

Special Thematic Section on "Multiple Perspectives in Conflict Settings: From Diversity to Pluralism"

'Two Homes, Refugees in Both': Contesting Frameworks – The Case of the Northern Muslims of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Policies that address post-war displacement often reflect temporal linearity as transitional periods during which they are developed imply a shift from one situation to another. These policies obscure complexities experienced by local communities for whom displacement is ongoing and interminable. This essay applies Sri Lanka's National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement (NPDESCAD) to the case of Northern Muslims who were expelled from the Northern Province of Sri Lanka in 1990 and have lived in prolonged displacement for over 25 years. For these Muslims, return-remain is an oscillation and not an either/or option. Using "frames of recognition" to analyze policy documents and data from fieldwork, the paper critically unpacks the category of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) – the displacement-related frame applied to the Northern Muslims – to reveal the multiple subject positions respondents navigate in presenting their own stance to this category. Calling for recognition of the circumstances of their displacement, the respondents' footing to the IDP frame holds in it both needs-based and justice-based discourses and demands that Northern Muslims be recognized as political subjects. Return-remain is complicated by issues respondents face as they travel between their current home in Puttalam and origins in the North. The paper concludes that while the Northern Muslims are denied full recognition by the NPDESCAD, their complex experiences continue to contest the frames deployed by the policy.

Keywords: Northern Muslims, displacement, frames, policy, Sri Lanka

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War-related experiences are multifaceted and studying post-war settings demands recognition of complex pluralities, and diversity of experiences and perspectives. A post-war period, which is marked by the end of active warfare, is often theorized as transitional and temporary. However, post-war settings pose specific questions to transitions. Legal and policy responses adopted during transitional periods often aim at smoothening the journey from one situation to another: from war to peace, injustice to justice, and displacement to resettlement (Teitel as cited in [Scott, 2014](#), p. 137). They thereby echo a logic of linearity and temporal flatness reflected in concepts

such as 'return', 'relocation' and 'local integration' as distinct end-goals through which displacement, for instance, is "resolved" (Muggah, 2008, p. 19). This is often at odds with how those affected by war-related displacement remember and narrate their own experiences. Friction ensues, therefore, between policy objectives and the aspirations of those who 'speak from the ground'.

This paper explores questions around diversity of experience and perspective in the Sri Lankan post-war setting by discussing the social and political implications of recognizing multiple perspectives of conflicts. It does so by providing a critical reading of Sri Lanka's *National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement* (NPDSCAD; Ministry of Prison Reforms, Rehabilitation, Resettlement and Hindu Religious Affairs, 2016), in particular its typologies which are used by both the Sri Lankan State and civil society in conceptualizing displacementⁱ. It then applies the policy to the case of the Northern Muslims of Sri Lanka who have lived in prolonged displacement for over 25 years to ask whether and how 'issues on the ground' are reflected and dealt with in the policy. Drawing on fieldwork conducted with Northern Muslims during 2014-2016, the paper highlights a tension between policy categorizations and the pluralities of conflict experiences. In doing so it also seeks to understand the discursive subject positions (i.e. Davies & Harré, 1990) the Northern Muslims draw on to construct and position themselves within the discourses of displacement and related war-victimhood.

Three broad research questions underpin the paper. First, how does the NPDSCAD categorize Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and what does its 'solutions' imply? Second, how do Northern Muslims remember and narrate their experiences of displacement, and how do they navigate the categories deployed by policymakers? Third, does the NPDSCAD permit 'Northern Muslims' a voice and options through which they can engage the State, and how does it authorise or illegitimise their demands?

Studies on migration and legal documents related to displacement have maintained a distinction between the categories of IDP and refugee. According to definitions deployed by the United Nations, IDPs are those "who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border"ⁱⁱ whereas refugees are those "unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin" i.e. those who have crossed an international borderⁱⁱⁱ. In this paper, however, we stay true to how our respondents referred to themselves. In conversations with the community Tamil equivalents of 'IDP'/'displaced' and 'refugee' were used interchangeably. In this paper, therefore, we use these terms as our respondents did.

Drawing on previous research on the Northern Muslims (Haniffa, 2015; Hasbullah, 2001; Thiranagama, 2011) and critiques of humanitarian aid and policy (Fassin, 2012; Muggah, 2008) the paper employs close readings of policy frameworks and the narratives of Northern Muslims. It uses "frames of recognition" (Butler, 2009) as a meaningful analytical lens for interpreting data from the field site and policy documents, and reveals that while gaps do exist between policy and 'issues on the ground', Northern Muslims navigate this gap by remoulding policy discourses in order to voice their sociopolitical demands to the State.

The paper begins by describing its theoretical framework. It then provides an introduction to the community – the Northern Muslims of Sri Lanka, followed by methods employed for data collection. The NPDSCAD is described in brief before the study's findings are discussed. Results are classified thematically, according to issues that emerged as important during fieldwork. The paper concludes with a summary of key findings and limitations of the study.

Theoretical Framework

Framing, the concept proposed by Bateson (1972) and adapted by Goffman (1974), Gumperz (1982) and later Tannen (1993), has been a useful analytical tool with which to study the constructed nature of interaction. Frames focus on understanding how participants 'make sense' of ongoing interaction, and imply large ideological constructs. As Korobov (2010) states, frames "are [...] the overarching, more fundamental, and perceptual gestalt-like cognitive structures" through which interactions are interpreted (p. 264). Related to frames, footings (Goffman, 1981) focus on the microstructures of interactions and how participants align themselves in conversations. Footings, however, are generally theorized as operating within the structures of frames (Tannen & Wallat, 1993). Positioning (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999), in psychology, is closely related to footings. Positioning was proposed by Davies and Harré (1990) to signal fluidity that countered the fixedness associated with roles, and analysis concentrates on a "discursive construction" of interactions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 16). This essay will use these three concepts in its analysis.

While framing has primarily been used to study interactions, it holds the potential to unpack ideological implications that undergird other texts too. In this regard Butler's (2009) theorizing of "frames of recognizability" is useful as it has a wider scope than interactions, and can be applied to a broader spectrum of data. In her discussion of subjectivity in post-9/11 America, Butler (2009) explores who and what becomes precarious under frames of recognition shaped by conditions of terror, threat and surveillance. Precarity, she states, is a "political notion" and points to how precariousness plays out politically (p. 3). Central to her argument is the question "what is a life?" For her "apprehension" and "recognizability" are two concepts related to the "frames" through which a life is granted or deprived of recognition. For Butler, "apprehension" entails intuitive knowledge of a form of existence that has not yet been fully comprehended or recognized (p. 5). In other words, apprehension marks a tentative realization. Recognizability on the other hand, refers to "the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition"; it constitutes the "categories, conventions, and norms" that prepare a life to be "recognized" (p. 5).

The continuity of a "frame" is established as it travels through time and context. As Butler argues, frames "must circulate in order to establish their hegemony" (p. 12). It is in a frame's passage that it encounters new situations and attempts to instantiate itself in different settings. Yet it is precisely here that it is vulnerable to interruption for despite its reiterative moves towards establishing hegemony, the reiteration itself can produce a break, making the brittle borders of the frame unsettled and porous. This is where the potential for apprehension, as a critique of the frame, can disrupt, so that lives previously denied recognition come into view.

This study applies the above theoretical concepts to interpret both the NPDSCAD, as well as data from fieldwork. "Frames of recognition" (Butler, 2009) is used to tease out the frames present in the policy document i.e. what classifications are present in the NPDSCAD, and how are they demarcated? When applied to data from the field site, "frames" are used to identify how the Northern Muslims we interviewed recognize and situate themselves in discourses of displacement. The paper therefore presents its findings thematically, discussing overlaps, limitations, and mismatches between policy and voices from the ground, examining how Northern Muslims, resist and adapt frames offered by the NPDSCAD to fit their experiences.

The 'Northern Muslims'

This section of the paper provides a brief introduction to the community we are concerned with in this paper. According to the Sri Lanka Census of Population and Housing (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), Muslims^{iv} make up 9.3% of the total population and are the second largest ethnic minority following Tamils. They are spread across the island with the largest population concentrated in the Eastern Province^v (36.9%), followed by the North-Western (11%) and Central (9.9%) Provinces. The 'community' we study for this paper is a particular subsection of Muslims. They previously resided in the North of Sri Lanka and lived in villages across the five districts of the Northern Province. They were formerly the largest minority^{vi} in an ethnically Tamil-dominant region, and use Tamil as their first language. The 'event' that formed this collective of Northern Muslims took place amidst the Sri Lankan civil war that lasted for three decades from 1983-2009. The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) cited ethnic discrimination by the Sinhala-majority government and fought to claim a separate State of Tamil Eelam that included the North and East of the country. Friction between Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan Armed Forces began to escalate from the early 1980s onwards and resulted in active warfare between the two parties.

In October 1990, the LTTE issued an order evicting Muslims from the Northern Province^{vii} that was under LTTE control. The Muslims in the North experienced this order as unanticipated and unexplained^{viii}, as close to 75,000 Muslims who were resident in the five districts of the Northern Province were ordered to leave. *VeLiyEtram*, the Tamil term that denotes expulsion and used by the respondents to identify their eviction, took place over two days with some villages being given as little as two hours within which to evacuate (Hasbullah, 2001). As ethnographic work by Sharika Thiranagama (2011) which studies the retelling of eviction narratives reveals, the 'Muslims of the North' who hailed from different locations in the province were transformed into the 'Northern Muslims' through this collective experience of expulsion. In other words, 'Northern Muslims' were born of an experience of expulsion, and over time gained sociopolitical significance and identity as a collective.

Following the expulsion, Northern Muslims are now scattered and live in many districts across the island. The Puttalam District, which lies along the western coast of Sri Lanka and is situated in the North-Western Province, hosted a large population of this collective as Muslims resident in the district welcomed those expelled by providing shelter, food, and basic necessities. The influx of Muslims from the North to Puttalam inflated this population^{ix}. The Northern Muslims also significantly altered the social, economic and political landscape of Puttalam^x. Over 25 years after their expulsion, some Northern Muslims continue to live in the Puttalam District, with varying levels of integration with the local host community (Brun, 2003^{xi}).

In this paper we use the label 'Northern Muslim community' with caution. We acknowledge that 'community' does not imply homogeneity. The different locations our respondents 'come from' reflect the diversity within this community. We also recognize that experiences of the expulsion and post-expulsion differ amongst individuals. Nevertheless, expulsion is narrated as a collective experience and shapes the political demand of return. The 'Northern Muslim' has become therefore an important category in which political mobilization takes place. Therefore we use this label acknowledging both its limits and potential.

Fieldwork and Methods of Data Collection

Our fieldwork was conducted primarily in the Puttalam District between December 2014 and 2016. We initially conducted 40-60 minute one-on-one, in-depth, guided qualitative interviews with eleven key respondents – nine in Puttalam and two in Colombo.

A small number of respondents were selected to construct an in-depth understanding of their experiences. With the assistance of a local community-based organization, we chose participants based on their home district in the North so as to capture the diversity of experiences of expulsion. Respondents were also selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to share their experiences of displacement. Table 1 lists the demographics of those interviewed.

Table 1

Demographics of Respondents Interviewed

Name	Age range	Sex	Details of residence	Socioeconomic background
Begam	Unknown	Female	From the North, now resides in Colombo	Dressmaker-homemaker
Fareena	Unknown	Female	From the North, now resides in Colombo	Dressmaker-homemaker
Abdullah	Unknown	Male	From Mannar District, now resides in Puttalam	Retired teacher (Principal grade)
Numan	45-50	Male	From Jaffna District, now resides in Puttalam	Counselor
Jecintha	Unknown	Female	From Mullaitivu District, was displaced to Puttalam and now resettled in Mullaitivu	Social worker
Hameena	40-45	Female	From Jaffna District, now resides in Puttalam	Montessori teacher
Jafar	60-65	Male	From Mannar District, now resides in Puttalam	Retired teacher (Principal grade)
Riswan	40-45	Male	From Mullaitivu District, now resides in Puttalam	Teacher; involved in social work
Fazeen	40-45	Male	From Kilinochchi District, now resides in Puttalam	Teacher
Rahman	40-45	Male	From Mannar District, now resides in Puttalam. In the process of returning to Mannar	Teacher
Thaleema	50-55	Female	From Mannar District, now resides in Puttalam	Homemaker-farmer

Interview questions focused on three broad themes: what home means, conflict-related events, and perspectives on sharing war-related memories. We treated primary interviews as key texts from which we drew our preliminary findings. Supplementary fieldwork was conducted to test emerging findings, and included limited ethnographic work and follow up with selected respondents after two years to inquire about the status of their return to the North.

Our data also includes observations from two types of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The first is a collection of four FGDs held in Palavi, Puttalam on the implementation of a community-led intervention process^{xii}. The recordings of these four discussions were used as supplementary data for crosschecking how the community, as represented by those who participated in these FGDs, responded to expulsion and subsequently, displacement. We were also participant-observers at one of the four FGDs in order to understand better the dynamics of on-site discussions. The second type of FGD was conducted with a group of six second-generation Northern Muslims –

those born and raised in Puttalam. At this discussion we inquired particularly about participants' views of return and remain, and their perceptions of 'home'. Although the focus of this study is not to trace intergenerational responses to displacement, this particular FGD was conducted to help us gauge if there were significantly different attitudes conveyed by second-generation Northern Muslims who have been raised in displacement.

All interviews were recorded with consent from participants. In order to maintain anonymity respondents' consent was recorded orally. All data that could result in participants being identified was erased following transcription. Additionally, with all respondents who could be contacted, second consent was sought. With the process of second consent, respondents were able to read the anonymized transcript of their interview and amend or withdraw information before consenting to publish data shared during their interviews. We avoid referring to long extracts from interviews for which second consent could not be obtained. All names of respondents are pseudonyms. For FGDs too, permission to record was obtained within the group, and anonymity was maintained by erasing all identifying information. Those who participated were also provided the option of exiting the discussion if they so wished. Data was encrypted and stored securely, and shared with research partners only.

The Policy

This section provides a summary of the [National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement](#), a 33-page document drafted by Sri Lanka's Ministry of Resettlement and adopted by the Cabinet in August 2016. The policy draws on the Ministry's previous [Framework for Resettlement Policy \(2013\)](#), the [Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission report \(2011\)](#) and the [National Involuntary Resettlement Policy \(2001\)](#) as well as a number of national consultations, in addition to borrowing heavily from international blueprints such as the [UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement \(1998\)](#) and the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons \(2010\)](#).

The policy lists "Persons of Concern" as the five following groups: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugee returnees, IDPs or returnees who resettled but have not found a durable solution, host communities of IDPs and returnees, and new and extended IDPs and returnees (specifically second, third and successive generations). Taking into consideration women, children, the disabled, elderly, and those affected by violence, it grants these populations special provisions within the policy. The NPDS CAD guarantees rights and entitlements under State and international law, such as equality, non-discrimination, protection, humanitarian assistance, participation and engagement in civic life, and addresses issues regarding livelihoods, right to work, housing, land and property.

"Durable solutions" are presented as a way forward, and three settlement options are offered: return, local integration, or relocation. The policy states measures to be taken for monitoring implementation, and names the Ministry of Resettlement and Rehabilitation as the lead implementer of this policy. It also sets out the process for registering and addressing grievances through the State's administrative system and other statutory bodies, with the highest institution that could be approached being the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka.

Findings

Results of this study are divided thematically into five sections. The first discusses the frames present in the policy, laying out the mismatch between these and the lived experiences of people in prolonged displacement. The next questions the terms that are employed to group those displaced into need-based categories, detailing how respondents adapt these terms to suit their experience, while the third explains how respondents assert themselves as political subjects within need-based classifications of those displaced. The fourth section explores the struggle of returning to the North and/or remaining in Puttalam, and the final section deals with the complexity of settlement for those in long-term displacement.

Frames of Recognition

What are the frames that underwrite the NPDSAD? A question that has dominated refugee studies in the past is ‘when does displacement end?’ ([The Brookings Institution - University of Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 2007](#)). According to [Brun and Fábos \(2015\)](#) recent scholarship in forced migration studies has been occupied with responding to the ‘problem’ of living “in limbo” – an idea associated with prolonged displacement indicating temporal and spatial ‘in-betweenness’. This ‘problem’ demands ‘solutions’, and these ‘solutions’ dictate the thrust of displacement-related policies.

As illustrated below, the NPDSAD frames displacement as a terminable condition.

IV.2.3. The State acknowledges that it has primary responsibility for providing protection and humanitarian assistance to displaced and displacement-affected populations, to mitigate the adverse effects of displacement and take all measures to ensure that *displacement does not last longer than is necessary under the circumstances*. [our italics]

Displacement is also referred to as an external situation in the policy, something that happened *to* an individual, exemplified through the implication in V.1. “Protection *against* displacement” [our italics]. According to [Muggah \(2008\)](#), understanding displacement to be an external ‘event’ as well as a condition that expires is common in forced migration studies, and is shared by both scholars and policymakers as meanings of displacement-related concepts are carried back and forth between scholarship and practice. Displacement, he states, is seen as caused by an ‘event’ of “external shock” which results in a “*temporary* disequilibrium [... that] can [therefore] be ‘normalised’ with the introduction of ‘protective measures’ and ended with the provision of so-called durable solutions” ([Muggah, 2008, p. 18](#)).

In line with Muggah’s critique were our respondent’s statements on the intermittent nature of displacement. Everyday experiences such as choice of residence, education and employment were lensed through their experiences of displacement. Displacement was not a situation but a way of life, “a way of inhabiting the world” ([Thiranagama, 2011, p. 129](#)). Our own pre-conceived view of it as a situation that ‘ends’ was challenged during our interaction with Begam, a female dressmaker-homemaker who is a Northern Muslim currently resident in Colombo. After her narrative of migration, when asked if she faced other conflict-related ‘events’, she replied definitively: “This is our event!”. She refused to classify displacement as a one-off experience and her response indicates that displacement configures her current existence. Rooted in the present (“this *is* our event”), her response demanded recognition of displacement as ongoing and interminable, thereby challenging policy approaches to displacement as a temporary condition.

Within displacement studies, the categories deployed by policymakers to classify those displaced have been questioned. The NPDSCAD defines IDPs^{xiii} as:

III.1.1. [P]ersons, group of persons or a community who have been asked to leave against their will, or forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka, including situations of generalized violence and violations of human rights arising from that conflict, and who have not left the country.

This IDP category includes the Northern Muslims as a group that was forced to flee their homes. In Butlerian terms, this IDP “frame” is what grants “recognition” to the Northern Muslims within the policy. However, our fieldwork and findings in Puttalam complicate this frame.

In interviews, several terms that label the Northern Muslim community emerged. Respondents stated that they are referred to in Tamil as *ahathi* – refugee; *vantha varaththaan* – someone without a home, a wanderer; someone out of place; and *idampeyarnthavarkaL* – the displaced. These labels are used as antonyms to *uLLoor* – or locals – a term which distinguishes the Northern Muslims from those in Puttalam. Brun (2003) notes that the semantics of ‘refugee’ which borrows from humanitarian categories of need gained currency in Puttalam in a post-expulsion setting and was used as a *social* category to exclude and segregate the population into residents (Puttalam-born) and outsiders (Northern Muslims). As our respondents reveal, this category of ‘refugee’ is commonplace even today. Although initially used by humanitarian organisations, in Puttalam it was a marker of displacement used specifically for Northern Muslims, and a frame through which the community was granted “recognition”. However, it remains a marker of exclusion as it continues to define the community as outsiders and challenges the legitimacy of their residency in Puttalam.

The frame ‘refugee’ as a category of need however, has traveled from humanitarian discourses into civic life and as it installs itself onto new conditions, has broken from itself and gained new meaning. Such rupture holds the potential for Northern Muslims to gain a new form of ‘visibility’ as a social category other than as a group in need. Today, both “frames” exist in tandem: refugee as a category of need in State policy, and refugee as a social category in society. However, the Northern Muslims remain entrapped by both for if they are permitted “recognition” within the NPDSCAD as ‘refugees’, they remain sidelined by the host community precisely because of this nomenclature. If, however, they forego their “recognition” as refugees they risk losing assistance to settlement options.

Questioning Categories: Displaced or Expelled?

Within the frame of ‘refugee’ resides a somewhat differently nuanced descriptor that emerged from our interviews. Respondents frequently referred to themselves in Tamil as *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* – forcibly evicted. For example, when discussing her relationship with the host community in Puttalam Hameena, a female teacher aged 40–45, asserted:

They [our hosts] have given us a title: refugee dog. [...] *IdampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced) are not [really] *idampeyarnthavarkaL* (displaced), we say *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted).

Likewise, during an FGD on designing a community-led intervention held on 30 January 2016 where participants were requested to share their thoughts and experiences of conflict, a male participant stated:

You asked about the war... for example, you said those displaced (*idampeyarnthavarkaL*) during war. But we were not displaced! We were chased out!

Northern Muslims we spoke to rejected how others referred to their community as displaced and offered *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) as a label that describes their specific case of displacement through expulsion. This provides an example of a 'footing' which Goffman (1981) analyzed as conversational cues that contain the positions we take to ourselves and others present in an interaction, and conveys the ways in which "we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (p. 128). For Northern Muslims, even though 'refugee' is still the frame that marks the general condition of their displacement, two specific footings emerge: *idampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced) and *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted). In Tamil, both forms are third person plural references and share the same root noun *idampeyarvu* (displacement). Yet, the difference is a significant one. The morphological change to the root in *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) confers a semantic shift that indicates third person involvement which *idampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced) does not carry. What this shift clarifies is the Northern Muslims' experiences of *expulsion* over general displacement.

IdampeyarkappattavarkaL (forcibly evicted) articulates the loss of choice in eviction, the violence and forcefulness of expulsion, and the loss of historical claim to residency in the North. It foregrounds expulsion and thereby highlights the specific history and political conditions that mark Tamil militancy, pre-1990 Tamil-Muslim relations^{xiv} in the North and East, and the conditions that fuelled the LTTE-led Muslim expulsion from the North in 1990. In other words, *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) articulates a specific political and historical subject position that is not captured by *idampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced). *IdampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced), meanwhile, emphasizes displacement within the general conditions of war and is broadly similar to 'refugee'. Davies and Harré's (1990) work flags the fluidity of subject positions; here then is an example of how our respondents reject one position in favor of another in conversations on displacement. By taking up *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted), it can be stated that Northern Muslims challenge the subject position policy documents assign to them as *idampeyarnthavarkaL* (the displaced). They thereby demand recognition of the *circumstances* of displacement, rather than displacement in and of itself.

Within the NPDSCAD, the Northern Muslims are primarily recognized as IDPs. The historical and political specificity of their displacement remains marginal. As such, they are 'apprehended' but not fully recognized because the *politics* of their expulsion (anti-Muslim ethnic cleansing and their right to return) are not center-frame. Their case demonstrates that when *circumstances* of displacement are excluded, the range of conflict-affected displacement is narrowed. This has implications on return and/or remain. As will be discussed in the next section, the options of return and/or remain are also political demands rather than mere steps in the settlement process.

Refugees as Political Subjects

In his critique of humanitarian aid work, Fassin (2012) notes that the role of the aid worker, as a witness to violence, complicates the contemporary terrain of aid. Fassin argues that when aid workers become witnesses, those who experienced violence, instead of being accorded pluralistic subject positions are reduced to 'victims' who are politically passive. Drawing on examples from Palestine where young males are reduced to 'victims' of trauma (enuresis sufferer) and not recognized as political subjects (stone thrower), Fassin argues that humanitarian reason "replaces the martyr subject with a neurotic subject, substituting the politics of justice proclaimed by the martyr with a politics of compassion, which has the sufferer as its object" (p. 211). According to Fassin, humanitarian reason reduces experience to the language of trauma and denies the existence of multiple subject positions.

Fassin's illustration of how victimhood is constructed in such a way that denies political subjectivity to Palestinians is similar to the case of the Northern Muslims. Discussing humanitarian discourse in the Sri Lankan context, Haniffa (2015) applies Agamben's concept of 'bare life' and Fassin's interpretation of it in relation to humanitarian aid, to resettlement assistance in Sri Lanka with a specific emphasis on the case of the Northern Muslims. Haniffa states that a hierarchization within victimhood itself has formed in spite of local and international pressure to recognize the Northern Muslims as a special category who were displaced prior to the final phase of the war (2006-2009). She argues that this hierarchization privileges "new" IDPs as those in "greatest need" (p. 2). She contends that in such instances the Northern Muslims are excluded from recognition.

The problem is not only that such victim identification leaches the political life out of the persons thus identified, but also that anyone who asserts a more complex identity is considered an imperfect victim not worthy of assistance. The northern Muslims had created a political and social identity outside the category of IDP and UNHCR staff had no framework to comprehend it. (Haniffa, 2015, p. 18)

Therefore of significance is what the NPDSCAD subsumes when it borrows from the humanitarian category of need (which frames the IDP) to address "Persons of Concern." When terms employed in humanitarian discourse by aid organisations are brought into State policy, the subject 'in need' overrides his/her political citizenship. How do Northern Muslims navigate this obfuscation? The term they use in their own self-representation – *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) – holds both the language of need/assistance and that of political rights and demands. *IdampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) as a discursive subject position (Davies & Harré, 1990) presents them as both war-victim refugees and expelled refugees who have a right to return to the North, revealing a position in which a political right and a humanitarian one are enmeshed.

(Re)turn / (Re)main: The Struggles of (Re)settlement

In previous sections we discussed the frames or categories used by the NPDSCAD to represent the displaced, and how the Northern Muslims in their insistence on *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) unsettle these framings. The NPDSCAD's categories not only define "Persons of Concern", but also structure the options of their 'settlement'. Most of our respondents expressed a desire to return to their origins although not all were able to do so. Three stated that their abode was in Puttalam but noted that they would visit their hometowns for special occasions, while two (those who resided in Colombo) stated they had no links to their hometown in the North. Those who were, however, at various stages of return to the North had registered their vote in their respective villages. One resided in the North and five commuted between Puttalam and their hometowns frequently. However, during follow-up interviews, all who wished to return to the North expressed disillusionment with conditions in the region and most had decided to return to Puttalam. Therefore, our respondents are not a population that has moved from Puttalam to the North permanently: rather they are one for whom return is desired but tentative and interrupted. It is in this context that our analysis of their return takes place.

Muslims who were expelled from the North began to return to their villages as early as 1991 but they were far and few in number (Hasbullah, 2001). The end of active warfare in May 2009 and the elimination of the LTTE by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces opened to the Muslims the hope of permanent return to their origins. However, many were caught between the choice of returning and remaining (Citizen's Commission, 2012, p. 174). A closer analysis of Northern Muslims' relations with other communities (Tamils in the post-war North and their Muslim host community in Puttalam) reveal how they had to navigate their subjecthood within transforming demographics

of a post-war nation. Particularly interesting are the ‘problems’ brought up by respondents when asked about remaining and returning. We found that travelling between ‘two homes’ was a key part of their identity.

Northern Muslims and Tamils in the Post-War North: Shifting Demographies

Respondents who made the choice to return to the North have encountered many challenges. Apart from the physical challenges of setting up home from scratch, reclaiming lands, limited access to resources, landlessness, and lack of State support, which has been documented in detail in the [Citizen’s Commission report \(2012\)](#), respondents noted that Tamils resident in the North regarded returning Muslims with much suspicion.

Extract 1: Hameena, female teacher aged 40-45

Respondent: *I went to my hometown in Jaffna. I had to overcome many obstacles when I first went back. When I went there the first question was “Why are Muslims coming to this village?”*

Interviewer: *Who asked this question?*

Respondent: *Tamil people. Not the same people who lived in our Jaffna, but others- it’s like this, there had been people from other villages there [in our village]. “Why do you come to this village?” [they inquired]. I immediately replied, “This is our village. I will come [as I please]. Who are you to question me?”, and I went and inspected our land and the place...*

Extract 2: Fazeen, male teacher aged 40-45

(Preceded by a long and detailed description of cordial relations with neighbouring Tamils before eviction)

Respondent: *But (respondent begins to cry) the sad situation is, this situation isn’t present now. Now they look at us as an enemy. But (pause) see us as the enemy. We can’t bear it.*

Extract 3: Jecintha, female social worker who has returned to her hometown in the North, age unknown

Respondent: *The Tamil brothers who are here [in my hometown] now have all come from different districts and settled here. [...] When we go and speak to them they see us as outsiders – people from a different district – they think “These people have come to settle in the original homeland”. This is because for 30 years they lived at a war front – people who lived within one area. They were taught to think this way – they grew like this – because all their interactions were with the same ethnic group when people like us [...] go there they think we are people from other districts [i.e. outsiders].*

Interviewer: *Do they think there is nobody who is originally from Mullaitivu?*

Respondent: *That’s what they say. They say “You are people from Puttalam. What is here for you? Why have you come here?”*

War significantly altered demographic patterns in the North, resulting in a massive migration of populations across and out of the province transforming its social composition. The above extracts reveal the challenges posed to returning Muslims by these transformations. In spite of being residents of the North prior to their expulsion, the Muslims’ claim to the region was challenged afresh on return, and they were required to prove their origins^{xv}. As evident in Extract 3 often such verification was demanded by current Tamil residents in an altered context where the province had become mono-ethnic under LTTE rule. As highlighted in the Citizen’s Commission report, this issue is compounded by illegal settlements and encroachment, incomplete legal documentation related to land ownership, landlessness, and land grabs/occupation by the Sri Lanka military (p. 174).

Return was narrated as a disconcerting experience by the respondents who found that former social bonds with Tamil neighbours had been ruptured because as Hameena in Extract 1 remarked, these were “[n]ot the same people who lived in *our* Jaffna” (our emphasis). The altered social fabric of the North including Tamil ethno-nationalism hindered Muslims from reclaiming full residence there. Hameena also shared the following interaction with a Tamil government official:

Extract 4: Hameena, female teacher aged 40-45

Respondent: *At that time, [name erased, who held a government post], a woman, she said “Are you Muslims coming to this land? Are you trying to appropriate land illegally and come here to demand your rights?” I immediately asked her “When were you appointed to [government post]?” I asked her in her own language when she became [government post]. “When did you become [government post]? Since the time I was here this (place marker indicated) belonged to us. When did you come?” She replied “Our movement [i.e. the LTTE] gave this land (to us)”^{xvi}. I said “If the movement gave it to you, go and ask them! This came to us, we will not forfeit it”.*

For Hameena, and others like her, ownership is claimed through a history of residency in the North. This history is complicated in some cases by the absence of legal documentation proving land ownership. Later in the interview the respondent narrated in detail how she and her family cleared the land and lived on it despite great difficulty. For Hameena, although she does not have title deeds to the land she claims, the memory of ‘living on the land’ supersedes the necessity of legal documentation. For her and other returnees such as herself, such memories legitimize belonging and most importantly, the right to return. When these memories are denied by a Statist legal regime that demands clear land title, Northern Muslims continue to be exiled from their original homes.

A study of the laws governing land ownership recommends that where documentation on land ownership is lost in the context of displacement, IDPs “must be allowed to establish their earlier possession prior to abandonment by other extrinsic evidence such as through Grama Sevakas^{xvii} records, registers of residence, in the absence of which even by oral evidence, acceptable to a court in the event of litigation” (de Almeida Guneratne, Pinto-Jayawardena, & Gunaratne, 2013, p. 247). These special provisions, however, are still only recommendations. In the same vein the NPDS CAD advocates “special measures... to address disputes relating to ownership and use of land and property that may have arisen in relation to or over the period of displacement” (V.4.2). As revealed by our respondents, these measures nonetheless remain intangible to returning Muslims, and proving land ownership and prior residency in the North continue to be hazards.

A significant document proving permanent residency is the electoral register.^{xviii} In spite of living in Puttalam, registration in the North functions as a place-holder symbolizing both the desire and inability to return. However, such registration has other implications for returning Muslims especially for those who are registered in the North but do not reside there permanently. For example, in follow-up interviews two respondents who had registered in their Northern hometowns but who are now reconsidering their choice elaborated on the issue of registration. Voter registration in the North meant that certifications required for employment, enrollment in schools and universities, government training programs etc. had to be processed through local administrative officers (the *Grama Sevaka* of their hometowns). Those who were registered in the North but commuted between locations faced a stumbling block when Northern government officials were reluctant to assist with certification as they did not know the applicants and could not vouch for them. At the same time, when applicants approached government officers of the Puttalam district, they were unable to obtain the necessary certification as they had not registered in the District.

The NPDS CAD recognizes this issue and declares that:

VI.2.10 For durable solutions to be achieved, there must be respect for the right of IDPs and refugee returnees to register as residents in the place of return, local integration or relocation.

However, it does not take into consideration 'issues on the ground' as people struggle to navigate ethnic suspicion and the law.

Extract 4 indicates that when administrative officers display anti-Muslim sentiments, returning Muslims feel slighted and discriminated against as these officials deny them access to State support. The case of the Muslims of Musali reveals another contending force: of State governance of land.^{xix} The issue surfaced when the traditional homelands of Muslims of Musali South were declared forest land that belonged to the Wilpattu National Park in a gazette notification signed by the President which expanded the forest reserve. Exacerbated by anti-Muslim rhetoric^{xx}, allegations of a Muslim minister using his political power to resettle Muslims on State land, and environmental activists for whom conservation of Wilpattu was critical, returnee Muslims faced continued hurdles in accessing land. Although following public protest, the boundaries of the forest reserve were redrawn to exclude the Muslim homelands, these demarcations now cut off access routes to grasslands for livestock thereby affecting returnees' livelihoods. This is just one example of anti-Muslim sentiment that received publicity in the media.

Northern Muslims and Their Puttalam Muslim Hosts: Conditions of Hospitality

Much has been written about the host-migrant relationship that emerged from the expulsion of the Northern Muslims (Brun, 2003, 2010; Hasbullah, 2001; Thiranagama, 2007, 2011). What are the current issues that animate this relationship? Brun (2010) argues that hospitality resides in the unequal relations between host and migrant. Following the initial influx of Muslims into Puttalam, the host community welcomed and supported those expelled. As aid organisations entered, the balance tipped and conditions of hospitality shifted as hosts found a well-supported community on their doorstep. From the perspective of the Northern Muslims, their relationship with their hosts remains complicated, and the extracts below showcase some of these complexities.

Extract 5: Jecintha, female social worker who has returned to her hometown in the North, age unknown

Respondent: *After that we left that place – the educated and the wealthy people living in Puttalam came with their vehicles and brought the Muslims who were there here to Puttalam. These people in Puttalam did that for us. What they offered was a helping hand to us. During the time that we lived here [...] we had a good harmonious relationship. These Puttalam people didn't cause any interference to us. But there is one thing – we were branded as refugees – they would ask 'Are you a refugee? Are you displaced?' We lived at a time when there was such a label placed on us. In the camps if someone asked 'Who are those people?' they would say 'Those are the people from the camp' – the villagers would say that. [...] The displaced people used all the resources of these Puttalam people. They gave their lands to them. They have even given it free [of cost]. Mostly those who had more [land] gave it for them to stay [in]. They gave their fields for them to stay – they gave their homes for them to stay – they gave them a part of their belongings. Also mixed marriages – their children and ours have married. During the time we lived in Puttalam – we didn't have to face as many difficulties from the people here when we were displaced and came to Puttalam as we had to when we were resettled. We didn't have any pressure from the people in Puttalam. Yes... they didn't impede us in any way. [...] They said 'Someday your land will be restored. Till then you can stay in our village.' I have a duty to thank them on behalf of my village at this point. [our highlights]*

Extract 6: Notes from audio recording of FGD on community-led intervention held on 30 January 2016. Participants were requested to share their thoughts and experiences of conflict.

A female participant stated: *Speaking even today, elder sister, we will not forget those from Puttalam. Because even if they call us refugees, it was they who came forward to take care of us. Even though they labeled us as refugees, as wanderers, we must thank them- it has been [26] years but they have not asked us to leave [...] Now [Puttalam] is like our own hometown [...] The day they ask us to leave, we must depart.*

[our highlights]

There is a layered relationship here between the Northern Muslims and their hosts built on hospitality that is also grounded in duties and responsibilities within Islamic culture. As Muzaffar (2001) notes writing on a refugee policy for Muslims countries, “given the significance of Prophet Muhammad’s flight from persecution in Mecca and reception in Medina, it is not surprising that Islam enshrines the rights and duties of both refugees and the Muslim community” (p. 254). It is therefore unsurprising that when expelled, Northern Muslims gravitated to areas in which those who shared the same faith were concentrated, and that these host communities welcomed those evicted.

As evident in the extracts above, respondents’ gratefulness *and* understanding that they will never really ‘belong’ in Puttalam should be taken as two sides of a coin, and one that shapes the subject positions of Northern Muslims in Puttalam. These positions co-exist as the self is discursively constructed along multiple storylines. Though both migrants and hosts are Muslims, those expelled become *Northern* Muslims in a relationship with their host. As Butler argues, “we” always exists “in the hands of the other” as “we” are brought into being through the other, interrupting the very identity of “we” (Butler, 2009, p. 14). This interruption reveals itself in instances where our respondents are unable to, and at times denied, full integration into Puttalam. They exist therefore on the cusp of recognition – as Puttalam dwellers, but never full residents. This then becomes an integral part of their sociopolitical identity.

There is some resistance to this identity by the second generation of Northern Muslims, especially those who were born in Puttalam or were young children during expulsion. A participant at one of our FGDs on a community-led intervention stated that because her children claimed Puttalam as their origin by birth, they refuse the title of refugee. However, during the FGD with second generation Northern Muslims, participants expressed the following views:

Extract 7: FGD held on 29 September 2016 with second generation Northern Muslims during which home and the option of return to the North was discussed

Female 1: *When asked what my hometown is, I reply saying both. My parents are from the North, I was born here, [I say]. We are not of the state of mind yet to say Puttalam only [...] If asked where are you from, I say Mannar. “Are you from Mannar? Where are you now?” [This] will be the next question. Then I say I am in Puttalam.*

Female 2: *If we say Puttalam [as the place we’re from] people will ask “Are you from Puttalam or did you come from elsewhere?”*

Female 1: *That question still remains.*

As this extract illustrates, the question of belonging haunts the second generation. For them, the North is remembered through their parents’ experiences and they told us that they do not feel they belong there. Hence the option of return was not as alluring to them as to their parents for whom return still remained a viable, albeit challenging, option.

Belonging to ‘two homes’ is a characteristic common to migrants who travel between them and remain connected to both^{xxi}. When remaining in Puttalam Northern Muslims continue to be at the margins, never fully integrated into the District’s original community. Upon return to a transformed post-war North, they are denied access to land, economic resources and government services. However, their situation is not one of *either* returning *or* remaining. Instead we argue that return-remain captures the experience of our respondents: an oscillation between both locations. We do not read this oscillation to mean unsettlement in a negative sense; instead the travel between ‘homes’ captures their ‘reality’, and in the case of the Northern Muslims interviewed, reflects an identity informed by both expulsion and long-term residence in Puttalam.

Classifying Settlements

We turn in this section to the NPDSAD and ask how it articulates settlement for those displaced, and especially for the Northern Muslims who return-remain. It acknowledges that:

[A] durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons and refugee returnees no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. Hence, choosing a settlement option and the provision of shelter does not mark the end of displacement. (VI.1.1)

The policy thereby seeks “durable solutions” and proposes a progressive approach to resettlement that goes beyond addressing basic living conditions. It proposes three settlement options: “return to place of origin, local integration in place of displacement, or relocation in another suitable area in the country” (VI.2.1). Often ‘re-’ (re-location, return, re-settlement) is marked by an imaginary of reverting back to ‘what was’ in its original, pristine and preserved state (Brun & Lund, 2008, p. 277). The prefix ‘re’ edifies ‘what was’. However, it does not recreate the past exactly. As such, though return for the displaced means going back, what they return to is never the same place they left. The NPDSAD is progressive in acknowledging this potential disconnect through its listing of settlement options.

VI.2.8 *To provide durable solutions is not simply a matter of restoring pre-displacement conditions; durable solutions must aim at transformation of entrenched structures and institutions that facilitated displacement and related injustice and vulnerabilities or that could be detrimental to IDPs and refugee returnees. [our italics]*

While conceding that a restoration of pre-displacement conditions is not the aim of resettlement, the policy nevertheless argues that structures that led to displacement must be transformed. However, these structures themselves may have altered over the years to take ‘new’ forms which are important to recognize and address. Additionally, “durable solutions” is still within the discourse of a terminus: of displacement as conclude-able rather than a continuing way of life.

The policy apprehends and intuits the issues faced by Northern Muslims. However, it never *fully* recognizes their experiences of return-remain as a circuitous process that may not end in the choice of one option. While the policy states that “making a choice other than return does not involve the loss of the rights to land and/or property in places of origin nor the right to compensation” (V.2.4), it grants in the long-term only *one* option – return, relocation or local integration. Similarly, when discussing long-term displacement it states that:

VI.2.3 [...] *In protracted displacement situations, deciding on a durable solution is often not an either/or choice and may take time. This should not negate the right of displaced persons to pursue a durable solution of their choice, including the right to return and restitution of their lands. While they remain without*

a durable solution, displaced persons should be free to choose whether they want to register their residency in their area of displacement or their place of origin. [our italics]

It is clear from the above that the policy does recognize that choice is not an either/or option in prolonged displacement. However, this provision is granted only until a final decision is arrived at, and remains viable “*while they remain without a durable solution*”. This is yet another instance in which the NPDSCAD at the same time permits and withholds full recognition of the Northern Muslims. The Northern Muslims, whose experience is only partially recognized by the NPDSCAD, remain therefore at the margins of the frame which shapes the discourse and practice on ‘solutions’.

Conclusion

This essay has mapped the case of the Northern Muslims onto Sri Lanka’s NPDSCAD. Interrogating categories and frames deployed by the policy to recognize IDPs, the paper analyzed the complex subject positions taken up by Northern Muslims who live in prolonged displacement. Northern Muslims reject the perception of displacement as an ‘event’ that concluded and continue to see it as a way of life. We found that our respondents also contest categories they are framed by and demand that expulsion be acknowledged as the condition of their displacement. Linked to this demand is their right to return to the North. Their own footing to the conversation on displacement – *idampeyarkappattavarkaL* (forcibly evicted) – contains the right to assistance and justice. While this footing remains in the margins of the NPDSCAD’s IDP frame, it continues to challenge dominant typologies of displacement by calling on the State to recognize Northern Muslims as political subjects and not only a category of need.

Focusing on our respondents’ connections to two locations, the paper presented the terrain our respondents navigated as they commuted between their origins in the North and current place of residence in Puttalam. In Puttalam our respondents were granted recognition as those displaced, a label that continues to marginalize them. On returning to the North, they encountered legal obstacles to proving their origins. The return of the Northern Muslims is complicated by a larger national and perhaps even international discourse on Muslims. ‘Muslims’ is the label through which actors recognized them which posed an additional ethno-religious challenge to their return to their homelands. In both ‘homes’ (in the North and in Puttalam) therefore our respondents are denied full integration.

Complicating the settlement options available to IDPs through the NPDSCAD, the Northern Muslims disrupt the either/or solution presented in the policy. As our respondents travel between two homes, we see return-remain as their ‘reality’ – an option that is not granted full recognition in the NPDSCAD.

Our study was limited to a small number of respondents, but we gained in-depth knowledge of individual displacement life stories. However, this paper does not aim to represent the situation of all Northern Muslims, and rests mainly on selected discursive accounts. For further research, a survey document that explores the thematic issues that emerged through this paper would complement our study, and corroborate findings across a larger sample population.

In closing, by examining the complexities of post-war displacement through the case of the Northern Muslims, we find that policy documents are unable to fully recognize respondents’ multifaceted subjectivities. Reviewing policy

discourses that frame and categorize those displaced, our essay concludes that it is 'voices from the ground' that hold the key to dismantling the limitations of policy frameworks.

Notes

i) The Sri Lankan war that took place in the North and East of the country over three decades resulted in mass displacement of civilians. Resettlement of those displaced is still underway in the island.

ii) Taken from the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

iii) Taken from the UN's 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Convention and protocol relating to the status of refugees; [United Nations, 2010](#)).

iv) In the 2012 census report 'Sri Lankan Muslims' have been reclassified as 'Sri Lankan Moors'. For research focused on the Muslims of Sri Lanka, see [Ismail \(1995\)](#); [McGilvray \(1998\)](#); [Nuhman \(2007\)](#).

v) Tamils form as large a population as Muslims in the Eastern Province. Recent publications focused on Tamil-Muslim relations in the East include [McGilvray \(2008\)](#) and [Spencer et al \(2015\)](#). Relations between Eastern Tamils and Muslims, however, differ from those in the North as Muslims in the North are a smaller population than those in the East. It has been noted that regional differences among Tamils and Muslims transcend ethnic ones ([Thiranagama, 2011](#), p. 122).

vi) According to current statistics, the percentages of Muslim (3.1%) and Sinhalese (3%) populations in the Northern Province are almost equal.

vii) For research that documents the case of the Northern Muslims see: [Hasbullah \(2001\)](#); [Brun \(2008\)](#); [Thiranagama \(2011\)](#). A report by the Citizen's Commission on the Expulsion of Muslims from the Northern Province by the LTTE in October 1990 (2012) provides a detailed exploration of the expulsion and current issues faced by Northern Muslims.

viii) In 2002, the LTTE acknowledged that the expulsion was a "political blunder" (Pirapaharan to meet Muslim leaders, 2002). LTTE ideologue, Anton Balasingham also issued an apology for atrocities committed by the movement against Muslims ([N. Subramanian, 2002](#)). However, whether this could be read as an apology for expulsion is debatable. In 2015 M. A. Sumanthiran, Minister of Parliament and Spokesperson of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA) suggested a resolution be passed by the Northern Provincial Council stating regret for the expulsion of Muslims from the North by the LTTE ([Balachandran, 2015](#)). His statement was opposed by members of the TNA who disagreed with his stance of seeing Muslim expulsion as ethnic cleansing. No resolution has been passed on this matter so far.

ix) The 2012 census report shows an increase in Muslim population in the Puttalam District from 1981 (49,000 persons) to 2012 (147,546 persons). This increase cannot be attributed to the expulsion only, and reflects overall growth in population. The report also remarks that the Jaffna, Mannar and Mullaitivu districts showed a decrease in Muslim population. From this we surmise that statistics reflect the low trend of Muslim return to the North.

x) See [Shanmugaratnam \(2000\)](#) for discussion on Kalpitiya, Puttalam.

xi) [Brun \(2003\)](#) reveals the complication faced by IDPs when navigating local administrative systems that mark citizenship through place of registration. Such processes, she argues, prevent complete local integration of migrants as migrants are registered in the original place of residence while currently resident in a different location.

xii) The intervention was facilitated by a Communications Officer and members of the Palavi Northern Muslim community. The group held FGDs that culminated in the planning and implementation of an Artwork competition held in two schools in the Palavi area. The group decided that it was important for children to remember their past in the North, and express gratitude to the Muslims of Puttalam for hosting them after expulsion.

xiii) In the NPDS CAD IDPs are differentiated from returnee refugees who left the country and have returned.

xiv) In an interview with an older male respondent, the reason for the expulsion of the Muslims living in the North was traced to friction between Tamil and Muslim communities in the East. He noted that incidents such as the massacre at Katankuddy and Eravur in which a number of Muslim devotees were killed was an expression of the desire of the LTTE, which comprised a majority of Tamil cadres, to suppress Muslim resistance through violence and establish an ethnically pure Tamil State. The respondent attributed the expulsion of the Muslims from the North in October 1990, where Tamil-Muslim relations had thus far been peaceful, to the fear of an uprising in the North in response to rising tensions in the East. Although the LTTE did not provide a reason for expelling Muslims from the North, [Hasbullah \(2001\)](#) and [Thiranagama \(2011\)](#) have also pointed to this as possible explanation.

xv) One way of proving origins is proof of land in the village; however, land is a contentious issue in the post-war North. For example, when State land is granted to a citizen through permits, the process of owning it requires residency on the land. However, following displacement respondents are unable to lay claim to the land they were granted as they have not occupied it for decades. In such instances, and especially when displacement continues for more than one generation, verifying ownership proves to be difficult.

xvi) Ownership of land is complicated by land distributions that occurred under the LTTE which functioned as a *de facto* State in areas of the North and East under its control. For discussion on land-related issues in the North and East see [de Almeida Guneratne, Pinto-Jayawardena, & Gunaratne \(2013\)](#).

xvii) The GS or *Grama Sevaka* is a village-level public official appointed to a *Grama Niladhari* Division (generally a village) which is the smallest administrative division in Sri Lanka.

xviii) For those registered in the North but were displaced to Puttalam, special provisions were granted to cast their vote in Puttalam during elections.

xix) [Hasbullah \(2015\)](#) provides a detailed historical geography of Musali land and ownership. For news reports on the issue see [M. Srinivasan \(2017\)](#) and [R. Wickrematunge \(2017\)](#).

xx) The anti-Muslim violence that took place in Aluthgama and Beruwela along the Southwestern coast of Sri Lanka in 2014 involved Sinhala thugs targeting Muslim villages and looting and burning Muslim-owned shops. These acts set off a string of anti-Muslim attacks in other parts of the island. These incidents were not reported on mainstream media, and were seen to be the result of a nationalist agenda driven by religious forces that wished to reclaim Sri Lanka as a Sinhala-Buddhist nation. For documentation of events that unfolded see report by [Law & Society Trust \(2014\)](#). For an analysis of the discourse of Sinhala-Buddhism see [Dewasiri \(2016\)](#).

xxi) See for example the concept of “third space” discussed by [Bhabha \(1994\)](#).

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