ethno-nationalist discourse we must move away from the dominant view that constructs the nation as containing only one majority.

Kaufman's argument reproduces the logic of ethnic nationalism, which in turn perpetuates the practice of discrimination, the creation of counter-nationalisms and, at its extreme, ethnic cleansing. At the moment Sri Lanka's peace process, built on the ideology of the nation-state and confined to politically fixed identities, is heading straight for such an outcome. 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). Identity therefore needs to be reformulated within the discourse of peace. Currently identity is seen as politically fixed and governed by top-down structures, rather than transversal, multi-lateral and processual. The vision for peaceful Sri Lanka needs to draw from the deep roots of co-existence and multiculturalism in South Asia rather than Western forms of multi-culturalism that 'put people in boxes' (Rajasingham Interview, 2004). This call for a more integrated and multi-ethnic Sri Lanka is, as the Centre for Policy Alternatives

(CPA) asserts, a 'cliche, to be sure, but its truth is not diminished by its being obvious' (CPA 2003:52).

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.[20] 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 CPA 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'.

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). This paper challenges his 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.

Part Two: The Place of People in the Peace Process

A Desperate Hope

The average person does not support war and there was a general view in Trincomalee that the conflict must stop. As Nordstrom says, '[i]t is hard to convince people to support a war when the fight for the 'hearts and minds' of the people involves destroying them' (Nordstrom 1992:29). There are signs of peace, a displaced man told me, 'the conflict has no backing from the people here who are disgusted by the LTTE and the Government, so there must soon be peace' (Muslim man:74, Love Lane w/c). There was support among all three communities for the Tamil cause and recognition of the need for a more inclusive political system.

There also appeared to be a sense of hope, albeit a desperate hope in a desperate situation: 'peace will come ... it's compulsory ... it must come' (Resettled Tamil woman:27, Eachchilampathu). Although people voiced this belief their voices were tainted with desperation, a sense of incredulity that the traumas they have experienced could be repeated: 'how many times should you make displacement here?' (Resettled Tamil woman:42, Trincomalee). People are tired, they told me, there cannot be any more war, 'they are too tired' to retaliate (Sinhala woman:60, Morewewa w/c). People in all three communities were living in a state of continual caution, careful about where they went, what they said and even what they thought. There was among many a clear and marked conscious will to 'not remember', one man told me that 'these things are no longer in my memory' (Muslim man:74, Love Lane w/c). According to University Teachers for Human Rights (UTHR), this is a strategy used by most conflict-affected people in order to survive. People make 'a conscious decision to know as little as possible about what happened' and talking to people just before or after an incident of violence they would assure you that things were normal and peaceful (UTHR 1993). This backs up the notion that this 'hope' is born from a desperate will to survive.

I also uncovered an undercurrent of prejudice, distrust, resentment and fear that was inflected in over half the discussions that I took part in. One or two people were bitter and fairly negative about future peace. The question is, one Tamil woman rhetorically asked, 'how can we trust them [the Sinhalese] and go back to the way things were?' (51, Alles Garden w/c). She had no hope for good relations between the two and because she had experienced violence several times was not confident about the prospects for peace. This of course is unsurprising and more surprising was the strong current of positive and open attitudes towards members of 'other' ethnic communities; many were remarkably reflective and non-partisan. 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 desperate hope that I picked up on echoed what Radhika Coomaraswamy calls 'a sense of "never again"', that surrounds the riots of July 1983 (Coomaraswamy 2003:7). People have experienced too much horror and the feeling in Colombo was that the riots would not happen again despite the fact that private views of individuals (their prejudices and resentments) had not changed.[21] I propose that this feeling also exists in Trincomalee district in response to the instances of brutal violence and displacement. While we can be optimistic with regards to the very singular and unique (within the history of Sri Lanka) event of July 1983, can we be so optimistic about the non-recurrence of violent displacement that has a very long history within Sri Lanka and Trincomalee?

Violence and displacement has been played out differently in Trincomalee. There has been a lack of citizen participation, structures of co-existence were a prominent feature of society before, during and after violence and time and the actions of the ceasefire has been a panacea to feelings of resentment, bitterness and the memory of fear. Despite this, the dirty war style violence in Trincomalee is a largely top-down aggression that is extremely dependent on political and military actors, thus, we cannot rule out its recurrence. In contrast to Coomaraswamy's observation my findings, I believe, reveal that private views are possibly the most

positive aspect of the present situation. 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.

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 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, that had experienced two episodes of conflict and displacement, had set up a fishing co-operative that had 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 foreground as reasons for good community relations.

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. 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 needs greater appreciation and more integration into the peace process as a whole.

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 (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 reinstallation of a peaceful, supportive and democratic society. My vision would be to create as many cross-cutting identifications as possible, what Coomaraswamy calls 'humanist bonds' that cut across ethnic boundaries in employment, commerce, education and other socio-cultural practices (2003:6; 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.[22]

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

Chapter Four:

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, hypernationalistic rhetoric 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.

This paper has explored the changing place of ethnicity in the Sri Lankan conflict moving beyond a traditional focus on ethnicity as a root cause to an exploration of the dirty war tactics now in progress. In these mechanisms of war ethnicity has become the line along which the dirty war is played out in order to militarise and politicise the population. Chapter Two documented the divisive, dislocating and dehumanising strategies of the dirty war and explored emplacement and displacement of civilians as more than a product of the conflict, but as a strategy of the war itself. The (dis)placement of people has been at the centre of the struggle over place and space 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. The affects of conflict-induced (dis)placement have been explored in relation to inter-ethnic co-existence and attitudes towards the ethnic 'other'.

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.

Overall the objective of this paper was 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 overwhelming' and there needs to be found an alternative ideal of unity from which to critique the divisive strains of ethnic nationalism (Spencer 1990:12).

> *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 (Rajasingham 1999:66-67).*

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 affects 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.

Inter-ethnic relations amongst the IDPs in Trincomalee district and future prospects for peaceful co-existence

Report for the Human Rights Commission Sri Lanka and the International Centre for Ethnic Studies.

Objective

The objective of the study was to gain information from which to begin to construct and inform peaceful co-existence programmes.

This report is the outcome of a combined internship with the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (ICES) and the Human Rights Commission IDP department Sri Lanka. The data was collected over June and July 2004, whilst based in Colombo a period of field research also took place in Trincomalee district. This report summarises the findings, which are more extensively recounted in the preceding paper. The purpose of this report was to look at inter-ethnic relations on the east coast of Sri Lanka, which is a region that although deeply implicated in the two decades of violence has been under researched and given little attention in the history of the peace process. Batticaloa is at present more central to the prospects for future peace in Sri Lanka and at the time of the visit was heavily embroiled in political and conflict related developments due to the split in the LTTE and the attacks on professionals in the region. Despite this and in fact due to these developments this report has focused on Trincomalee district in the north-east. Batticaloa was less stable and thus access would have been more heavily restricted, also the eyes of Sri Lanka were already focused on this region, but for very different reasons than the focus of this report. In other words Batticaloa was perceived to be caught up in 'high politics' while this paper's focus is on the 'deep politics' of

society and so geographical distance helped to maintain this distinction. In respect of inter-ethnic relations, dynamics vary considerably within the east coast alone not to mention the island as a whole. With an equal representation of Tamils, Sinhalese and Muslims, Trincomalee thus offered a very unique and diverse area of study.

It would have been too much for this report to address interethnic relations among the general populace and this would have proceeded to produce vast and unhelpful generalisations. The paper thus focuses on IDPs and to a lesser extent those resettled after long periods of displacement. Its objective was to analyse links between displacement and inter-ethnic relations by focussing on the changing perceptions of the other ethnic communities. 80% of the population in the north-east has been affected by displacement and approximately 62% of the population of Trincomalee has been displaced at some point in time for varying periods and often repeatedly. Thus it would appear to be very important to assess the affects of such displacement on relationships among communities that have historically been inter-mixed and inter-related on several social levels, but which now forms the framework for a discourse of 'ethnic' conflict on local and national scales.

When starting this project I was asked to look at the possibility of harmony between the different ethnic communities on the east coast in order to prevent a recurrence of violent displacement that was forecast, by one member of the HRC IDP department, to take place within the next 5 years unless something drastic was to change. This was a massive undertaking and one that was limited by time, resources and expertise. This report is thus more of a background paper on the views and perceptions of those displaced by the conflict and their potential role in conflict resolution at a local and national level. This report offers a number of possibilities for future research and makes a number of recommendations for policy approaches.

1. Summary of findings

1.1 In Trincomalee like the rest of Sri Lanka ethnicity has been a tool used by political leaders and has been manipulated in order to create divisions for the purpose of control and power for a select few. This political manipulation cannot easily be stopped by grass-roots peace initiatives. It also does not look close to stopping at the present time as demonstrated by the spates of killings and riots that the east has seen over the past year and the discourse and fear of invasion that was clear and demonstrable in several of the interviews that I conducted. In fact as the national peace process progresses this manipulation and rhetoric is likely to increase as some try to disrupt its progress while others try to control the outcome in their favour.

1.2 Apathy: the internally displaced and the resettled communities generally demonstrated apathy when it came to peace on a societal level. A report by Oxfam (2004) also picked up on this and pointed out that interviewees were generally sceptical about their potential to have an impact beyond the local level. This is understandable and to some extent has been proved to be the case time and time again especially in the east where there is a limited political space for civil society peace building or relationship building which are often constrained by larger political events such as the split in the LTTE that created immense instability and tension within this region. People felt generally that they had no control at this level and that peace was in the hands of the politicians, often simultaneously they would voice a lack of confidence in the politicians themselves.

1.3 There was a concern and fear of ethnic colonisation and ethnic cleansing across the three communities. This was intimately related to their displacement and the resettlement of other

communities. This was a key cause of antagonism and distrust.

1.4 The displacement of communities had also lead to the formation of ethnic enclaves on a national and district level. IDP welfare centres can also be viewed as localised ethnic enclaves. This in turn has been accused of creating an '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).

1.5 There was not a clear-cut ethnic enclave mentality among the displaced and there was a general inconsistency regarding people's attitudes towards living with other ethnic communities. In general there was surprisingly little evidence of ethnic enclave mentality. The Tamils that I spoke to demonstrated a stronger ethnic enclave mentality than the Sinhalese or Muslims, but considering the relative violence that they had suffered this was not surprising. The Sinhalese showed the least and this could be attributed to a continuing minority complex.

1.6 Local experiences, combined with national and international discourse created a plethora of localised attitudes towards and perceptions of the other ethnic communities. The topic of ethnic conflict was time and time again tied to issues of land, colonisation and political representation. Narratives of invasion and fear of ethnic and cultural domination were common in social constructions of the 'ethnic other'.

1.7 Relations were by no means good and there was a clear undercurrent of prejudice, distrust and resentment. The Tamils were also generally more sceptical about the prospects for future peace and good relations between the communities.

What was surprising was the strong feeling of hope and the open attitudes towards members of the other communities. There was a sense that people were ready for peace. The findings revealed that private feelings were the most positive aspect of the present situation

1.8 There was a conspicuous lack of 'ethnicisation' in the discourse of all three communities and generally clear distinctions were made between the perpetrators of violence and the general population of an ethnic community. It became clear that ethnic identification was highly situational and context specific and the differences that were highlighted changed not only between people but also during the course of an interview.

1.9 My findings supported the idea that ethnicity is a set of perceived cultural differences that communities collect around. Identities are not static, but situationally defined and socially constructed. Conflict between these different communities is not natural or unavoidable, but is triggered by uneven power and resource distribution, old and new prejudices, and political manipulation.

1.10 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 shape individuals' and communities' perceptions of the other.

1.11 The Study by CPA 'For the Sake of Lasting Peace analyses people's attitudes towards the Peace Process and addresses the underlying dynamics of public support. One of its major findings was that support for the peace process is greatest among those with the most and least contact with other ethnic groups. 'Substantial ethnic integration facilitates peace, but a little bit of contact is a dangerous thing' (CPA 2003: 8). It also found that overall those who most strongly embraced their ethnic identity were the most supportive of the peace proposals.

They were also the most likely to protest a peace agreement that they considered unfair.

1.12 Some of those I spoke to noted the movement of other communities away from the locality as placing a strain on relationships and the renewed contact that the ceasefire facilitated had eased tension and improved relations. It became clear that increased interaction since the ceasefire had eased tensions between a number of communities. On a number of occasions I was told about renewed social and economic connections.

1.13 There were clear signs of peace and reconciliation among the different communities. There were a number of different strategies taking place to re-establish socio-economic relationships, predominantly within resettlement villages.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Since the signing of the MOU in 2002 there has been an abundance of peace-related civil society initiatives targeting peaceful co-existence and relationship building. During the short time I was in Sri Lanka I came across at least three peace-building projects while I spoke to people working on several others. Approaches in general continued to work along lines of ethnic difference and they thus encouraged a naturalisation of the divisions between the different communities.

2.2 This report recommends that several things take place to improve relations between the three communities:

1. It should be recognised that conflict, fear or distrust are not natural and unavoidable they are feelings and situations which have causal factors some of which can be addressed.

2. Although grass-roots initiatives can do little to stop political manipulation what can take place are educational

programmes that challenge this rhetoric, offering people an informed and truthful representation of the situation. Of course not everyone will want to listen especially those who have been the victims of much violence, but according to my research even some of these IDPs are willing and able to distinguish between those that commit the violence and those with whom they have historically lived in harmony and inter-dependence.

3. People need to be encouraged to resolve their disputes in a peaceful way without involving powerful political and military actors such as the LTTE, the armed forces or the HomeGuards.
4. Relationship-building needs to be encouraged. A key task would be the development of greater trust and understanding between and within communities.[23]
5. The report points to the fact that increased encounters between people from different ethnic backgrounds is a good thing because:

   - increased positive interaction will lead to positive changes at the personal and inter-personal level,
   - Trust and understanding is built through repeated positive encounters with the same people. Stereotypes and demonisation are countered, rumours challenged and people, especially children, are socialised into a more tolerant world-view.
   - Attitudinal change will lead to more peaceful co-existence, but this will involve more than a few one-off activities and will involve a long-term approach to building inter-dependence and familiarity.

2.3 Relationship Building

2.3.1 Increased inter-ethnic interaction is already taking place among many of those spoken to, especially among the

resettled and this has been facilitated by the ceasefire. This should be recognised and encouraged.

2.3.2 Relationship-building exercises with IDPs should involve multi-ethnic approaches and organisations should be encouraged to employ ethnically diverse staff or volunteers as the Oxfam report pointed out mono-ethnic organisations are less likely to be effective in working across different communities (Oxfam 2004). Many of the activities and projects that were running in the areas visited were working with mono-ethnic groups and thus inadvertently perpetuating divisions and differences. Few projects aimed to integrate the different communities through crosscutting issues or activities such as fishing, farming, trade, development, human/labour rights, celebrations, education or gender.

2.3.3 There is a need for realism and proportionality in terms of macro impacts. Relationship-building initiatives are likely to be community based and highly localised. Whether they help to build trust in the long term is difficult to answer, although it would seem logical that with wider movements towards peace these ties would create a more cohesive society. While on the other hand a return to extreme politics or fighting would likely see their collapse. Peace though is not linear or top-down and while high politics will influence local peace building activities these local activities will influence wider public perception and attitudes towards the Peace Process itself. Although an uncertainty has already been highlighted among those on the ground regarding the impact that individuals have on the Peace Process it would seem retrogressive to dismiss it altogether.

2.3.4 The Study by CPA 'For the Sake of Lasting Peace analyses people's attitudes towards the Peace Process and addresses the underlying dynamics of public support. One of its major

findings was that support for the peace process is greatest among those with the most and least contact with other ethnic groups. It also found that overall those who most strongly embraced their ethnic identity were the most supportive of the peace proposals. They were also the most likely to protest a peace agreement that they considered unfair. Thus it is important not to envisage relationship building in any way as an attempt to undermine individual or community beliefs. It is an activity to promote understanding and trust which in its turn would lead to a more liberal/inclusive view on what is considered a fair settlement.

2.3.5 Relationship building is not an easy task especially because the IDPs are not neutral within the political conflict and instead the movement of people and the welfare centres are politically contentious areas. Dialogues between different communities are often closely followed by political entrepreneurs and any relationship building activity would have to be careful not to attract the unwanted attention of those who may wish to sabotage such ventures.

2.3.6 To what extent can there be a 'trickle up' affect when it comes to community based relationship-building projects in Trincomalee? The internally displaced and the resettled communities generally demonstrated apathy when it came to peace on a societal level. The Oxfam report also picked up on this and pointed out that interviewees were generally sceptical about their potential to have an impact beyond the local level (Oxfam 2004). People spoke of peace as something that had to happen at a high political level and they couldn't understand how increasing tolerance and understanding could lead to peace. This attitude needs to be targeted and challenged by information, education and communication programmes.

2.4 The role of the HRC

2.4.1 Although the focus of the HRC is not relationship building and peace work is already over-represented within Sri Lanka, the HRC cannot ignore the conflict. The conflict is integral to many of the human rights abuses that the Commission is in constant battle with specifically when it comes to IDPs. It could also been argued that the HRC may have an advantage in the area of relationship-building due to its close and unbiased relationship with all communities, the longevity and stability of its presence, and its neutrality.

2.4.2 HRC needs to integrate a conflict and peace perspective into its mainstream programming particularly where it comes to its work with IDPs. This could be done by developing relationships between and within communities around concrete needs, issues and human rights practice. HRC could also take a role in helping sensitise the donor and NGO community to peace/relationship-building and encourage an integrated approach.

2.4.3 HRC could continue to build on this by ensuring that all its operational staff are able to converse in both languages and most importantly ensuring that its staff are ethnically diverse with equal representation from all ethnic communities, religions and genders. It would be encouraging to see this diversity as often as possible working together in the field. HRC could also seek out opportunities to work with ethnically diverse organisations.

2.4.4 Advocacy. HRC has a unique position in that it works closely with those at the grass roots level affected directly by conflict with other communities while maintaining a public and position in government. Thus HRC could be used as bridge between the two, communicating messages out to rural areas and isolated people and also communicating measures from the bottom-up. The latter of these two could be strengthened

as a means to increase the visibility and importance attributed to public opinion, attitudes and experiences within high politics.

2.5 Further Study

2.5.1 To inform this study further investigation could take place into:

- the role of gender and age in relationship-building among the IDPs.
- the perceptions and attitudes of IDPs that live with family or friends or integrate into town life
- the populations that do not move but experience a drastic alteration to the ethnic composition of their region.

2.5.2 There have been a proliferation of peace-related civil society initiatives since the signing of the MOU, but as far as the report is aware there has been no attempt to 'map' such activities or to assess whether they 'add up' and have a cumulative impact. This would also be a worthwhile area for further study.

End notes

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.

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

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.

4 The children that were born in the camps or those that were too young to remember life outside the camps would be an interesting group for further study to explore the affects of being born into a life of 'displacement' and insecurity, their sense of belonging and the perceptions and interactions with members of different ethnic communities.

5 To compliment this paper a study should also be done on the perceptions of those who do not move, those left behind and those acting as 'hosts'. Some would have lived in situations where large numbers of their ethnic 'other' had suddenly and violently been removed or large numbers of their own ethnic community had suddenly arrived.

6 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.

7 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).

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

9 '[T]hese people have seen too much war...' (Nordstrom 1992:40).

10 Nordstrom also holds the opinion that ethnicity has taken a back seat in the Sri Lankan conflict (1992:27).

11 Spencer used the term ideological over-production to refer to the situation he witnessed in rural Sri Lankan society (1990:10).

12 w/c is an abbreviation of welfare centre.

13 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).

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

15 This was a clear illustration of Arjun Appadurai's thesis on ethnic conflict and the cascade effect, 'These local feelings are the product of long-term interactions of local and global cascades of events that build up structures of feeling, which are both social and historical and are part of the environment within which, gradually, it becomes possible to envisage a neighbour as a fiend, a shopkeeper as a foreign traitor and a local trader as a ruthless capitalist exploiter' (153) see Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

16 One of the most obvious effects of the Eealam struggle on the east coast McGilvray has noted is the political polarization and formal divisions between the Tamils and Muslims and both have accepted that there are two distinct Tamil-speaking communities each deserving its own political representation (McGilvray 2001: 23).

17 UNHCR is unwilling to promote return yet as it considers the situation too unstable. The 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'

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

[18] 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).

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

[21] This was the conclusion of the July 1983 Retrospective hosted by ICES in July 1993. For more information see the special Issue of *Nethra* Vol 6: 1&2, 'July '83 and After' eds. Regi Siriwardena and Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham.

[22] 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.

[23] As UNHCR (1995) points out, many practical steps can be taken to establish a degree of trust between different communities, especially at the local level. They include strategies such as cultural exchange programmes; publicity campaigns; media coverage of positive interactions between ethnic and social groups; promoting tolerance through education, especially in schools; encouraging religious and community leaders to make public appeals for social harmony; and assisting the activities of multi-ethnic peace movements.

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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 for Progress	S.I.A. Paid	P.E.G. Paid	Tem.Hut Paid	Implements Paid	Details of After M.O.U. Returnees Up to 30-03-2003: Staying at Refugees Camps	Gone back to the Original Places	Staying with Friends/ Relations	U.A.S. Paid @ 25,000/-	U.A.S. Paid Part Payment
Town & Gravets	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
Thampalagamam	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
Earchchelampattu	2,250	2,169	-	-	81	1,793	179	54	125	2,001	2,001	2,009	2,001	-	167	-	56	-
Gomarankadawela	1,850	1,794	-	-	86	1,620	928	846	82	1,821	1,821	1,824	1,821	-	133	-	256	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

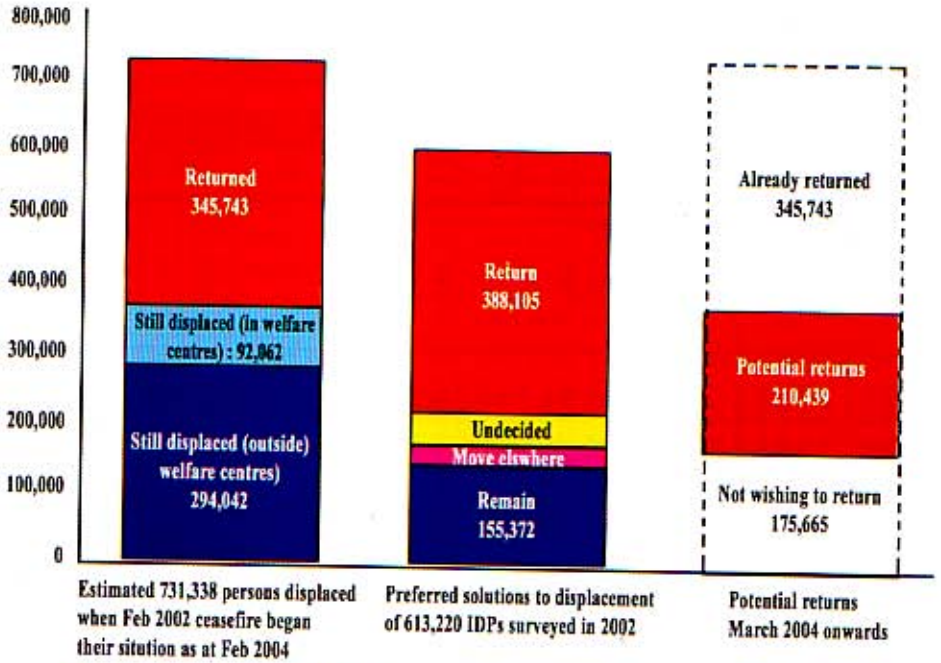
Appendix 2

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	-	-	-
	net gain	2	4	2
Badula	net loss	-	96	-
	net gain	183	-	18
SOUTH				
Ratnapura	net loss	128	5	38
	net gain	-	-	-
Gampaha	net loss	902	563	2068
	net gain	-	-	-
Colombo	net loss	151	5483	84
	net gain	-	-	-
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	-	-

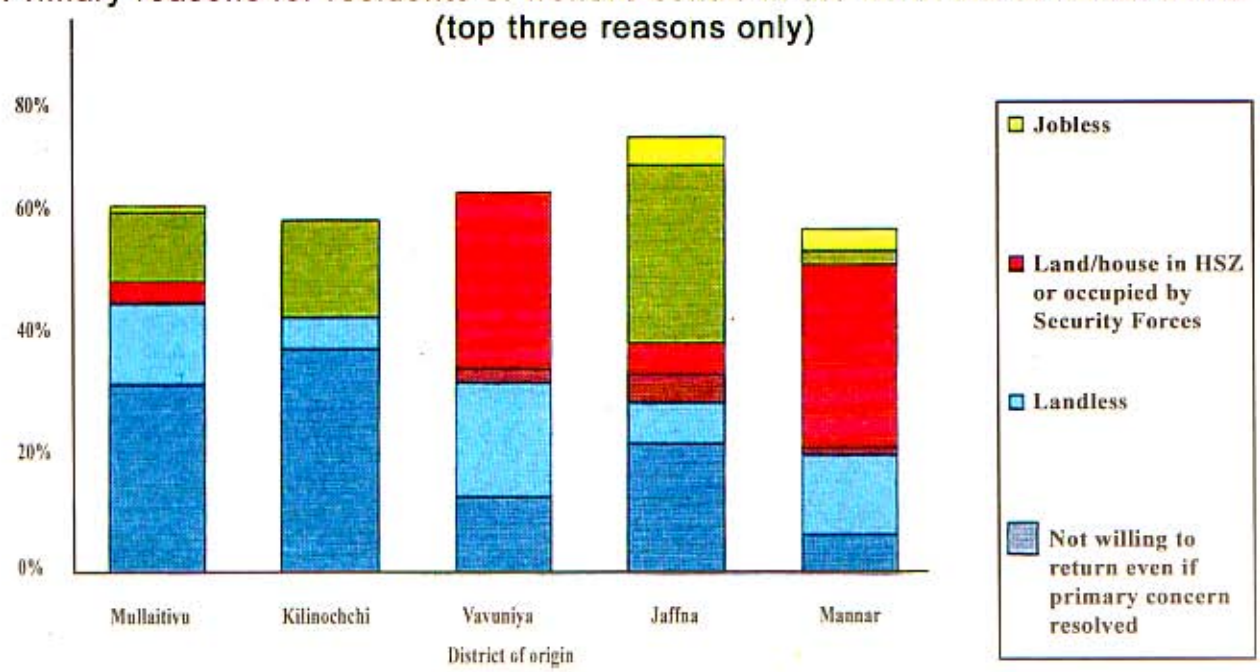
Source: Compiled from UNHCR Registaration of displaced persons Map (2002)

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

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