Changing Place Attachment and Belonging among Internally Displaced Women: Implications for Durable Solutions to Displacement

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Abstract

By drawing on the experiences of internally displaced women living in protracted displacement in two camps in Kalpitiya in the district of Puttalam, the study aims to interrogate the linkages between women, place attachment and belonging in the context of government initiated durable solutions to displacement issues. I researched forty women using questionnaires, formal and informal discussion. Their narratives reveal their place attachments towards places of origin and their belonging have become very fluid and complicated during the last two decades due to many factors including bitter experiences of living in protracted displacement, generation, standard of life back in their original villages and in camps, livelihood opportunities, social networks, safety and education. All these aspects are reflected when narrating their place attachment and belonging. The study concludes that IDP women are unable to resolve question in a uniform way regarding durable solution to displacement due to conflicting views over place attachment and belonging in the context of government promoted solution for displacement. Although, these differing views are negotiated at household levels and have become important in making a durable solution to displacement both at household and government levels, such views have not been heard or incorporated in finding a durable solution to IDP issues.

Key Words: Women, Displacement, Place attachment, Belonging.

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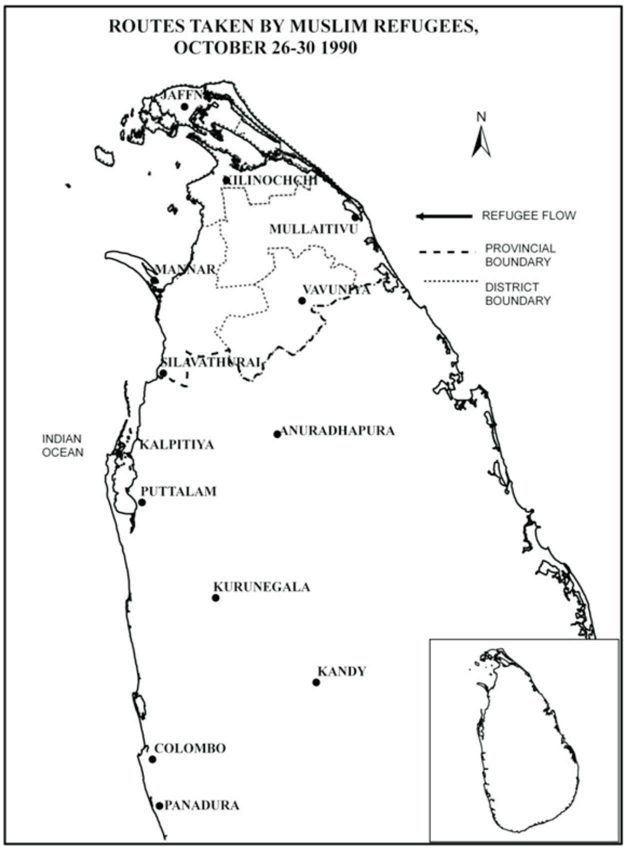
1. Introduction

Every year millions of people are displaced across the world and within state boundaries for reasons varying from development to war and conflict. Highlighting these phenomena, the last three decades have experienced an increase in the literature on displacement and it's far reaching social, economic, political, cultural and environmental consequences (Cernea, 1997; Cernea and McDowell, 2000; Brun, 2000; Lund, 2000; Scudder, 2005). Sri Lanka has also experienced different types of displacements throughout its history. Although internal displacement is not a new phenomenon for Sri Lanka, if one were to trace back the long internal displacement history of the country, during the last three decades what Sri Lanka witnessed in terms of 'internal displacement' is rather unique and challenging due to number of reasons (Land and Knudsen, 2008). Since the end of war in 2009 May, Sri Lanka is currently in an early phase of a post war reconstruction and it has realized the need to address IDP problems in a more comprehensive and a sustainable manner when it comes to durable solutions.

The thirty years of war displaced thousands of people from all three communities. In the internal displacement history of Sri Lanka, 1990s marks a milestone especially as it reflected an open ethnic cleansing. In 1990 almost all of the Muslims in the North were forced to leave by the LTTE. They were about 80,000 people and were given 2 to 48 hours to leave their houses. Muslims who were forced to leave, made their way towards government-controlled areas in Vavuniya and Anuradhapura, as well as to Puttalam districts (Hasbullah 2001; Brun 2000; Brun 2003). Figure 1 shows different routes taken by the displaced Muslims to come to safer areas. After their arrival, the IDPs who arrived in separate groups to Puttalam were allocated to various welfare centres.

Figure 1 : Routes taken by displaced Muslims from Northern Provinces



Source: Prepared by KNP Piyatissa[2] based on Hasbullah (2001).

Those who migrated to Puttalam as refugees have continued to live in open camps over the course of two decades. After the end of war in 2009, there is now a hope within this community to explore their right to find a durable solutions to their problems. The government of Sri Lanka has already opened the space for resettlement. The current resettlement process of the country accepts that there is a need to give Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) a more constructive stake in implementing the solutions which targeted return to their

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own villages. However, among the IDPs there is no consensus in accepting the invitation to return as the arrangements for resettlement are not as expected by the people.

Resettlement decisions are influence by a broad spectrum of factors. Badurdeen (2010)[3] highlights that Northern Muslims continue to construct their identities around their places of origin even after expulsion and living in protracted displacement for a long time. Azmi (2012) highlights how sense of belonging and home vary in the line of generation. The second generation IDPs have different sense of place, belonging and home compared to the first generation. Further, there are conflicting interests that vary across different sections of IDPs when it comes to sense of belonging, place and home. Regardless of these differences, they are now left with three alternatives: remaining in Puttalam; returning to their villages in Mannar or resettle elsewhere. Although IDPs have negotiated these options among themselves and with the government, under large scale post war reconstruction agenda, government of Sri Lanka motivates IDPs to return to their homes.[4]

In recent years, many discussions have been held to find solutions to people living in protracted displacement. Voluntary return, local integration and resettlement are identified as 'durable solutions' to IDP issues.[5] Return is almost always seen as the best solution for displaced persons by state, NGOs and

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[3] http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/working-paper-series/wp66-ending-internal-displacement-2010.pdf Accessed 13.12.2013

[4] According to Deng (1999: 484) IDPs are '[P]ersons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.' Defining characteristics of IDPs according to above definition is that they have been forcibly evicted within national borders and not crossed the national border.

international organization. Return is – at least when it is voluntary and carried out with safety and dignity- considered as a strong solution. But in protracted displacement situation, voluntary return is not simple. The 28th to 30th Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement spell out that the conditions for voluntary return should be in safety and dignity to places of origin, resettlement and re-integration (UN-OCHA, 2010). In developing a durable solution for IDPs, the Brookings Bern Project on Internal displacement, defines durable solution as 'no more displacement-specific needs and vulnerabilities' (Brookings Bern Project on Internal Displacement 2007 : 14). According to the updated version of this report the concept of 'durable solutions' is further clarified. It defines durable solution as "A durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons 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"[6]. This report also emphasizes that a durable solution should make the displaced to stand on their own feet with dignity.

In Sri Lanka, at present, the end of thirty years long conflict makes it possible for IDPs to contemplate return to their places of origins or re- integrating with the host community or settling elsewhere. But these options which IDPs may choose for their durable solution is far from established. One reason is, finding durable solutions to protracted internal forced displacement is a new area for policy discussion in Sri Lanka. Further, displaced people vary considerably in the lines of time, geography, ethnicity, generation and gender which makes the task even more difficult for a country just emerging from war. While the government is trying to implement the internationally accepted solutions, IDPs also have initiated new ways of solving the issue which is not yet

[5] http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e4878e6.html (Accessed on 20.11.2012)

[6] http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Research/Files/Reports/2010/3/05% 20internal%20 displacement/0305_internal_displacement.PDF (Accessed on 24.11.2012)

widely acknowledged. What I argue in this paper is that by examining place attachment and belonging of internally displaced women, one could identify that decision to return, resettle elsewhere or remain composed of mixed nature addressed by distinct layers of meanings the displaced have regarding place attachment and belonging. Such an understanding is very essential for taking a decision that addresses people's real concern. In order to provide a policy insight, I locate the internally displaced women's narrative in detail.

This study focusses on the following two research questions: how the attachments to places are (re)constructed and negotiated through living in forced migration and where do the women think that they belong? The main aim of the study is to explore different displacement experiences of IDP women and to show how IDP women conceptualize place/ place attachment and belonging within the context of government proposed solutions to protracted IDP situations. Through this objective, I try to find out whether their place attachment and belonging have any impact on future decisions to remain, resettle or return. Hence this study will be useful in development practice and policy.

2. Methodology

This section describes the data and methods that I used in the study. In terms of methodology, traditional approaches on migration and displacement have mainly used quantitative methods of data collection, influenced by the researcher's epistemological stand point. These studies are valuable in giving information about the magnitude and spatial pattern of the problem and contributed in understanding the problem at a macro level (Shanmugaratnam, 2001). However, such studies cannot adequately shed light on individual experiences and perceptions. Studying experiences of forced migration and exploring their attachments to place and sense of belonging is a sensitive issue. My epistemological position accepts that individuals and their place–specific lives might disappear in statistics if I depend on numbers alone. Therefore, I believed such topics cannot be researched by quantitative methods alone. Hence, the study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. In order to generate some basic socio-economic data, a semi structured questionnaire was administered.

Apart from the semi structured questionnaire, the empirical data collected through informal interviews. Where relevant, I obtained institutional information from *GramaNiladari* office and NGOs to triangulate the information furnished by the IDPs. Field visits and observation methods were also used. They provided interesting information about everyday lives of IDP women. In order to maintain research ethics, real names of the respondents are not used in the analysis.

The interviews held were semi structured with open-ended questions. The duration of an interview was between 1-1.5 hours. The sample consisted of 40 women aged between 35-75 years. I approached the sample units through personal contacts. Therefore, the sample is not statistically representative of the population from which it is drawn. However, when selecting participants I paid attention to variations such as age, education and place of residence. I believed that all these factors might be related to different experiences of displacement, attachment to place and belonging. Data collected through questionnaires are analyzed to give an account mainly on basic socio economic background of the informants. In terms of qualitative data, the analysis involved reading the interview transcripts, making analytical notes, searching for analytically relevant themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and presenting the data.

In order to study the experiences of displacement, place/place attachment and senses of belonging among IDPs, I selected Mandalakkuda GS division of Kalpitiya in the district of Puttalam. This study was undertaken between September 2011 and May 2012.

3. Conceptual Framework

When forced migration and displacement occur, far more damages are created than mere loss of physical assets. People's lives and social fabric of the displaced community are torn apart (Cernea, 1997; Cernea and McDowell, 2000). Among several other impacts, the gendered impacts of internal displacement and how they vary during various stages of displacement have been addressed widely (Judy and Khadija, 1998; Banerjee, 2006)[7].

Women and Internal Displacement

Research highlights that forced migration has greater impact on women than men, and the effects differ during the different stages of the crisis (Agarwal, 1996; Cohen, 1997; Guruja, 2000; El-Bushra, 2000; Hyndman, 2008). Conditions in new places may often be new especially to women, even if they are displaced within a country. In new places unfamiliar living environments may affect the existing social roles and responsibilities of women (Judy and Khadija, 1998). The damages created to their family and community bonds, their lack of mobility prior to displacement, and the threat of family disintegration all may constitute significant challenges for women in new living environments.

When they encounter differences and new challenges, they are forced to lose their negotiated position and have to negotiate for new roles and relations

[7] http://www.mcrg.ac.in/pp10.PDF Accessed on 13.12.2013.

in the new socio economic and geographical context. They also have to negotiate for new socio economic responsibility. In such contexts, women's vulnerability arises from existing gender inequality which reflects on unequal workloads due to patriarchal productive and reproductive roles, their lack of control over resources, restricted mobility, and limited education and employment opportunities (UNCHR, 2001). These changes can question their place attachment and belonging when they try to locate themselves in the social space. Therefore, looking at forced migration, displacement and resettlement from a gender perspective might provide insights into a number of serious issues relating to the planning and implementation of resettlement and reconstruction programmes.

Place / Place Attachment and Belonging

I use place/ place attachment and belonging as analytical framework of the study. Place as a sociocultural construct has been researched in relation to its impact on various aspects of people's lives by researchers from different disciplinary backgrounds. Place attachment and belonging are extremely broad concepts. Although I rely basically on geographical concepts of place/place attachment and belonging as analytical framework of this study, I borrow from other disciplines such as Sociology, and Environmental Psychology as I found the literature on place/ place attachment and belonging in the aforementioned disciplinary areas have recognized these concepts as an important construct for exploring factors that links individuals for certain places (Manzo and Perkins, 2006). Further, I believe the interdisciplinary focus will help to understand the concepts in a broader and deeper way.

In the discipline of Geography, how place is used, defined, and applied vary (McDowell, 1997) as geographers have brought the concept of place to the forefront of the field by researching it broadly. Place has been viewed by geographers as a dynamic product that is produced through historical, social, economic, and political processes (Tuan, 1977; Tuan, 1980; Massey, 1995; Massey, 1997). Humanistic geographers Tuan (1977) and Relph (1976) identify the importance of place in creating identity and emotions when highlighting the social construction of place as constructed by different people and groups subjectively. In the literature on people's emotional relationship to places, geographers have used several key concepts such as sense of place, place attachment, place identity and place dependence (Buttimer, 1980; Tuan, 1980, Hay, 1998). Tuan (1980) suggests that the primary function of a place is to highlight a sense of belonging and attachment. Hay (1998) notes that place attachment become deeper and stronger when it is decided by long term continuity. However, in the context of protracted displacement, this can be complex. Rubinstein and Parmelee (1992) found place attachment as a set of feeling about a geographical location which can emotionally bind a person to that place and can change over time. They describe that place attachment is a process than a state of mind. The focus on 'process' shows that 'place attachment' can be a constantly negotiated process and cannot be linked merely to a geographical reference point.

Low and Altman from Environmental Psychology background suggest that place attachment “is an integrating concept comprising interrelated and inseparable aspects” (1992:4). According to them, the concept of place attachment refers to a strong connection between people and place. They highlight place attachment as a multifaceted concept. They also stress place attachment may be held by individuals or a cultural group. Individuals can have attachment to places emotions, feelings, beliefs, memories and thoughts. In terms of cultural groups, place attachment can be comprised of shared symbolic meanings of places (Low and Altman, 1992).

As such, “attachment to a place” consists of layers of meaning, nature/physical aspects and social relations as explained by Olt Jensen (2006). Like social construction of places (Tuan, 1977) when looking at 'place attachment' it is important to acknowledge that different people have different attachment towards and different meaning for places. Eyle (1985) suggests place attachment is gendered. Eyle (1985) points out while men's place attachment is connected to physical settings of a place; women's place attachment is linked with social community. Yet, questions on how displacement tends to shape the connection between people and places have not received adequate attention it ought to until recently in the discipline of Geography. New geographic research on internally displaced people and refugees has benefitted from the works of Hyndman (1999), Birkeland (2000), Lein (2000), Lund (2000), Van Hear 2000) and Brun (2008) on the relationship between people and places.

The concept of place attachment is closely associated with the concept of belonging which is a contested, problematic concept in protracted displacement.Geographic research on 'belonging'/ 'sense of belonging' is increasing recently as a result of different types of migration and mobility which has questioned belonging (Mee and Wright, 2009). Mee and Wright (2009) while highlighting the concept of 'belonging' as an inherently a geographical one, in the editorial written for *Environment and Planning ,* they sum up the discussion by saying that *'The geographies of belonging are negotiated geographies, through which diverse actors work to reconfigure notions of who and what belongs through the ontological, epistemological, and material struggles of everyday practice'* (Mee and Wright, 2009 : 776). This reflects the fluid nature of belonging in more mobile world.

'Belonging' in the discipline of Geography has been theorized through the dimensions of time, everyday spatial activities, feelings of safety comfort and commitment (De Certeau, 1984; Massey, 1994; Fenster, 2004, 2005). Massey (1993) claims belonging as a feeling that is constructed at a certain place and time which reflects the idea that belonging cannot necessarily be a static concept. Probyn (1996) and Fenster (2005) highlight the differences between sense of belonging, practices of belonging and formal structures of belonging. What they emphases in their argument is that the construction of sense of belonging is not necessarily connected with presence in a particular place. It can also be linked to a place people already left as in the context of displacement. In analyzing physical and symbolic construction of belonging in the location and construction of churches in Tel Aviv, Fenster and Vizel (2006) argue that in practice belonging can be a 'multi layered' construction by highlighting different layers of identity people prioritize. Although people living in displacement have different attachments underlined by different layers in their everyday life, they have to negotiate belonging to a 'place'. When they negotiate belonging in such a context, inclusion and exclusion to a particular socio economic and political context can shape their sense of belonging.

In this study, the above discussed conceptualizations and understandings of place/place attachment and belonging will be analyzed through the narratives presented in the paper. I believe living in protracted displacement has implications for place attachment and belonging. Exploring place attachment and belonging among IDPs can shed light on how they are continuously negotiating places and belonging since their arrival to an unfamiliar place which is essential for finding durable solutions for their problems. The limitation of this research is the fact that as gendered actors in such contexts although both men and women are important and worthy to be researched, I focus only on women, as I noticed women's voices are completely muted in the resettlement discussions in Sri Lanka at household and government levels. I insist, in the context of protracted displacement 'place attachment' and different types of 'belonging' are important concepts that have policy implication for durable solutions for IDP issues and this situation should be looked at through gender lenses. I will preface the analysis on internally displaced women's place attachment and belonging by exploring their personal narratives on living in camps in Kalpitiya and back at their places of origin.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Study Site

In 2009, there were 74,433 IDPs belonging to 17,302 families in Puttalam district. In the Puttalam district, Kalpitiya consists of large number of Muslim IDPs compared to other areas of the district. About 75 percent of the displaced northern Muslims were living in this area during the time of the research. There are nine IDP camps in Mandalakkuda GN division. For this particular research, I have selected Al- Manar U and Al-Manar T IDP camps. Table 1 shows the distribution of families in both camps which are categorized according to sex.

Table 1: Population Distribution of Selected Camps

Camp	Total number of families	Males	Females	Total
Al-Manar U	332	600	624	1224
Al-Manar T	57	115	126	235

Source: S.N.D.M Office, 2009 (Puttalam).

Mannar Before 1990s

Mannar, which belongs to the Northern Province, is divided into five Divisional Secretariats divisions namely Madhu, Mannar, Musali, Manthai West and Nanaddan. Informants selected for the study mainly come from Mannar DS division particularly from Mannar Island. Tamils and Muslims in the North lived in a violent environment even before 1990s due to fighting between the government army and the LTTE and various other groups in the area (Shanmugaratnam, 2001; Brun, 2008). They have lived as an interdependent community. Key informants in the study also shared similar experiences regarding the life in Mannar before the forced eviction. Although Muslims and Tamils in the North have traditionally been integrated in a very interdependent way in their day today life, religious identity of Muslims was an important factor that distinguished Muslims and Tamils in the North like elsewhere in the country.

Economy of the Mannar Muslims was tied up with agriculture. Most of the people were engaged in agriculture and fishing. Some were engaged in trading and had outside links beyond Northern Province. As noted by Hasbullah (2001) changes in the lives of Northern Muslims started with their forced eviction in 1990. While these changes have been captured through economic, political and demographic dimensions, relatively little attention has been paid for gender dimension. According to casual conversations with informants, it was revealed that within the cultural context of Muslims in Mannar, women's roles were not very much visible in the public space. They reflected a lower level of education compared to Muslim women in other parts of the country. Although they were not much visible in the public space, within the domestic space they performed the traditional roles as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters. They also assisted in family business by engaging directly and indirectly in economic activities in a socially defined space. Poor people in the villages benefitted from community networks. Even in the case of poor women, community networks helped to cope with poverty through personalized strategies, informal loans, exchange of food, clothing and durable goods, mutual help with farming, building houses, and caring for children as in many rural areas of the country. Some of these helps were extended through religious charity too. These networks not only provided mere economic benefits but they also ensured belonging to and a bond towards the community. However, such bonds were torn apart when the LTTE declared an open ethnic cleansing in the Northern Province.

Informants' Background

The age composition of the field survey respondents is as follows: 27.5 percent of women were between 35-45 years; 40 percent of women were between 46-56 years; 25 percent of women were between 57-67 years and 7.5 percent of women were between 68-78 years. Majority of the respondents (40 percent) were at the age range between 46-56 years. A comparison of number of children among different age groups revealed that the women in the age groups between 57-67 and 68-78 had more than five children each. Further all informants belong to Sri Lankan Moor and practice Islam.

Although the overall literacy level of Sri Lanka is very high compared to many other countries in South Asia, literacy levels among the IDP women in the study area remains low. Findings of the research show poor achievement after grade six. Notably an analysis of the data reveals that among the grade 1-5 group, seven women have studied up to grade three only. Among the respondents, three women have not gone to school. It is pertinent to note that none of them have studied up to GCE (A/L). Previous research on Northern Muslims' educational challenges have highlighted that school dropout rates were high among girls since 1983 due to the war (Dawood, 2008). When conflict started in Mannar, girls were the first to be pulled out of schools and faced early marriages. Table 2 shows the educational level of respondents.

Table 2
Educational Attainments of Respondents

Grade	Number of respondents
No Schooling	03
1-5	20
6-10	14
GCE (O/L)	03
Total	**40**

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Despite a substantial economic development in Puttalam after the arrival of the IDPs in 1990, the local economy had not expanded enough to absorb the increasing labour force. As a result many displaced men and women are in a marginalized position in terms of access to employment. With few possibilities to restoring their lost livelihoods, and other constraints, women face more challenges in securing employment opportunities. According to the field survey, among the women in this study, only 12.5 percent women were engaged in income generating activities before they were migrated. They were engaged in self-employment activities like, poultry, tailoring and preparing dry fish. They also worked in their agricultural land as unpaid workers. After migration, the involvement of women in economic activities increased though such activities were concentrated in the informal sector. Among the interviewed women, after migration their economic participation has increased up to 20 percent. The income earning activities these women have selected are shaped by culture, capacity, resources, access to market, host community institutions and social mechanisms. Women in the study earn from grinding rice, packing and selling, plucking green chilies and harvesting onions, making food (string hoppers, hoppers) and selling clothes.

Negotiating Displacement, Place Attachment and Belonging

As pointed out in a previous section being displaced is not just a change of physical location but a dislocation of many aspects of normal life. People may lose properties, their families may be divided, social relations can become fragile, educational opportunities are disturbed, religious places are lost and more particularly peoples psychological wellbeing comes under fire. Though with such an array of issues, life goes on and, whether displaced into a camp or into an unfamiliar environment, someone who is forcibly displaced try to find ways to re-create what is lost or to find substitutes for it. Stories pertinent to such struggles are different and may highlight different aspects. Among many other things, in such a context place/ place attachment get new meanings and people may narrate their 'belonging' differently.

Living in Displacement: Place Attachment

Theoretical discussions on place attachment have highlighted the fact that displacement can alter attachment to places. In the context of protracted displacement, attachment to places can be more complicated. During the initial informal discussions with the IDP women, I understood their attachment to place was reflected by the views that compared life in Kalpitiya to Mannar. As a result answers to the question on place attachment were influenced by multiple meanings they assigned for places which are reflected through both material and non-material things.

Loss of Livelihoods

When asked about the experiences of living in displacement and place attachment, Mazahima, a mother of four children, told with tears:

> *"We had 100 cows, 150 goats, a van, five acres of land, a large house and fishing equipment including a boat. When LTTE announced we should leave our homes, my husband was in Jaffna for a business. I was shocked and left with no choice other than leaving with my sister's family. I met my husband after three weeks in Puttalam. When we came to camps, we had to find work. My husband felt humiliated to do a coolie work as he had never done coolie work before. But in order to feed us he started to do causal works also. Now we have a three wheeler from which we earn our income. We are also getting the government ration. Here no body respects us or nobody knows how rich we were. I think one can keep his or her head high only if they have wealth in their own places. Although Mannar did not give us a good farewell I feel more attached to Mannar as it provided a good life when we were there".*

Displacement has had a significant negative impact on their livelihoods of many Muslim IDPs like Mazahima's family. Displacement deprived Mazahima and her family of valuable assets which have given the social respect in their own villages are far away from them now. In Mazahima's case her place attachment is largely decided by the livelihood and assets which gave her family a higher social status in her village. Even after nearly twenty three years of life as IDPs, many families did not have a steady income to sustain their livelihoods. Living in displacement for a long time has made the whole displaced community in the study area to largely depend on government assistance and relief packages provided by NGOs. Pre-displacement livelihoods of most families were related to agriculture and fishing which is hard to replace in a new living environment. All of their livelihood assets were abandoned at the time of their displacement which has strong influence on place attachment.

Social Environment

I met Thasleema at her home. She, along with her family went to Mannar in 2010. But she decided to return to Kalpitya. I wanted to know whether her decision was informed by place attachment. When I asked the reason, she told:

> *"I went to Mannar, with my family. I was looking forward to go there for years as it is my home. I was happy that we got this opportunity to go back. We lived there for three months. We put up small shed also. But it was extremely difficult to be there as we did not know the people around us. We missed our former neighbours. I was always worried and I discuss the problem with my husband. Then we decided to return. I could not have the same attachment to my own place that I lived once and left".*

Thasleema's account reveals that social relationship and people are important in making or creating attachments to place. Low and Altman(1992) have identified that 'places are repositories and contexts within which interpersonal, community and cultural relationships occur, and it is to those social relationships,not just to place qua place, to which people are at-attached' (p. 7).This is reflected in the story of Thasleema too. In Thasleema's case although she is originally from Mannar, she could not stay there as she could not find the same neighbours she had before forced migration. Even in Kalpitiya, she lived in a place where she had some neighbours she knew from her village in Mannar. For her, place attachment is not simply connected with the place as expressed by geographical place, rather she valued the social network when defining place attachment in the context of return.

Comfortable Life

When asked about 'place attachment' Haleema, aged 68 and a mother of seven, told:

> *"There isn't a single day in my life, that I forgot Mannar. We had a happy life there, as we did not have any problems. I still have a very strong attachment to Mannar. Life was comfortable there as we had good income and good respect in the society. My husband was attached to the mosque and he served as a trustee. Life was comfortable there. But everything was shattered after LTTE announced we should leave our home. I could not recover from that shock for a long time".*

When living in displacement, whether forced or voluntary, one might have wonderful memories of their own places and carry strong memories of such places as their homes which can influence their place attachment. Although Haleema has been living in Kalpitiya for nearly two decades, in her reflection on place attachment, it is clear that she has a strong attachment to Mannar which was influenced by the comfortable life she had there.

Loss of Home

Home can mean different things to different people. When homes provide a positive and a happy environment people's attachments to homes can create positive place attachments too and vice versa. Forced displacement can make people to lose their homes which provided them with comfort and happiness once. As a result of displacement, people may be forced to live in poor houses with poor access to basic amenities. During the research, women reminded the extreme conditions of the camp life they had and experiencing now. Overcrowding, inadequate shelter, lack of privacy and poor sanitation were identified as negative aspects of living in displacement which crated a negative place attachment to the places where they live now. Loss of home after displacement was heavily felt by women. Being primarily housewives most of them have spent their time at homes which was not the same with men—most of their working life was spent outside the home. Therefore the loss of home was seriously highlighted by women when explaining place attachment. Salma explained:

> *"When I think about my village, I remember my home. We did not have cage like houses when we were in Mannar. They were large and with a big garden. We had everything in our gardens. I hate the crowded environment here. I think I feel more attached to Mannar if I think of housing here".*

Most IDP families lived in overcrowded conditions in camps in Kalpitiya since their arrival. The women interviewed lived in extremely modest houses in the camps. They reported the hardships they experience during rainy seasons. The interviewed women said, after they came to Mandalakkuda IDP camp in 1996, from transitional camps and welfare centers, number of houses have increased. Due to the extended family system and inability to buy separate land for their daughters' dowry, they have to build small houses in the available small plots of land. This has created a very congested living environment. Interviewed women compared this situation with their houses in Mannar in which they lived

22 years back. But some women like Meharun are trying to create a home/a place attachment that comfort them, a heaven for themselves in Kalpitiya. Meharun said:

> *"We can't have large houses like what we had in our villages. We are living in a different time and different environment now. Although I have a small house, it is in a good and safe place as it is here in Kalpitiya. It is because of this I am more attached to Kalpitiya than my village. You can have money and other assets. But if you live under threat, how can you be happy".*

Meharun's narrative shows that over the years she has developed an attachment to Kalpitiaya than her own village. This is a clear example as to how displacement can change the logic of place attachment when places of origin become unsafe. But it also highlights place attachments are not only influenced by 'home' in its physical sense, but also by safety.

Opportunities for Educating Children

In the camp area there is one government school which has classes up to GCE (O/L). The school was established to serve the educational purpose of IDP children. Inadequate teachers, poor class rooms and lack of infrastructural facilities were identified by the interviewed women as basic problems for the smooth functioning of the school. They also told about the financial difficulties related to educational spending. Despite difficulties in schools, educational aspirations of their children were very high. Women were much more concerned about their daughters' education unlike in their former villages. The high educational aspirations for their children shown by women in the study could be a response to the importance generally placed on schooling by IDP families as token for a better tomorrow. However they are not in a position to afford good quality education provided by some tutorial classes in Kalpitiya.

Sualiaha:

> *"I have to sell the food I received as rations to pay tuition fee for my sons. This would not be the situation if we were in our villages. But you know; now we understand spending on education is a good investment. If we were in our villages, we would not have understood the value of education. In a way Kalpitiya opened our eyes in terms of education. I think because of this I have started to like Kalpitiya more than my village".*

Sulaiha was just eleven years, when she was forced to leave her village along with her family. She could not continue her education because of displacement. She values the opportunities for education in Kalpitiya and her attachment to place is shaped by the educational facilities available for her children at Kalpitiya.

Generation

The discussions with informants revealed that place attachment can also have a 'generational' dimension. I was able to notice a conflict between place attachments across different generation. Narratives of older generation women revealed place attachment is an ongoing struggle linked with losses and negative experiences. These narratives commonly emphasized personal experience of displacement, the stress of adjusting to new environment and the feeling of exclusion. For them the bitter experience of living in displacement has increased their place attachments to their places of origin. However, the middle aged IDP women's place attachments were often more complex and ambiguous as the time they spend in their own villages and the time they spend in Kalpitiya are almost equal. When I asked about place attachment, Beebi, a middle aged woman, answered:

> *"I really can't say to which place I am more attached to. I have lived half of my life in Mannar and half in Kalpitiya".*

But the young IDPs who were between 10-15 years of old during the time of displacement do not have a strong attachment to their own places as such places gradually moving away from their memories. The young generation has lived most of their life in Kalpitiya rather than in Mannar. Farwin a young IDP said:

> *"I do not feel any attachment to Mannar. I lived there when I was a child. I do not remember my village well. I have lived most of my life here in Kalpitiya. I am much attached to Kalpitiya".*

Farwin's narrative shows, the notion that place attachment is a kind of 'rootedness', established and developed over time. It can reflect a direct link with the amount of time spend in one place in one's life (Altman and Low, 1992). For Farwin, she has spent more years in Kalpitiya than in her village in Mannar and this time span has influenced her place attachment.

Taken together, during the interviews and discussions, women raised a number of complex issues (Loss of livelihoods, home, social support, uncomfortable life, time living in displacement and poor housing) related to living in displacement which had implications on their place attachment. Different experiences under different themes pulled out from the narratives show that these women had different and fluid place attachments. Going through the narratives of women it is obvious that within the changing social, economic, political and cultural context of Kalpitiya and Mannar, attachment to place has become multiple, diffuse and fluid for these women. What is clearly evident from their narratives is women's attachment to place is both rational and emotional.

Negotiating Belonging

After exploring their place attachment, I try to document their reflection on 'belonging'. 'Where do I belong' is an important question IDPs often pose to themselves when living in displacement especially in the context of post war resettlement projects initiated by government. They have to make a decision on 'belonging' as they are pushed by the government. With the end of the war, IDPs in Puttalam district are forced to think about their belonging as the government has expedited the resettlement process. However, from the part of the government as well as the displaced, the answer to this question has strong implication for durable solution to internal displacement issues. Finding a common answer to this question is particularly problematic in a protracted displacement context. When I asked where do they belong if they asked to decide on resettlement, majority of them told they belong to both Mannar and Kalpitiaya (Table 3)

Table 3 Origin of IDP Women

Age	Kalpitiya	Mannar	Both
35 - 45	09	01	01
46 - 56	03	02	13
57 - 67		07	03
68 -78		02	01

Source: Field Survey 211

Table 3 displays the fact about where IDP women belong to. It is interesting to note that many women said they belong both to Kalpitiya and Mannar. These were mainly the middle aged group.Older women identified themselves as 'belong' to Mannar. However, there were many stories behind these statistics. The following reflections from the few interviewed women reveal very interesting stories on how they view the government's solution to their problems and what they think about where they belong to.

Belong to the safe place

Raabia:

> *"I come from Mannar. But today we belong to Kalpitiya.I don't know the real situation there. People who have already gone to see the places say they were given land in very remote places and experienced snakebites. If the government can guarantee us a safe place, I may return as I was born there. My husband tells he wants to return despite of the bad situation. Therefore, it is difficult for me to make a decision on return".*

Rasheeda:

> *"When my family first heard about resettlement, I was dreaming to go back to my place permanently. I belong to Mannar. I went there a couple of time. It is not the same place that I had in my mind. My husband is going there but he is leaving me and my children here. He is telling conditions are still not good there to take us. He is engaged in fishing and he wants to do it in the future also. He will be coming and going to Kalpitiya".*

Raabia's as well as Rasheeda's sense of belonging is towards Mannar. From their narratives it is evident that men and women may evaluate the security conditions of the places which they fled in different ways. Women are more concerned about the safety compared to men. Interviewed women believe as Kalpitiya is safe and that they belong there. It is pertinent to point out that if government encourages return, it is important to make sure the conditions are conducive for sustainable return. Although the government has initiated 'a journey home' after two decades, the people are caught with challenges and obstacles to start a new life in the old places. From the narratives one can assume it is not due to place attachment and belonging men visited their former villages but because of economic reasons. Women in Kalpitiya cannot go to Mannar as Mannar has not returned to normality. Some men I met during the filed visits told me that transforming Mannar to a place suitable for living may take years and they have to maintain the link with Kalpitiya in order to develop their villages.

Informal Belonging

Ummuna is a widow and a head of the household. When asked about where she belongs to and what does she think about government decisions she told:

> *“I can't say I belong to Kalpitya in front of Kapliitya people though I feel I belong to Kalpitiya now. Although we want to be here, they {Kalpitiya people} don't treat us as insiders. Government solution to the problem has made us a double edged sward. I am not sure I will be able to do the same job I am doing now {She makes string hoppers}. I do not have any documents to prove that I had properties in Mannar. Everything was left when we came here. How can we live a nomad's life forever? I do not want to start my life from zero”.*

Like Ummuna, through certain everyday practices of belonging (engaged in a self-employment in the host community) IDPs are trying to show that they are part of the host society though they are excluded or treated as outsiders. Probyn (1996) and Fenster (2005) highlight practices of belonging and negotiations for belonging are not easy. Although Ummuna wanted to identify herself as belonging to the local community, she is reluctant to tell that in front of people from that community in Kalpitiya. Her belonging is also influenced by a paper document, which she lost (national identity card) that served as a proof of her identity and belonging to Mannar. According to some key informants, although they lived in Kalpitiya for a long time, differences generated by host community are prevailing as a cold war.

Like Ummuna many IDP families do not have documents to prove their formal belonging to the places of origin. When displacement is forced, unexpected and protracted, IDPs have problems with personal documentation. Some of them do not have birth certificates, which is a constraint to access employment and education. Even if IDPs decide to return, there might be challenges related to the problem of identification and documentation when it comes to reclaiming land and other properties even in their own land. Situation is particularly problematic for women who really want to return, but had less formal access to land compared to men in their former villages before they were forced to leave. Such women want to remain with the host community though they are excluded openly.

Naleema:

> *"I work as a cook in a local school in Mannar. But during the weekend and school holidays I come here. When I go to Mannar, I stay with my brother's family. I have my family here. My husband*

works in a hotel. When I am away, my elder daughter looks after the family. My children do not want go back to Mannar. I go there because it is my home and it is the place where I earn my living now. I don't know where I belong to. I live in Mannar and Kalpitiya".

Naleema is a trans- local who works in Mannar and lives in Kalpitiya. Her narrative reflects that depending on social, political and economic interaction belonging can become multiple and stretched over different locations. Like Naleema many middle aged women in the camp go to Mannar and come back while not planning to return permanently. During the protracted displacement many IDPs have become translocals living in Kalpitiya and in their own villages.

Discrimination

Negotiating 'belonging' to a host community is not easy if the stay of IDPS is prolonged. Salma expressed her bitterness as follows:

"When we came to Puttalam and lived in schools as IDPs we were treated well. But with time, when our people started to go to Saudi, buy land and built houses, people here got jealous and we are treated like outcastes. They expect us to be refugees forever. People are jealous here. But if we had what we have here Kalpitiya in our village we will not be treated as second class citizen. We are excluded here and we can't say we belong to Kalpitiya".

Although initial reception for the expelled Muslims from the North was very positive, the long term stay of displaced people in Kalpitiya created threats to local people (Brun, 2008). Conflicts between locals and IDPs reported in the past. Women interviewed mentioned that still that division is going on silently and at some instances very openly. The above narrative of Salma reveals that sense of belonging is structured within a complex power-relation system and a social hierarchy. IDPs are often considered as a weak and a low status group in the system and they are treated as secondary citizens.

Some women struggle to accept being referred to as IDPs. Sulaiha, 56 years old woman, told:

> *"They called us as 'akathi'-refugees- we accepted that at that time. Now I don't accept being called as an IDP. Because, I am not an IDP anymore. I have a home here. I am settled and now I belong to Kalpitiya".*

When one obtains the IDP identity it has serious implications on a person's life as it shows a negative personality. In protracted situations "IDP" label can undermine their ability to integrate into and belong to the host society. With time what an IDP meant earlier can gradually change in the minds of the displaced people. But it is hard to expect similar changes may take place in the host community too. Like Sulaiha, many women do not want to be labelled as IDPs or refugees. Hussaima, a mother of nine children told:

> *"I don't know where I belong now. When we were forced to leave, though it was a shock, I thought we will be able to go back to our places soon. I made up my mind. I was longing to go back to my home in Mannar as it is my village. Years and years passed and finally we have the freedom to visit our places. But my hopes are now faded. All my children and grandchildren are here. They are my life. I often worry about my past whenever I confront a situation that seems to question my belonging. But I have made*

up my mind to think that I belong to where my children and grandchildren belong to. Sometimes I also think I belong to Mannar as well as Kalpitiya".

Hussaima was seriously worried about her identity and hence belonging. She had confronted situations which questioned her belonging. In Kalpitiya they belong to 'refugees or IDPs' according to locals. But Hussaima thinks she belongs to Kalpitiya, influenced by her off spring's attitudes towards belonging and Mannar because of her home in Mannar. Although her children and grandchildren want to live in Kalpitiya, Saleema, the oldest women among the respondents had a different view:

"May be we will live like this in Kalpitiya for another twenty five years. But how can you say you belong to Kapitiya. My children and grandchildren do not want to go back to Mannar. But I want to ... because I belong to Mannar though I live here. I am not healthy enough to see my village before I die".

The above narrative confirms that constructing a sense of belonging does not necessarily require physical presence in a place (Probyn, 1996; Fenster, 2005).

Loss of Social Support

Social support serves as a protective factor in reducing the impacts of stress or depression among the displaced people. During the discussions it was reported that such factors as having family friends and relatives around create a support systemand improve lives of women. It also enhances a sense of belonging to their community again. Many women in the research highlighted that they experienced a sense of social marginalization due to disruption of social network by the processes of displacement. Thrust into different worlds, some IDP women are forced to create a new kind of place attachment and belonging in the world for themselves. When I asked about the existing social support Beebi told:

> *"When we were in Mannar the whole village is our family. We knew each other. If I want to go to see the doctor, I cannot take my kids. So I left them with my in-laws. But now they are living in another camp, I do not know much about my new neighbours. One of my sisters was living close to my home. But she has gone back to Mannar. But if I were in my village I will not have any problems".*

Rahmath told:

> *"Our relatives used to help us in our land. But now we don't have land or nobody from our family living closer to us to help. I miss my village a lot. I feel like living in another country in certain times".*

Belonging is necessary for an individual or a group to maintain their identity. Rahmath demonstrates that the social networks in her place of origin and in Kalpitiya are different. Now the families and communities are scattered spatially and socially. As a result of the distance created between kinship groups, women also experience a loss of support systems. Everything has changed since displacement. Over the time women interviewed have developed complex understanding of belonging. Misiriya , another IDP said:

> *"My husband wants to go back to Mannar if the government compensation is good. If we can get a good piece of land and if the government can help us to build a house he would go. But for me house and land is nothing as we will not have our families and former neighbours there. I prefer to stay here as I have some of my relatives here in Kalpitiya although they are not living closer to our place. For me belonging depends on where my relatives and friends are".*

Misiriya's explanation shows women value the social aspects of places than the physical aspects when talking about belonging. Many women valued social support and reflected in a complaining tone that they do not get enough social support. These social support systems become more essential in the context of displacement to achieve various objectives in the lives of IDPs. They can provide social, economic, cultural and political capital. They are also important for their collective 'belonging'.

5. Conclusion

From the above narratives on place/place attachment and belonging it is evident that these concepts are important in a protracted displacement context. However, the connection between place attachment and belonging is highly complex. In the context of displacement 'place/place attachment' are important concepts that have different meanings. Displacement, whether it is forced or volunteer can alter place attachment of people. This is particularly true in the context of protracted displacement situation where people might find difficult to relate them to a place. Thus in the protracted displacement context, place attachment can be more complex. It can be influenced by a set of social, economic, and political processes in the new places and comparing them with places of origin. It can be informed by age and experience. It can simply be influenced by material and non- material aspects of life between two places in life. In this way, displacement can change the logic of meaning to a place and hence the place attachment.

The narratives presented show though displacement had invoked a strong emotional place attachment to women' places of origin, during the first few years; such attachments have changed with time. But these changes have not been uniform when it comes to individuals. Findings of this study suggest these women are caught in a complex situation and daily confronted with the struggles related to 'return', re-settlement' and 'reintegration' due the complexities related to place attachment and belonging at household level and beyond. Throughout the interviews and discussions it was evident that IDP women have developed a fluid place attachment shaped by social, economic, cultural, historical, political and gendered processes.

Further, narratives of women in this study also reveal that traditional solutions to IDP issues regarding resettlement may not be capable of resolving the problem sustainably. Some women are skeptical about acknowledging whether the place they currently occupy as a place of stability- a point of reference- will provide them the identity of 'insiders' in the host community permanently in the future.

Generally, elder women in the study refuse to integrate with the host community and they want to go back. While young women believe that they belong to the host community and the majority of the middle aged women are caught in a dilemma. The latter group of women supported a trans-local strategy as a solution though they were not very definitive about how they are going to negotiate such a solution. They have to make a conscious decision. Although such strategies are complicated and difficult to implement, any programme targeting at return should not assume relocation of displaced people who are living in displacement for a long time is merely a technical operation. The Government can consider radical new approaches to 'durable' solutions rather than fully relying on the traditional approaches. Guiding Principle 28 implicitly acknowledge that IDPs have a right to make voluntary decision on what durable solution they can opt for. It further emphasizes, the IDPs have the right to participate in the planning and management of a durable solution.

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