

Contributing to development?

*Transnational activities among members of the
Tamil diaspora in Norway*

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List of abbreviations

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (TRO)

Tamil Economic Consultancy House (TECH)

Tamil Eelam Economic Development organization (TEEDOR)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Introduction

1.1 Migration, development and peace?

The population of the North East of Sri Lanka has suffered a protracted armed conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), fighting for the right to self-determination for Tamils in Sri Lanka, and the armed forces of Sri Lanka. This armed conflict has lasted for more than two decades and taken more than 60 000 lives, significantly, it has displaced more than a million Tamils internally in Sri Lanka, while there are now 800 000 Tamils living in exile (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah, 2006). In February 2002 a ceasefire agreement between the warring parties was made, and this agreement still holds, despite violations from both parties, in April 2006. However, though the war does not continue, the situation in the North East of Sri Lanka is still far from peace. The everyday lives of ordinary Tamils in the North East of Sri Lanka have been strongly affected by the armed conflict, many are still displaced and are not able to return to their 'home's (Goodhand et al 2005). In this context migration from Sri Lanka has been an option sought by many Tamils. The migration of Tamils started in colonial times and has continued throughout, though the war has increased numbers of Tamil migrants. Bearing in mind that Sri Lanka's Tamil population numbers only approximately 4 million people, the fact that 800 000 Tamils live in exile becomes significant. What are the ties of these Tamils in the diaspora with their 'home' country and with their family remaining in the North East of Sri Lanka? How do they relate to their families, how do they keep in touch and are financial remittances significant? What are their contributions towards development in Sri Lanka? What are these Tamils contributions in relation to the war, to the LTTE and in terms of the prospects for peace?

1.2 Migration, globalization and transnational activities

The theme of this project are the transnational activities of members of the Tamil diaspora, particularly those which are of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka. This theme is set within the wider context of globalization and international migration, where there are increasing numbers of different kinds of global links between people and places. While globalization for most people in the West means easier access to cheaper international travel and increased global contacts, this is not the case for a majority of the world's population. Nevertheless, the possibility of travel is there and people know about this,

making migration an option at least at a theoretical level. The number of displaced people, internally and internationally is more than 20 million, while the number of so called illegal migrants to the West is increasing. These movements of large numbers of people do not fit with the conceptual framework of traditional migration studies, which applies categories such as forced/voluntary migrants or legal/illegal migrants. In order to enter most Western countries, migrants have few options other than entering illegally, and in order to remain there are few options other than applying for asylum or remaining illegally. The differences between rich and poor societies globally, suggest that there are some economic motivation mixed with other motivations, when migrants come to the West. The nature of contemporary migration leads to a blurring of boundaries between these traditional categories of migrants (Black 2003). This leads to a change in the ways in which migration can be handled by both sending and receiving countries, as well as leading to new possibilities of involvement of migrants across large distances and across borders. All this suggests the need for new approaches to migration, and to the activities of migrants, and it is here that the transnational approach to migrants and their activities in exile and in relation to 'home' is relevant.

Among other because of processes and outcomes of globalization and the changing nature of international migration, there has recently been an increase in the academic interest in transnational migrant networks, both in term of their activities and relevance in exile, but also with their relevance for their country of origin (Zuzner, 2005). The concepts transnationalism, transnational migrants and transnational activities centre around the academic debates about identity and meanings of 'home', about the role of the nation-state and nations in the era of globalization, about the integration of immigrants in multi-ethnic societies, about the links with 'home' and with people in the diaspora in a range of different countries and about the moral obligations towards family who remain at 'home' and the wish to contribute to ones 'home' country (Portes, 1999, Vertovec, 1999, Vertovec and Cohen 1999, Mohan 2002, Yeoh et al 2003, Van Hear et al 2004).

Literature on transnationalism frequently seeks to justify the fact that transnationalism is a new phenomenon, and that it is significantly different from the international migration of the past centuries (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002). Due to the processes and outcomes of globalization, and the related changes in the nature of contemporary migration, this is arguably the case. The essence of transnational activities of diaspora populations, as they will

be investigated in this study, relates to both the individual migrants cultural and social needs in exile, the economic aspects of financial remittances to family remaining in the country of origin and to the broader role of diaspora members in the economic, social and political developments in the country of origin. The broader role of the Tamil diaspora in relation to development in the North East of Sri Lanka is of great significance, as is their role in terms of supplying funds for the LTTE. Arguably, the Tamil diaspora can play the role of peacemakers or war mongers, in Sri Lanka (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah, 2006). However, within this understanding, it is important to note that diaspora populations are not homogenous. Members of diaspora populations, whether Tamils in Norway or elsewhere, are individuals; children and adults, females and males, farmers and engineers, with differing hopes and ideas about the future.

1.3 The Tamil diaspora in Norway

The Tamil diaspora in Norway and their relationship with Tamils in the North East of Sri Lanka provides an interesting case, in the context of existing academic debates about diaspora, transnational activities and development in the 'home' country. In connection with helping organize a solidarity action for peace in Sri Lanka in 2003, I took part in a two week field-trip to Sri Lanka (in August 2003) with Caritas Norway, visiting development and peace building initiatives in Colombo and the North and East of Sri Lanka, including Trincomalee, Vanni, Kilinochi and Jaffna. It was this trip which triggered my interest for the ongoing peace process in Sri Lanka as well as creating a strong sympathy with the population of the areas of the North East, which have been devastated by the civil war. This led to an interest in the role and potential of the Tamil diaspora in development and peace building in the North East of Sri Lanka.

The Tamil diaspora in Norway is an interesting case, as it is very well organized (Fuglerud 1997), well educated and resourceful. It is also a truly transnational community with linkages not only between the diaspora in Norway and Sri Lanka, but also between the Tamil communities in various countries of exile (UK, Switzerland and others). The significance of brain-drain in relation to Sri Lanka should not be forgotten, and the education levels of the diaspora in Norway may also be a point in case here (Fuglerud 1997). The magnitude of brain-drain globally is substantial (Adams 2003), and it is more than likely that

most of these people will not return – it is likely that they will want to contribute to their ‘home’ country nonetheless (Van Hear 2002). The question is how do they contribute, how can they potentially contribute in the future, and to what extent do these contributions have political significance in terms of the development and peace building in Sri Lanka?

The research question was initially about the nature of the transnational activities among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, and the significance of their contributions for peace building and post-conflict reconstruction in the North East of Sri Lanka. However, the Sri Lankan peace talks were at a stand still between April 2003 and March 2006, and so at the time of interviews, a permanent peace settlement seemed less and less likely. This led to a change in the focus of the research question, with an emphasis on diaspora contributions towards development in the North East more broadly, including peace building and post-conflict reconstruction, but without a specific focus on these issues. The research question is: **“To what extent and in what ways do members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway participate in transnational activities of significance to development in the North East?”**. Due to both time constraint and the somewhat unclear situation in Sri Lanka, the field work which was planned to be conducted in Sri Lanka did not happen, so the information obtained is from members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway only, leading to a diaspora view of the situation, rather than a more balanced view from both the diaspora and from Sri Lanka.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

The thesis starts with theoretical framework, about transnational communities and activities, where the significance of the transnational approach for addressing contemporary issues related to processes and outcomes of globalization is discussed. The theoretical framework which is applied in the analysis and discussions of the transnational activities of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway is then laid out. It is argued that the transnational approach to migrant activities is suitable for the investigation of Tamils in Norway and their activities. A broad understanding of the concept diaspora is adopted, where diaspora is taken to mean transnational community of migrants, and where ‘transnational’ is related to sustained contacts with the country of origin, including economic, cultural, economic and

political dimensions, and including a focus on both transnational activities and on desires for participation in such activities (Portes 1999, Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 2001).

The nature of the field of study suggests the use of qualitative methodologies, while the nature of transnationalism leads to a number of methodological challenges related to cross-cultural issues and the multi-local nature of these activities, these issues will be discussed in chapter 3. While researching the Tamil diaspora community and their transnational activities ideally should have involved research in several sites, at least including Norway and the North East of Sri Lanka, this was unfortunately not the case, due to limitations in time available. However, the interviews conducted with Tamils in Norway, supported with a range of internet sources and communication with Tamils in Norway outside the interview context, has turned out to be sufficient in terms of addressing the research question of this study, with a clear diaspora focus. While the case of Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora have been briefly introduced here, some further comments about the background of the civil war, the civil war and the Tamil diaspora will be given in chapter 4. This will serve as an introduction to the field of Tamil politics at 'home' and in the diaspora, which will be useful in the context of all the analysis and discussion chapters, as the role of the LTTE comes up in relation to most topics on the Tamil diaspora.

The next three chapters present, analyze and discuss the findings of the study of the transnational activities of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. Chapter 5 investigates the transnational activities of the members of Tamil diaspora and their relation to 'home'. In this chapter all kinds of transnational activities, including economic, social, cultural/religious and political, with both a 'home' and host country focus are included. This is because the transnational activities of relevance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, are interrelated with activities which seem to be of no direct relevance to development. Chapter 5 also discusses the possibility of permanent return for members of the Tamil diaspora, finding that 'diaspora circulation' seems to be a favoured solution. This leads on to a discussion of the implications of the everyday transnational practices of members of the Tamil diaspora for their abstract conceptualizations of 'home', which finds that these everyday practices do in deed have implications for the abstract conceptualizations of 'home'. The fact that members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway watch Tamil satellite TV, follow Tamil web-sites and participate in Tamil diaspora activities in Norway, means that the Tamil 'home'land comes

closer and that their Tamil identity is strengthened and re-shaped in the diaspora, and through this perhaps encouraging more contributions to family and to development in the North East, as well as more personal and direct involvement with the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka.

Chapter 6 addresses the question of diaspora contributions to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, particularly through remittances to family and contributions to Tamil development organizations, though also in the form of ‘social remittances’ and temporary return visits. These contributions have a significance at the organization level, for the TRO and for the LTTE, as well as at the family level, for family members living in the North East. The somewhat unclear relationship between the LTTE and the TRO is a good illustration of the interrelatedness of politics and development (and all other) issues in the North East of Sri Lanka. Chapter 7 looks at the political involvement of members of the Tamil diaspora, and particularly at the role of the LTTE in Tamil diaspora politics. The role of the internet is also investigated, revealing new and interesting sites for diaspora activism. This leads to an acknowledgement of the complexity of Tamil transnational activities, particularly in terms of issues which may in some ways be seen as political, but it also reveals a pragmatic stance of the majority of the Tamil diaspora to political issues in the North East of Sri Lanka. It is found that members of the diaspora are interested in political issues, but that few are involved in the current context. However, it is clear that members of the Tamil diaspora have hopes for peace and for democracy in the North East of Sri Lanka.

Though it may be difficult to generalize from the example of the Tamil diaspora to other diaspora populations in terms of the significance of their transnational contributions, there may nevertheless be some interesting insights for both Tamil and other diaspora members and policy makers, which may have some relevance in terms of realizing the potential of diaspora contributions towards both development and peace building.

2. Transnational communities and activities

2.1 Migration, transnational communities and development

The research question which will be addressed in this study asks to what extent and in what ways members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway engage in transnational activities of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka. In order to address this question, there is a need for clarification of some of the concepts which will subsequently be used in the analysis and discussion chapters. The theoretical framework aims to discuss contrasting views of some of the key concepts, and clarify the ways in which these concepts will be understood for the purposes of this study.

From a geographical point of view, the study of transnational activities among diaspora populations may be approached from a number of angles, while the study of migration in general and particularly transnationalism is an interdisciplinary field (Bailey 2001), therefore the literature and theoretical framework adopted in this study includes perspectives from different fields. The literature on transnationalism is dominated by two approaches, the postmodern approach which focuses on identity, hybridity and a celebration of difference, and the political economy approach which focuses on the globalization of capitalism, transnational corporations and labour migration (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001). Meanwhile there is a need for an approach which is “materially and socially grounded without losing sight of the cultural and personal implications of transnational spaces and practices” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:591). Therefore a geographical starting point, which does not represent either of the above mentioned approaches, but draws on both of them is chosen for this study.

Firstly, there will be a discussion of globalization and territoriality, in the context of nation-states and migration. Following on from this there will be a discussion of international migration, transnational communities and the significance of ‘home’ and belonging. Finally, the theoretical framework for the analysis of the transnational activities of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway will be laid out, including references to other transnational communities and some of the concepts which will be used in the analysis chapters.

2.2 Globalization, territory and the nation-state

Globalization, territory and the nation-state relate strongly to issues of migration, and to the transnational activities of migrants across territories and across nation-states (Piot 1999, Olwig and Nyberg Sørensen 2002). Globalization as a concept is hard to define, while some argue that the significance of globalization is extreme, others argue that globalization is in fact nothing new. Dicken (2004) argues that it is possible to refute the arguments of both hyper-globalists and globalizations sceptics, and that globalization really is a set of processes which are increasingly important to understand, but that studies of globalization should include not only the processes, but also the outcomes of these processes. Dicken points out that this raises the question of spatiality and scale of both globalization processes and outcomes, and that much of the globalization literature oversimplifies this by dichotomizing this into 'global' and 'local'. According to Dicken, in geographical literature on globalization two perspectives on scale have become prominent, one arguing that globalization leads to changes in the relationships between different scales (local, regional, national, supra-national, global), the other arguing a topological view of geographical space where one can think of "places in nonterritorial terms, as nodes in relational settings, and as a site of situated practices (of presence and absence)" (Amin 2002:391). Dicken, however, argues that "territorial scales of governance remain fundamental to the organization and operation of global political economy (...) Bounded political spaces matter." (2003:9). Dicken continues by suggesting a network approach with a balance between agency and structure, as a way of investigating the processes and outcomes of globalization, at different scales.

Drawing on Dicken's review of geographical literature on globalization, it seems that the significance of space is being questioned by some geographers. This is significant in terms of current debates about globalization and issues of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Often processes of globalization are understood as deterritorialization, in the sense that the significance of space and territory are seen as declining, as means of travel and communication become more available. Elden (2005) critiques this understandings of globalization as deterritorialization, and reiterates the significance of space and of territory, in Dicken's words "Bounded political spaces matter" (2003:9).

Despite globalization, territories remain defining for the ways in which political processes are organised. In this particular context, migrants become interesting, as they do

not 'fit' neatly into the nation-state system of political organization. Some argue that migration in the era of globalization confirms the idea of deterritorialization. However, the investigation of the relationship between diaspora and territory reveals a different story. Following the view that globalization is deterritorialization, diaspora is celebrated as a potential, breaking up the 'fixed' relationship between identity and territory (Carter 2005). Arguably, this is too simple. Through the example of the Croatian diaspora in the US, during the war in Croatia in the 1990s, Carter (2005) demonstrates how territory becomes extremely significant to members of the Croatian diaspora. There is also an interesting issue of how national identity and territory are linked, and how diasporas fit into this picture. Critical geopolitics, argues that there is a need for reconfiguring political territory, the nation-state has been seen as "a single, fixed, unified, entity" (Carter 2005:61) and is still seen as such, despite disruption from processes of globalization, both from above and below. However, the crucial point here is that this reconfiguration of political territory, does not change the significance of territory, rather the ways in which we understand political territoriality, particularly in terms of breaking down "conceptual borders that imagine nation-states as discrete from each other, and the imaginative distinction between foreign/domestic or inside/outside the nation-state" (Carter 2005:61). This suggests that there is not enough focus on territory and politics in the writings about diaspora in the context of globalization and that there is a lacking geopolitics of diaspora, which would discuss both the deterritorialization and the reterritorialization of diaspora, where the significance of territory is reiterated, particularly in the context of national identity. In terms of the Tamil diaspora, this is very relevant, particularly because of the liberation struggle of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and the related identity construction in the diaspora.

2.3 International migration

In terms of the way the world is organized into nation-states, where members of a particular nation live, migrants may in theory be seen as anomalies. However, nation-states need migrants, make use of migrants and protect those who come looking for protection, which since 1951 had been secured through the Refugee Convention. Despite ongoing discussions about migration, where many people seem to support the idea of limiting migration, the principle of asylum is nevertheless upheld. Many Western countries are in need

of labour, much of this labour is recruited in a targeted manner, while the rest is supplied from other Western countries (within the EU). Despite globalization, people from outside the West, have no other way to enter Western countries than as asylum seekers, and in most cases entrance legally is not possible anyway (Mårtenson and McCarthy 1998; Schuster 2000).

Western asylum policies are strict, for a number of reasons related to ‘home’ issues’ such as challenges within the multi-ethnic society, the threat of terrorism, and a perception among the population that there are too few jobs. This is ironical, as the institution of asylum was created in order to protect people fleeing persecution. However, because Western states have made it impossible to enter legally, and staying legally impossible in any other way than if seeking asylum, the result is that the vast majority of migrants enter illegally and seek asylum. In this sense the asylum system is being abused and this is thanks to the fact that no other option is left for people who want to come to the West. Increasingly, as asylum policies toughen, migrants do not apply, but rather remain illegally, for fear of deportation should their asylum claim be denied. Though many asylum seekers have genuine fears of persecution and are granted asylum, many are also seeking asylum, because this is the only way in which they can be migrants to the West in a legal way. There is a clear lack of systematic migration law (Harris 2002).

This context shows that the division into different categories of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants or illegal migrants, in fact has little value as most migrants to the West may well fit with several different labels. In analytical terms this kind of categorisation should be questioned (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Perhaps it is more useful to think of categories of migrants as categories which have blurring boundaries, which are placed along a continuum, rather than being discrete and exclusive containers (Black 2003).

Since migration to the West currently is dominated by asylum migration, it is interesting to investigate the ‘durable solutions’ to the problem of displacement, which have been important for the ways in which nation-states act, as well as for the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for refugees). These durable solutions have traditionally included, settlement in country of refuge, resettlement to third country and return to ‘home’ country (UNHCR 1995). Related to the idea that return is perhaps the ‘most durable’ of solutions, is the fact that in the past decades there has been an assumption that ‘return’ is also

a prerequisite for continued engagement in local development in the country of origin, whereas in reality very little is known about the processes related to return migration (Ghosh 2000). While all three solutions are still largely applicable, in terms of refugees, it is interesting to note that the UNHCR is considering the changing circumstances, which may be seen for instance in two working papers on ‘New Issues in Refugee Research’: “Policy challenges of the new diasporas: migrant networks and their impact on asylum flows and regimes” (Crisp 1999) and “From durable solutions to transnational relations: ‘home’ and exile among refugee diasporas” (Van Hear 2003).

Given the context of globalization, the ways in which migration is conceived in the public opinion in many Western countries and the ways in which states address this in terms of asylum and immigration policies, are increasingly challenged (Fuglerud 2001). Most often the asylum and immigration policy, integration policy, development policy and security policy are disintegrated and out of step with each other and do not address the issues which the processes of globalization and their outcomes demand. This suggests a need for new approaches to these complex and interrelated issues, and the following section will argue that a transnational approach to migration is useful in this context.

2.4 Transnational communities?

Whether or not transnational migration is new, compared to international migration, is a dominating question in much of transnationalism literature (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Most work on transnationalism argues that this is the case and that transnational migration is different, though overlapping with international migration of the past, mostly in the sense that it is increasingly possible to have multiple identities and multiple localities because of new technologies of travel and information, the globalization of kinship and network ties, the growth of remittances and as a result, the disintegration of boundaries between host and ‘home’ societies (Vertovec and Cohen 1999, Portes 2001). Therefore transnationalism as a concept is more suitable to address contemporary issues (Al-Ali and Koser 2002).

The concept of transnationalism is quite new and is still being discussed. In a review article Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) conclude that empirical case-studies attest to the reality of transnationalism while also displaying a great heterogeneity. Vertovec identifies some clusters of themes which seem to be dominating in transnational research “transnationalism as a social morphology, as a type of consciousness, as a mode of cultural reproduction, as an avenue of capital, as a site of political engagement, and as a reconstruction of ‘place’ or ‘locality’ (1999:447). This seems to support the argument made by Yeoh, Willis and Fakhri that “the field of transnational studies is still a fragmented one, and no one conceptual frame has emerged to define the shape of transnationality, or the quality and nature of the projects, relations and practices that it encompasses” (2003:215).

The theorization of transnationalism tends to follow either postmodern approaches, which focus on identity, hybridity and a celebration of difference, or the political economy approach which focuses on the globalization of capitalism, transnational corporations and labour migration (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001). Mitchell argues that there is a particular role for geography in terms of combining the two approaches, because “it is geographical context, and thus geography as a discipline that is best placed to force the literal and the epistemological understandings of transnationalism to cohere” (110:1997). However, both kinds of approaches to transnationalism give valuable insights, so combining the strengths from both approaches, while focusing on the significance of the geographical context seems a favourable approach.

The concept of transnationalism encompasses both what may be termed transnationalism from above and transnationalism from below (Portes 1998). Here transnationalism from above is the kind of transnationalism which involves the rich and the mobile, the cosmopolitans, while it excludes the majority of the world’s population, for whom globalization to date has not resulted in easy access to global travel, for instance. Some reject the concept of transnationalism on the grounds that it may be understood to exclude the majority of the world’s population. For the purposes of this study transnationalism will be understood in sense of transnationalism from below, including not only the rich cosmopolitans, but also the poorer, who perhaps participate in transnational activities through for instance receiving remittances from family abroad.

The discussions about transnationalism also include the issues of ‘who’ are the transnational communities? Most research on transnational migrants focuses on Latin American migrants in the USA, though some research has also been done on Asian and African migrants in Europe (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Most of the Latin Americans have been labour migrants, while the others have been more mixed groups. Therefore there has also been a discussion about whether it is mainly labour migrants who are transnational communities, or whether all kinds of migrants participate in transnational activities. In this context the theoretical understanding of why people take part in transnational activities, related to presumed factors such as the wish to contribute to the country of origin as well as a wish to return, have resulted in an assumptions which have led to refugees not being considered fully in terms of transnational activities. Al-Ali and Koser (2002) argue that the division between labour migrants and refugees in the context of transnational activities and communities, is perhaps not very useful. Rather they argue that refugees participate in transnational activities in much the same way as other migrants, with factors such as legal and economic security in the host country being of far greater weight in terms of whether they participate or not, than what ‘kind’ of migrant they are.

There is also a discussion as to the term ‘diaspora’ which has historically been used mainly about the Jewish diaspora, though the term is Greek and simply means dispersal (Cohen 1997, Van Hear 1998). Some claim that diaspora populations only consist of those forced to migrate (Cheran 2003), whereas others use the term in the same way as transnational community (Mohan 2002), acknowledging the diversities lying within, but nonetheless adopting this broader understanding. Among French scholars the term diaspora has been particularly significant, as in France all migrant and ethnic groups have been termed ‘diaspora’. For many French scholars the roots of the term in the Jewish diaspora have been particularly significant, while the postmodern cultural approach to diaspora, which has been more dominant in the English literature, has been less significant (Collyer 2006). For the purposes of this study diaspora will be understood largely in the same way as transnational community (Mohan, 2002).

Different approaches to ‘transnationalism’ also have different definitions of the concept, in the postmodern approach identity, hybridity and a celebration of difference are the key issues, while for the political economy approach the globalization of capitalism,

transnational corporations and labour migration are the key issues. For Vertovec (1999) transnationalism involves “a type of consciousness, a mode of cultural reproduction, an avenue of capital, a site of political engagement, and/or a (re) construction of place or locality” (in Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:581). Portes (1999) sees transnationalism as a significant number of people engaging in sustained social contacts over time. Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) add a distinction between “transnational activities – which can be observed and measured and transnational capabilities, which encompass willingness and ability of migrant groups to engage in activities that transcend national borders” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:581). Here capabilities “include the extent to which individuals and communities identify with the social, economic or political processes in their ‘home’ countries” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001: 581). For the purposes of this study the definition by Portes (1999) with the additions by Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) will be followed.

2.5 Identity and ‘home’

The concepts of ‘home’ and identity may be categorised within the vocabulary of postmodern approaches. However, these concepts are of significance in terms of transnational studies, not only for individual people’s identities, but these concepts are of significance for actions of diaspora members in relation to their countries of origin and within their host countries. The significance of these concepts needs to be balanced by other important contexts, such as economic and legal status both in country of origin and in host country, as well as personal factors such as level of education, in order for the picture to be complete (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001).

There are differing views as to the ways in which identity is shaped and re-shaped and about the significance of place in these processes. One perspective sees people as essentially ‘rooted’, while the contrasting view argues that place is of little significance in terms of ‘identity formation’. These are inherently geographical issues, as the significance of place, is what is at heart here. All people have a relation to where they were born, where their parents come from and where they live. However, this does not mean that if they have to move, they will experience this as an up-rooting, in the sense that a plant would experience up-rooting, where the plant would die, due to lack of nutrition being supplied through its roots from the

ground it was growing in. Neither does it mean that people who move, may be seen to re-root in the sense a plant would re-root and take up nutrition in entirely the same way from the ground in a new place (Malkki 1992, 1995). The experiences of human beings are far more complex. For human beings issues of identity and belonging are of significance to happiness and the ways in which we function in the societies in which we live or have moved from.

There are also two contrasting views of 'home', which may be understood in direct relation to the two understandings of people's relationship with place discussed above. Both these sets of discussions in turn, may be related to the discussions of deterritorialization and re-territorialization, which are often brought up in the current context of globalization in relation to the nation-state. The two views of 'home' may be described as, essentialist, seeing 'home' as "a peaceful haven which is unchanging and homogenous" (Mohan 2002:101) and as a physical place (Al-Ali and Koser 2002), and pluralist, seeing 'home' as "not only dynamic, but that it is defined differently depending on who does the defining and where they are" (Mohan, 2002: 101) and as symbolic spaces. However, "many writers on 'home' would converge to the view that the concept entails both meanings" (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:7). While noting the significance of spiritual and cultural belonging of the 'home' once left, there may be a 'practical 'home'' elsewhere (Black and Koser 1999), however, it is perhaps the 'lived experience of 'home'' (Malkki 1995) which is significant for transnational communities. As Rapport and Dawson (1998) suggest, everyday practices and routines may give tangible insights into the meaning of 'home'. It is therefore an interesting question "how [...] transnational social fields and practices manifest themselves in daily lives and how (if at all) [...] they impact on abstract conceptualizations of 'home'?" (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:7). For members of transnational communities it is through the everyday activities, through the lived experience of 'home', that abstract conceptualizations of 'home' may be constituted, that traditions are reproduced and that efforts towards creating change in their once left physical 'home' are made. Meanings of 'home' are linked with complexities and ambiguities, and are related to many different aspects of identity, not only ethnicity or nation, but gender, class, religion or other aspects (Armbruster 2002). Interestingly in the context of this study, Mohan (2002) argues that contrasting understandings of 'home' have significance for the motivations and involvement of diaspora communities in transnational activities, including those related to the development of 'home'.

2.6 Transnational activities

In order to make sense of the transnational activities of members of diaspora communities, Al-Ali, Black and Koser (1999, 2002) have developed a model for categorisation of individual and community activities by type and geographical focus. This model is based on their study of Bosnian and Eritrean exile communities, and their mobilisation and participation in post-conflict reconstruction in their ‘home’ countries, and will be applied in this study to the participation of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway in transnational activities.

Al-Ali, Black and Koser point to the heterogeneity of the findings among members of the Bosnian and Eritrean communities, drawing from this, firstly that previous studies of transnational communities have tended “to gloss over differences within migrant communities” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:594), they point to the importance of “analysing how different people are more or less likely to be involved” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 2001:594) in transnational activities. For the purposes of this study it is important to underline the diversity within the Tamil diaspora. Secondly, Al-Ali, Black and Koser underline that due to the small sizes covered in their research “it is not appropriate to generalise to the wider Bosnian and Eritrean populations, far less to refugee populations more generally” (2001: 593). While noting these reservations, their findings and their model for categorisation will be used as a tool to investigate the transnational activities among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. Al-Ali, Black and Koser (1999) include a range of activities in four categories: economic, social, cultural and political. The table divides the activities into focus on host and ‘home’ country, but many activities have a natural focus on both.

Table 2.1: Categories of transnational activities, with ‘home’ and host country focus

	Economic	Social	Cultural/Religious	Political
‘home’ country focus	Example: Financial remittances	Example: Visiting family and friends	Example: Collecting money for the LTTE at cultural events.	Example: Collecting money for the LTTE
Host country focus	Example: Donations to Tamil community organizations and schools	Example: Tamil school for children and youth	Example: Cultural events (music, dance, religious festivals)	Example: Lobbying political contacts in Norway.

Based on Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 1999.

There is a lot of literature on transnational activities of an economic nature, particularly financial remittances. Mostly this literature relates to labour migrants contributing to their countries of origin through remittances, including employees from many Asian countries in the Gulf states and a range of examples of labour migrants from Latin America to the USA, and their transnational activities (Gonzalez-Estay et al 2002, Portes 1999, Smith and Guarnizo 1998). The study of impacts of remittances in Ghana and Sri Lanka, seems to reveal little transformation of 'home', while remittances none the less are of great significance for people's lives (Van Hear 2002). The economic transnational activities of the Tamil diaspora in Norway will be discussed in chapter 6 "Contributing to development in the North East of Sri Lanka?".

Social, cultural and religious activities of transnational communities have been the focus of a number of studies and are often the focus because these are the most common activities. When the number of a diaspora population grows, it is natural that social and cultural gatherings take on a more formal organization and become institutionalized. Often this is organized in terms of religious groups, or in terms of cultural 'schools' for children, or more spontaneously in relation to particular occasions, such as an independence day or other holidays. In some cases, as Fábó found among Sudanese refugees in Cairo, social and cultural activities and traditions were actively recreated and reinvented as part of the project of Sudanese NGOs in Cairo to construct specific meanings of 'home', related to a 'new' and multi-ethnic Sudan (Fábó 2002). Such planned use of social and cultural activities for ideological and political purposes, may also be of relevance to the analysis of transnational activities among the members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. The social and cultural transnational activities of diaspora populations, such as contact with family and friends or 'school' for children and youth focusing on language and culture of the country of origin, are more often the result of the personal longing for 'home', and the desire for community with others of the same background and passing on ones culture to the next generation, than part of a conscious political project.

The political activities of transnational communities are not as much discussed in the literature as the economic and the social and cultural. Nevertheless, many transnational communities engage in political activities. An example is that of the Kurdish diaspora, which

is spread throughout Europe. Through her study of Kurdish transnational activities, Adamson identifies "three ways that political entrepreneurs can affect political change in their 'home' countries. First, they can use the 'political space' of the transnational community as a site for mobilizing identities and discourses that either reinforce or challenge the official hegemonic discourse of the 'home' state. Second, they can work for political change through networking with a variety of state and non-state actors, in order to raise international awareness. Third, they can mobilize and transfer resources directly to local actors in the 'home' country" (2002:12). These ways of affecting change may be of particular relevance in the case of the Tamil diaspora too. However, another study of the Kurdish diaspora underlines the significance of adopting different strategies in order to influence change and that different transnational communities adopt different strategies (Ødegaard-Nielsen 2002). An example of political involvement from a different diaspora population suggests that this may be the case. The Kashmiri diaspora, and their transnational activities reveals a focus on awareness raising internationally and a the use of lobbying, rallies and demonstrations, in addition to a great use of the media, particularly television and the internet (Ellis and Khan, 2002).

Most of the examples of transnational communities in the literature relate to transnational communities where the country of origin is either still in conflict, or where poverty is still dominating, where the effects of transnational contributions to peace and development are hard to assess. Two such examples are those of Bosnia and Eritrea, on which the model which has been discussed here is based (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001), where it has been found that the diversities both within, and particularly between the two examples were great, but where in both cases there was some evidence of transnational contributions. These two examples point out the significance of the context in both host and 'home' country for the motivation to contribute, as well as the need for policy measures in both host and 'home' country in order to encourage transnational contributions. In the case of Eritrea transnational activities included voting in the Referendum over Eritrea's independence, as well as paying a tax to the Eritrean state.

In addition to the examples documented in the literature on transnational communities and activities, one might add the examples of the Somali and Afghan diasporas. In all both cases the role of the diaspora is significant, particularly in terms of remittances, though also in terms of peace negotiations in Somalia and the new post-Taleban government in Afghanistan,

for instance the former diaspora member president Karzai and other members of the Afghan Transitional Authority (Jazayery 2002). However, these countries, like Sri Lanka, are cases of ongoing transnational activism, the outcomes of which are uncertain.

In order to understand not only which transnational activities take place, but also why they take place, the desires and capabilities of migrants to participate in transnational activities, need to be investigated (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 1999). Applying a definition of “transnational capabilities, which encompass willingness and ability of migrant groups to engage in activities that transcend national borders” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:581), where capabilities “include the extent to which individuals and communities identify with the social, economic or political processes in their ‘home’ countries” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:581), it may be argued that the capabilities of participating in transnational activities of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, are worth investigating, as part of a study of the transnational activities of the Tamil diaspora in Norway.

2.7 Transformations of ‘home’: development, democracy and human rights

Literature on transnationalism demonstrates that transnational communities and activities exist, but what are the possibilities for transnational communities to transform ‘home’? Arguably, there are many possibilities for contributions though it may perhaps be more accurate to label these processes contributing or sustaining, rather than transforming ‘home’ (Al-Ali and Koser 2002). Transnational communities and their activities give room for contributions towards development, democracy and human rights at ‘home’. However, “the processes that relate to development have, generally, been linked to specific, quite fixed, notions regarding territories, boundaries, spaces and places” (Mohan 2002:78). Though these approaches to development are not wrong, perhaps they do not make sufficient room for the current processes of globalization and transnationalism. Transnationalism provides an opportunity for new and different investigations into development which go beyond the frameworks within which development is usually investigated.

There are different ways to understand the term ‘development’ and different understandings of development should also lead to questions about the significance of such different views. Arguably, the ways in which development is defined and understood have an

ideological underpinning. For instance, current development policies employed by the World Bank and the IMF may be seen as pushing a neo-liberal agenda, whereas development projects using participatory rural appraisal methods may be perceived as pushing a socialist agenda of land-reform and social change (Nederveen Pietersee 2001). Similarly, it is widely acknowledged that development aid rarely comes without strings attached and always has effects on those people or societies who receive it, both foreseen and unforeseen. This means that who is funding a development project is seen to have certain responsibilities, as well as potentially certain agendas (Nederveen Pietersee 2001). Arguably, this applies in terms of members of the diaspora, as much as any other donor.

The relationship between war and development has been changing over the past decades. Previously war and development were seen as two entirely separate and unrelated issues, while increasingly the relationship between the two has now been acknowledged. While the main approach used to be ‘working around conflict’, then ‘working in conflict’, it is now ‘working on conflict’. With the current approach the idea is to use development aid to promote peace and peace building (Burke and Mulakala 2005). There is a peace conditionality to the development aid which is given, and this is particularly the case in Sri Lanka. While promoting peace is undoubtedly a good thing to do, actors in the international community can use this situation in order to favour certain kinds of development, and by linking this to the peace conditionality, use the transition to peace to institutionalize a certain kind of development. In the case of Sri Lanka, this is neoliberal economic development (Shanmugaratnam and Stokke 2005), which may be seen to be part of the broader set of development ideas here labelled ‘mainstream development’ (Hart 2002).

The way in which ‘development’ will be understood in this study, largely follows Nederveen Pietersee’s (2001) idea of ‘mainstream development’, which involves broader aims of transforming society as part of the development process, for instance in terms of empowerment of women and the poor and addressing issues of inequality in society, an approach where human rights, empowerment and decision-making at the grass root level are the foundations.

This ‘mainstream development’ approach dominates most international development organizations and the UN system and is largely a Western construct. Development studies have acknowledged the very valid criticism which has been raised in terms of the fact that the

ideas underlying development often are Western constructs, and in this case may be seen to be pushing a neo-liberal economic agenda. This may lead to the rather worrying situation where Western aid agencies encourage grass root participation and decision-making as a broader part of democratization, while the economic policies of a country as well as a number of other political decisions are in fact being made by Western donors in terms of conditionalities. Mohan and Stokke (forthcoming) argue that development now has a focus on civil society, decentralization and local participation, and that neo-liberal development creates local political spaces, but makes development technocratic. Arguably, this should lead to a questioning of the nature of both development and democratization processes which are in motion.

Al-Ali, Black and Koser refer to the “expanding discourses of democracy and human rights” (2001:585) as one of the “commonly quoted factors linked with transnational relations and practices” (2001:585), and as both are issues which will be discussed in this study, some brief remarks should be made as to the ways in which these concepts will be applied. Democracy will be understood in a deep and broad sense, not to mean simply free and fair elections and the rule of law, but rather a deeper respect of the human rights, a commitment to stakeholder decision making and local participation. This kind of ‘substantial democracy’ is about the creation of social citizenship, with a focus on the lives of ordinary people and state-society relationships (Grugel 1999) This understanding also focuses on the importance of civil society, though a contextual understanding of this concept is needed (Orjuela 2004). Clearly this kind of understanding of democracy is not as easy to ‘measure’ as a simpler focus on free and fair elections would allow for, rather it means that democratization will always be an unfinished process of politicizing and democratizing democracy itself (Harriss, Stokke and Tornqist 2004).

Though the applied understanding of development may be seen to be rights based, the focus on human rights will be kept more narrow, in order to focus only on a few human rights issues which are of relevance to the larger discussions about the political context of the North East of Sri Lanka.

2.8 Limitations to transnationalism?

The concepts of transnationalism and transnational migrant networks are becoming increasingly popular, arguably, because of their suitability to address some of the issues which are relevant in the current context of globalization. Due to the new technologies of travel and information there has been a growth of transnational activism, making multiple identities and localities possible, as well as globalizing family ties and playing some part in the growth of remittances (Cohen and Vertovec 1999). This creates new possibilities for the relationship between migrants and their 'home'. While transnational activities can both fulfil migrants social and cultural needs in exile, they also have the power to transform not only migrants lives, but also the lives of those at 'home' in terms of social, cultural, economic and political issues.

However, there are limitations to the concept of transnationalism, conceptually in terms of a largely lacking theoretical framework, and methodologically in terms of difficulties with researching the transnationalism and the significance of the transnational networks. Another limitation is the alleged weakness of the concept because of the focus on differences within transnational communities, which gives little room for broader generalizations, and so learning between different transnational communities. A final limitation is related to the fact that lack of definition means lack of measurement, both of the proportion of migrants involved in transnational activity, and the intensity/level of transnational engagement.

Nevertheless, it has been argued here that despite these weaknesses, the strengths of a transnational approach to international migration in the current context of globalization, lies in being able to deal with the issues of the day, the interrelated issues of globalization processes and outcomes, with migration and development, of multiple identities in our multicultural societies, of the threat of terrorism and persisting xenophobia, all within the understanding that places matter, and that identities can be related to more than one place.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The study of transnational communities and activities is challenging methodologically in a number of ways. Firstly, it may be seen to be challenging due to the limited scope of work in this field, which leads to a limited number of methods having been tried out. Secondly, it is challenging because the phenomenon at hand is so complex and is situated in more than one locality, and the significant ‘in between’ localities are particularly difficult to reach for the researcher. Thirdly, the study of transnationalism may be seen to be challenging in terms of being a cross-cultural field, in terms of language and representation. Fourthly, it may be seen to be challenging because of the ethical issues which may be raised, whether it is in terms of legal status in country of residence, or in terms of voicing political opinions about the situation in country of origin. Finally, it may be seen as a challenging field, because of the many policy considerations, and the need for new policy, in fields related to transnational communities and activities. Arguably though, these challenges point to the significance of the study of transnationalism. This chapter will explain how this study tries to overcome some of the challenges to the study of transnationalism, in the particular context of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway.

Firstly, this chapter will discuss the methodological framework of this study, where the choice of qualitative methods of research will be explained with reference to underlying ontological assumptions, as well as a critical survey of methodologies considered suitable for application to the research questions. Secondly, there will be a presentation of the research design, followed by a discussion of the choices made. Thirdly, there will be a discussion of limitations and strengths to the adopted research methods, including some ethical considerations. Finally, there will be a note on autobiographical issues, which aims at giving some insights into issues of positionality of relevance to this study.

3.2. Methodological framework

The literature on transnationalism is dominated by two different approaches, the postmodern and political economy (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001). The postmodern approach is characterized by a focus on multiple readings of reality, on the subjective and on culture and identity. The political economic approach is characterized by a focus on structures, particularly economic structures, and on concrete and measurable issues. This affects the methodological framework, as well as the choices of methods to be used in studies of transnationalism. Whereas the postmodern approach applies qualitative methods only, the political economy approach allows for the use of both qualitative methods, quantitative methods and a combination of methods. In many cases both approaches will apply qualitative methods, and so the difference in approach, does not necessarily entail a different method of research. Nevertheless, the two approaches adopt quite different methodological frameworks, based on their understandings of the relationship between knowledge and reality, and the meaning of causality, imagination and values (Smith 2002). Adopting a postmodern approach would mean accepting that there is no single reality to have knowledge about, rather knowledge is constructed individually and subjectively, and is the story of the person who has created it. On the other hand, adopting a political economy approach one would believe that there is a reality about which there are things we can know, though the knowledge about reality is affected by our personal and subjective features. The approach chosen in this study draws on the political economy approach in terms of acknowledging that there is a reality about which we can know things, though our knowledge is not objective. It also draws on the postmodern approach in terms of the focus in cultural and subjective issues, particularly the significance of identity and 'home', in order to balance the structural approach of political economy with a dimension of agency. The chosen approach to some extent resembles a critical realist approach, in terms of acknowledging structure and agency, as well as recognizing "the importance of experience and imagination" but trying "to dig deeper to find how things work" (Smith, 2002:307), and seeks to address the methodological challenges to transnational studies, by combining insights from the two approaches.

This ontological assumption leads to the epistemological choice of adopting qualitative methods in this study, despite the fact that some argue that "qualitative methodologies do not start with the assumption that there is a pre-existing world that can be

known or measured” (Dwyer and Limb 2001:6). A pre-existing world can be known, though one has to acknowledge “the complexity, uncertainty and interconnectedness of the objects of analysis in social science” (Smith 2002:281). In the context of transnational studies Bailey (2001) has critiqued the postmodern approach, in relation to the issues of representation in these approaches, asking: “Have we deconstructed ourselves into a relativist hell?” (Bailey 2001:422). Bailey argues that it is possible to theorize agency and hybridity, and that there is a need for connecting “postcolonial accounts to their broader structural context” (Bailey 2002:424). Having made a clear objection to the idea of deconstruction as an end, qualitative methods are adopted because of a desire “to understand lived experiences and to reflect on and interpret the understandings and shared meanings of people’s everyday social worlds and realities” (Dwyer and Limb 2001:6).

A key point of critique of qualitative methods is related to representation, as referred to by Bailey in the context of transnational studies. While representation and power relations in this context are significant, the stance that all representations should be seen as readings of text, will be opposed here. Rather the attention here will be on what people do, social activities and events, as qualitative methods are focused on practice. It may be seen as ironic that “academic accounts have not only downgraded the importance of practical activity by trying to represent it as representations... but may also have underestimated its power” (Thrift 1996:33 in Smith 2001:31) Therefore a pragmatic stance is taken as “Pragmatism is one of the key set of ideas that takes qualitative research beyond the world of representation, into the messy complexity of practice” (Smith, 2001:32).

3.3 The research design

Most studies of transnational communities adopt qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups and ethnographical methods such as participant observation (Al-Ali and Koser 2002), though studies of transnationalism adopting a political economy approach may also adopt different methods. More often than not, it seems that there is a mixture of methods including some ethnographical research and some interviews. Based on the literature it seems that a certain combination of qualitative methods should be chosen for a study of the transnational activities among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway.

The data collection for this study has consisted of a triangulation of methods, firstly, with a main emphasis on individual qualitative interviews, secondly, by closely following several Tamil English language web-sites and thirdly including conversations with key-informants as well as other members of the Tamil diaspora other than in the interview context. The interviews, as well as the research process more generally, has followed Kvale (1996) "Interviews: An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing", while also drawing on other sources. Following Kvale's seven stages of an interview investigation, thematizing and designing the study identified what the purpose of the study would be: to investigate in what ways and to what extent members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway participate in transnational activities of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, and how the intended knowledge should be obtained: mainly through interviews, while also using some secondary methods.

The interviews were conducted in the period November 2003 to August 2005. The tsunami on December 26th 2004 caused great devastation in parts of Sri Lanka, including parts of the North and East, was a factor which affected the interviews which were conducted in the period immediately after the tsunami. Access to Tamil communities in Oslo and in Bergen, was gained through several community gate-keepers, resulting in a 'snow-balling' effect where contact with new interviewees was easily established (Flowerdew and Martin 1997). The role of a community gate-keeper in recommending particular people to a researcher is powerful, which may create a bias in the study. However, by including several gate-keepers, and adding different interviewees from different communities as the research was undertaken, efforts have been made to reduce the bias of any one of the gate-keepers. Totally there were 14 interviews, with a duration of between 1,5 and 2,5 hours each. The interviews were mainly conducted in English, though with some Norwegian, though 4 of the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, with some English. Interviews were written up in the language in which they were conducted, while translation of quotes for use in the analyses chapters was only done at the final stage. 11 of the 14 interviewees were men and 3 were women. The reason why there were not more women is that most people introduced were men, why this was the case is not clear, it may be chance, it may be related to gender relations among Tamils. The age of interviewees ranged from late 60s to mid-20s, while most were married people in their 40s. Among the interviewees were Tamils who arrived in Norway in

the late 1960s, as well as some arriving in Norway in the 1990s, with a range of arrival dates in between.

The web-research has included following news and up-dates on Tamil web-sites throughout the period autumn 2003-spring 2006. These web-sites include www.tamilnet.com, www.tamilcanadian.com, www.trvs.no, www.norsktamil.no, www.uthr.org and www.denunge.dk, to mention some. Finally, the third component of the research design has consisted of conversations with 3 key informants, Tamil and Norwegian, as well as conversations with other Tamils offering insights into the lives of Tamils in Norway.

The interviews were conducted without the use of a dictaphone, as interviewees did not wish what they were saying to be recorded. Issues of confidentiality were of great importance in this study. All interviewees were informed about the aim and the scope of the study in advance of interviews, and all gave informed consent to participating as interviewees. Due to the sensitivity of issues discussed, no interview quotes in this study are labelled with names, gender or age, in order to ensure the confidentiality of interviewees. There are ethical dimension of undertaking a study where sensitive issues arise and where there may be impacts of both a foreseen and unforeseen nature. As far as possible, the aim has been to ensure that no interviewee will experience any unforeseen impacts of participating in this study.

The analysis of interviews has followed Kvale (1996) and Cresswell (2003). The interviews were not transcribed as they were not recorded, however, a transcription process was undertaken where hand-written notes from each interviews were typed up. This process of typing up allowed for the inclusion of emphasis and non-verbal elements in the written up interviews. Following Cresswell's (2003) stages of analysis, this was the first step, of organizing and preparing data for analysis. The second step was reading through each interview, to get a general sense of what was being said. According to Jackson (2001) this is one of the advantages of individual interviews, they allow for reading each interview multiple times, before a reading across interviews. The third step involved labelling different issues which did or did not come up in the interviews and categorizing these. Often this process is called 'coding' and may be done with the help of computer soft-ware. In this study the process was undertaken manually, with the help of colour coding the different labels in the interviews and making notes as to the different categories of these labels. The fourth step was to find the underlying themes. Largely this was spelt out through the different categories of

labels, however, a certain grouping of labels had to be done, in order to be able to identify a small number of themes. The fifth step was to translate these themes into a structure for the writing up of the analysis section of this study, this was naturally related to the sixth step, the interpretation of the findings from the interviews. The analysis of information from the Internet has largely followed the same principles.

Significantly for qualitative studies, Kvale points out that “A continuum exists between description and interpretation” (1997:187). The process of categorisation, mentioned as steps two, three and four, involves a condensation of meaning from the interviews. While it is possible, and necessary, to explain the research and analysis process, the nature of qualitative methods of research, mean that these processes can not be examined using the same tools as one would in terms of quantitative methods.

3.4 Limitations and strengths

There are some issues which should be addressed in order to discuss the limitations of the study, while accepting the way in which the study was undertaken and its limitations in scope and depth, due to time constraint. Firstly, the issue of whether or not the interviewees are spread "representatively" (whatever that might mean) should be addressed. Of the approximately 10 000 Tamils in Norway, 14 people can hardly be seen as representative, however one might define representative. Meanwhile, among the 14 people who were interviewed there were both men and women, both young, middle aged and older people, both Hindu, Catholics and non-religious people, as well as people of differing attitudes to the LTTE. So arguably, the 14 interviewees, together with information collected from the Internet, and other conversations with Tamils in Norway, may be said to represent the fuller width of experiences, though not in an exhaustive sense, but still may seem to give insights into the activities ‘among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway’.

The December 2004 tsunami was an unforeseen factor in terms of the research process. While this was only one of several factors which had effect on interviews at different stages of the research period, the tsunami had a significant effect on the Tamil community in Norway and their relations with ‘home’. The political context prior to the tsunami was increasingly tense, some spoke of risk of a new war. In the immediate aftermath of the

tsunami there was hope that the disaster might bring something good in terms of co-operation and renewed efforts for a lasting peace. But these hopes were soon devastated and exchanged with even greater frustration, particularly with the Sri Lankan government, which may have led to an increased support for the LTTE. The great efforts of the LTTE and the TRO to help the disaster affected populations of the North East, have had their impact on the changing attitudes and feelings towards the LTTE among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. As this was not part of the research question, the tsunami is not the starting point of the analyses undertaken in this study, though the tsunami is referred to. This illustrates the challenges to transnational studies related to both ethical issues and to policy issues.

In a qualitative study, issues of representation need to be addressed. This is particularly a challenge for transnational studies with their cross-cultural nature. Representation in this study is influenced by the positionality of the researcher. As far as possible ‘polyvocality’ has been an aim and a conscious effort has been made to try to bring out tensions and differences among interviewees responses. As suggested by Jackson (2001) silences, absences and exclusions are discussed, and following Butler (2001) direct quotes are used, in order to allow the voices of the respondents themselves to be heard. However, because interviews were not recorded, even these quotes are not directly the respondents voices. Rather they are notes from what they said, which aim at representing what they said, but which may have been influenced through the involvement of the researcher. Some quotes are translations from Norwegian, which were made at the final stage, before including them in the analyses chapters. In these cases issues of language, translation and meanings should be raised.

Cresswell points to some limitations to qualitative interviews including that the information which is provided is filtered through the views of the interviewees themselves, that the interview setting is unnatural and therefore the information provided may be different from what it might have been in a more natural setting, that the researcher’s presence may bias the responses and that “people are not equally articulate and perceptive” (Cresswell 2003:186). Of these issues the most relevant to this study are firstly, the fact that the information is filtered through the views of the interviewees themselves, responses varied hugely, according to for instance interviewees feelings towards the LTTE, and secondly, that people are not equally articulate and perceptive.

Related to representation is the issue of the positionality of the researcher which affects the ways in which representations are made. The life experiences of the researcher and the political context shape the ways in which what the interviewees say is interpreted (Ley and Mountz 2001). The positionality of the researcher in relation to the interviewee is one of power relations, where it is often understood that the researcher perhaps holds more power than the interviewee. In the context of this study, undertaken by a white, young female student, where interviewees included mainly older men, often with higher education, the power relationship was perhaps not so clear. Often interviewees were in a position of explaining, of sharing knowledge and offering insights. With the women interviewed, the relationship was also relatively balanced in terms of power relations. A more relevant issue is perhaps that of personal experiences and of political context and personal references to this political context. These issues will be discussed in the autobiographical note.

A note should also be made relating to the cross cultural nature of this transnational research, which is particularly challenging. Though conducted in Norway, the research was cross cultural in the sense that it involved interviews with Tamils as well as in the sense that the topic of investigation, transnationalism, is a cross cultural field. The study did not put an emphasis on this as such, which may be seen as a weakness, however, some cultural differences between Tamils and Norwegians did come up in the interviews, though the significance of these in terms of the research question is unclear.

The method of qualitative interviews was chosen, because interviews “allow a wide range of experiences to be documented, voices to be heard, representations to be made and interpretations to be extracted” (Smith 2001:29). Furthermore, because of the limited scope of time available, interviews seemed the most feasible way of gathering a substantial amount of information from various sources, while still allowing for individual encounters. However, had more time been available, it is likely that a research design including more interviews, as well as participant observation, might have offered interesting insights. The study would also have gained from research in another diaspora country, for instance the UK, Canada or Switzerland, but more importantly, it would also have gained from research among Tamils in the North East of Sri Lanka, who participate in transnational networks with members of the diaspora. Without the ‘story’ from the angle of those in Sri Lanka, there are significant limitations to the insights which may be gained from this study. This illustrates the challenges

of transnational studies in terms of the complexity of transnational activities and their multi-local nature.

Though “reliability and generalizability play a minor role in qualitative inquiry” (Cresswell 2003:195), these issues together with that of validity are of significance and may say something about the ‘trustworthiness’ of a study. For Cresswell it is particularly the issue of validity which is important and he includes trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility among the terms which explain what is meant by validity. Cresswell (2003) suggests different strategies to validate qualitative research processes and findings, among these are triangulating methods, checking findings with interviewees, clarifying bias in a process of self-reflection, presenting discrepant information as well as spending prolonged time in the field. In this study several of these strategies have been adopted, in order to ensure validity of the findings: there has been a triangulation of methods, a clarification of bias is presented in the autobiographical note and discrepant information is presented and discussed in the analyses chapters. Meanwhile findings have not been checked with interviewees, mainly for reasons related to confidentiality as well as time restrictions, which is also the main reason why there has not been a prolonged research period. However, the three strategies adopted to ensure validity of the findings hopefully support the trustworthiness and credibility of this study.

The issue of generalizability from qualitative research is contested and the idea that there is a need for data gathered through quantitative methods before any generalizations can be made, is still strong in the social sciences. However, in a discussion about validity, Kvale (1996) underlines the social construction of validity and of generalizations. He argues that while statistical generalizations follow mathematical rules, to which data collected with qualitative methods may not be applied, there are also other ways of making generalizations. He mentions, naturalistic generalizations, those made by people on the basis of common sense and what seems reasonable as well as analytical generalizations, involving “a reasoned judgement about the extent to which the findings from one study can be used as a guide to what might occur in another situation” (Kvale 1996:233), looking at similarities and differences between situations, by researcher, or indeed the reader. While the idea that it is possible to make some generalizations based on data from qualitative research is appealing, in the case of this study, it has to be pointed out that the scope of the study is too small, to be able to offer significant generalizable insights. Despite the noted limitations, the adopted

qualitative methods, with the available strategies for ensuring validity, have been found to meet the demands of addressing the research questions of this study.

3.5 Autobiographical note

Because the researcher's position in a qualitative study, with mainly interviews, becomes so dominant, there is a need for an autobiographical note in order to clarify some of the issues of positionality which no doubt have affected both interviews, description, interpretation and conclusions (Butler 2001). In this autobiographical note I have chosen to use I, whereas in the rest of this study I have chosen to adopt the more traditional style of writing, avoiding I. This does not imply that I believe that what is written should not be seen as something I am saying, making me an invisible narrator, however, I do hope that by avoiding the use of I, there may perhaps be more room to include the voices of the interviewees.

Firstly, as I was not born in Norway and my parents are not Norwegian, I have some experiences with what may be termed transnational activities, and certainly with life among diaspora populations. This may have had an effect on interviewees, when I mentioned this fact, in the sense that it opened up the space to be critical of what happens in Norwegian society, and a shared feeling of being an outsider in Norway, though this should not be overestimated. This seemed to have an effect of loosening up the atmosphere during several interviews. The fact that I am Catholic also came up in some interviews, and resulted in conversations about the Catholic church in Norway, with those among the interviewees who were Catholics, and shorter comments with those who were not. Mainly, I think that it is my experiences of what it means to have parents with a 'home' country elsewhere, which have effected the ways in which I have understood, and represented, the ways in which interviewees have spoken about their 'home' and their activities in the diaspora, related to 'home'.

Secondly, having a Polish background for me results in a particular political stand, which includes a strong faith in non-violent means of creating change and in human rights. Perhaps in the context of the North East of Sri Lanka, my particular way of understanding

and analyzing political issues, translates into a greater emphasis on issues related to violence, political killings and disappearances, than it does to other very significant issues. Human rights cannot be prioritized, however, as an outsider with my particular background, a certain positionality in terms of issues of democracy and respect for human rights is definitely the case.

Thirdly, during a visit to Sri Lanka in August 2003, including the North and the East, I was fortunate enough to be able to see efforts to build peace at the grass root level, carried out by the partners of Caritas Sri Lanka. These efforts included a range of small projects including people from both Tamil, Sinhala and Muslim communities, aiming at creating understanding, reconciliation and building peace. The fact that projects such as these, and ideas such as these, were not being represented in the responses of interviewees, is likely to have had an effect on the interpretations of responses, which has more to do with my position in terms of favouring such projects and ideas, than it perhaps has to do with my interviewees.

Finally, I should add that these issues of positionality may have affected representation, and the study at large, though I have sought to adopt strategies of validation in order to arrive at a credible result. The fact remains that this study is one reading of the transnational activities among Tamils in Norway and their contributions to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, others would perhaps present different readings, but different readings can co-exist (Jakcsen 2001).

4. The civil war in Sri Lanka and the Tamil diaspora

4.1 Introduction

The civil war in Sri Lanka has lasted from the outbreak of violent anti-Tamil riots in 1983, with a subsequent Tamil fight for a separate Tamil state in the North-East of the country, mainly by the LTTE, till the cease fire agreement of February 2002, with an ongoing peace process. The war has killed 60 000 people, including members of the Sri Lankan army, members of the LTTE and civilians, mainly in the North-East of Sri Lanka. The war has displaced more than a million people, mostly internally in the North-East, though the number of Tamils in exile in India and in the West has increased dramatically since the outbreak of the war, and is now around 800 000 people (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2006). Though the 10 000 Tamils in Norway include people who arrived well before the outbreak of the war, as well as at different stages during the war, the significance of the civil war in Sri Lanka as a context in which any issue related to members of the Tamil diaspora should be understood, can not be overestimated.

This chapter will briefly explore the history of the conflict in Sri Lanka. The existence of the Tamil diaspora is closely related to the conflict in Sri Lanka, though it should be noted that Tamil migration dates back to the colonial period. Nevertheless, a presentation of the Tamil diaspora globally will follow, touching on the complex relationship between the diaspora and the conflict in Sri Lanka. Finally there will be a short presentation of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, offering some insights into the diversity within the diaspora, issues of identity and of politics.

4.2 The ethnic conflict, the civil war and the ongoing peace process

Prior to exploring the civil war and developments towards the ongoing fifth peace process, some issue related the causes of the conflict should be discussed. Some figures may be useful in order to begin to understand the ethnic issues in Sri Lanka: the total population is about 20 million and the area of Sri Lanka is 65 000 square km, indicating a high population density. Of these approximately 20 million, about 74% are Sinhalese, about 18% are Tamil (including Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils), about 7% are Moslems and 1% others. The

Moslem population speak Tamil, but see themselves as a separate group in Sri Lanka. The relationship between the Moslems, who also inhabit the North and East of the country, together with Sri Lankan Tamils, has been challenged by anti-Moslem violence on the part of the LTTE during the war. The Tamils in Sri Lanka include Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils, the latter were brought to Sri Lanka by the British during colonial times in order to work on the tea plantations. The distinction between these two groups, as well as distinctions related to different caste among Tamils, remain of significance.

Sri Lanka gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1948, when both Sinhala and Tamil were official languages and languages of instruction in schools. After independence, for reasons which will not be discussed here, ethnicity became increasingly politicized, and issues of language and education, as well as employment and land were strongly affected (World Bank 2003)¹. It should be pointed out the causes of the conflict, as well as the conflict itself has more to do with the politicization of ethnicity, than with ethnicity itself. Three key issues may be mentioned in relation to the growth of Tamil frustration, in 1956 Sinhala became the only official language, in the early 1970s it became increasingly difficult for Tamils to enter universities in Sri Lanka and the issue of land has challenged Tamil ideas about 'the Tamil 'home'land', when Sinhalese settlement, encouraged by the government, has occurred. The most clear example is perhaps that of Trincomalee in the East of Sri Lanka, where according to census data the Sinhala population was 3% in 1921, while it was 30% in 1981 (World Bank 2003).

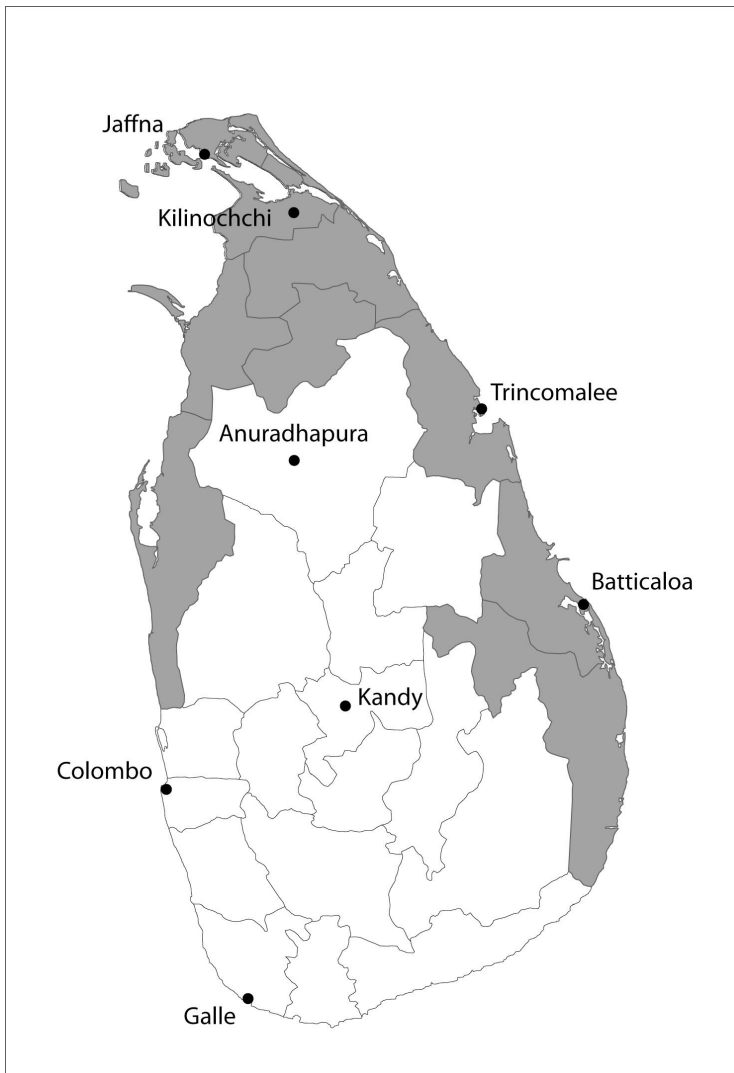
The developments in Sri Lanka leading to increased discrimination of Tamils, was matched by a development in Tamil politics from participation in parliamentary politics with the basic idea of cooperation among Tamils and Sinhalese at independence, then moving towards federalism and separatism, but still through parliamentary means, by the 1970s (Stokke and Ryntveit 2000). Though violent anti-Tamil riots took place a few times prior to

¹ "The Root Causes of the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka", appendix 1, World Bank Country Assistance Strategy Sri Lanka 2003, (down-loaded 22.03.06).

this, the riots in July 1983 are seen as a turning point in the ethnic conflict, which from this point turned into an armed struggle for a separate state for the Tamils. However, among Tamils there was not unity. With the support of the Indian government, five different Tamil armed groups emerged as key actors and were trained in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu; the LTTE, People's Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO), Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and Eelam Revolutionary Organisation (EROS). These militant Tamil groups, which originated from Jaffna in the North of Sri Lanka, developed in the 1970s voicing a critique of the Tamil elites who participated in the parliamentary politics in Sri Lanka. Together with the increasing discrimination of Tamils, the economic crisis in Sri Lanka in the 1970s, leading to a liberalization of the economy from 1977, fed into the increased support for radical nationalist and ethnic politics on both Tamil and Sinhala sides. The reason why there were so many Tamil militant organizations, with a socialist profile and the goal of a separate Tamil state, was more related to political opportunism of the leaders as well as the availability of resources in the Tamil diaspora, than to differences between the groups. The LTTE became 'the' Tamil militant group in the late 1980s, having defeated the EPRLF, and included or next to destroyed the other groups. The LTTE then led the war against the Sri Lankan army forces (Hollup and Stokke, 1997; Stokke and Ryntveit, 2000; Narayan Swarny, 2003).

The civil war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan armed forces started in 1983, after the violent anti-Tamil riots, and continued till the Indo-Lankan peace accord in 1987. The first set of peace talks were held in 1985 in Thimpu, where the Thimpu principles which defined the demands of the Tamil militant groups, including the LTTE, were first put forward. The Thimpu principles include: 1. Tamils are a nation, 2. Tamils have a right to a 'home' land in the North-East of Sri Lanka and 3. Tamils have right to self-determination (Balasingham 2001, Balasingham 2004). Despite Indian involvement for peace in Sri Lanka with a peace keeping force from 1987-1990, and re-newed negotiations between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government in 1989/1990, the war continued, interrupted by a fourth round of peace talks in 1994/1995, till a cease fire was initiated by the LTTE in December 2001 and a cease fire agreement was made in February 2002 (Shanmugaratnam 2002; Shanmugaratnam and Stokke 2005).

Map 4.1. Sri Lanka



Map of Sri Lanka, shaded area in the North and East is claimed for Tamil Eelam.

By February 2002 the civil war in Sri Lanka had lasted nearly two decades. The conflict has devastated large areas of the North and East of the country, and affected the lives of people, particularly though not only, in the North East of Sri Lanka (Shanmugaratnam, Lund and Stølen, 2003). The fifth peace process in Sri Lanka has been going on since the cease fire agreement in 2002, though no talks were held in the period April 2003 - February 2006. An interesting feature of this fifth peace process is that it has attempted to use development as a precursor to conflict resolution (Goodhand et al 2005).

4.3 The Tamil diaspora globally

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora globally counts approximately 800 000 people or one in every four Sri Lankan Tamils. These people are settled in many countries, with larger groups in Canada, Australia, Switzerland, the UK as well as in Tami Nadu in India (Gamage 1998). The Tamil diaspora is diverse, including sections of people who migrated prior to the civil war, as labour migrants in the 1960s and 1970s as well as people who migrated or fled at different stages of the war. For all Tamils, the armed conflict in Sri Lanka has been defining in terms of their exile experience, regardless of whether or not they came as refugees themselves. The diversity of the Tamil diaspora encompasses the obvious differences of gender and age, but also differences in caste and in education, in the status of employment in host country, legal status in host country, as well as in terms of religion (most Tamils are Hindu, though a minority of 7-8% are Christian). It also includes very different migration experiences, related to date and means of migration, as well as differences in terms of place of origin, though it is suggested that many Tamils in the diaspora originate from the Jaffna area (Cheran 2003).

The diaspora itself has, and still does, play a role in the conflict in Sri Lanka (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2006). The role of the diaspora is complex, firstly, as Van Hear point out “the politico-military centre of gravity has shifted over time” (2003:9). It started with a point of gravity in Tamil Nadu in India, later this shifted to different parts of the diaspora in the West. After September 11th 2001 this has shifted again, as the LTTE has been banned as a terrorist organization by the USA and by the EU. However, this has not been the case in countries such as Canada, Switzerland and Norway, all with Tamil diaspora populations, though Tamil diaspora activities in other countries, arguably, also still are of significance (Hyndman 2003, Nadarajah and Sriskandarajah 2005).

There are strong divisions within the Tamil diaspora. For instance McDowell (1996) has found that in Switzerland, date and motivation for migration are of some significance. It also seems that the LTTE had a very strong influence on diaspora activities in Switzerland, at the time of research in the early 1990s at least, including non-political activities such as sports and music, but mainly in terms of fund-raising and propaganda, with the TRO described as “an LTTE-allied fund-raising body” (McDowell 1996:259). Fund-raising was found to consist of remittances, door to door collections, cuts on transfers of money and some business

collaboration. While intimidation and pressure in order to obtain money was rare, it existed. According to Van Hear et al (2004) the Tamil diaspora in the UK, is very active in view of its size, and support for the LTTE continues, despite the UK ban on the LTTE after September 11th 2001. The same study points out the significance of place of origin and profession, as well as caste and political identities in terms of dividing lines among diaspora organizations and activities, as well as the potential for diaspora contributions to development and reconstruction in the North East. The study concludes that currently diaspora contributions either go through the TRO or similar organizations, or consist of small scale initiatives, but that the diaspora potential “is far from being realised” (Van Hear et al, 2004:17).

In terms of newer developments, Cheran (2003) in particular points to the recent concept of diaspora circulation, which increasingly after the 2002 ceasefire agreement has become popular among members of the Tamil diaspora. The term diaspora circulation refers to the fact that increasing numbers of diaspora members travel back and forth to the North East of Sri Lanka, where they often buy properties and houses, work voluntarily with development issues, invest in local enterprises, or as is the case most frequently visit family and friends. He also points out the significance of remittances to family and support of Tamil development organizations, as key ways of contributing towards development and reconstruction in the North-East. Nevertheless, Cheran (2003) concludes with recommendations towards facilitating and encouraging diaspora circulation through policies in both host country and country of origin, in order to create a form of reversed brain-drain, a pooling of human capital, for the benefit of development in the country of origin.

4.4 The Tamil diaspora in Norway

There are about 10 000 Tamils in Norway, including people who have lived here since the 1960s and people who arrived only a few years ago, as well as people with very different educational, professional and other backgrounds. However, they also share some common features, most have family members all over the world (Fuglerud 1999) and most participate actively in Tamil activities of one kind or another in Norway. According to information

obtained in interviews and from Aftenposten (04.04.01)², there are Tamil activities in most Norwegian towns, where there is a significant number of Tamils. It seems that these places include Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger, Vardø, Molde, Ulsteinvik and Ålesund. The range of activities and number of participants vary, as does the degree to which these activities do or do not have political aims. In many places diaspora activities are dominated by the local LTTE representatives, and in these cases activities have a propaganda and fund-raising nature, though they may include all kinds of activities for adults and children. Some places Tamil schools and activities are organized as an alternative to those organized by the LTTE representatives.

The Tamil diaspora in Norway is resourceful and Tamils are perceived as hard working in Norway. Statistics on immigrants in Norway support this notion, as it is found that Tamils have a high employment rate, high education rate, as well as high frequency in voting in Norwegian elections (Lie 2004). The Tamil diaspora seem united and well organized at a first glance, however closer acquaintance reveals diversity within. Tamils in Norway share a distance from the Norwegian society, while their bonds to Tamil Sri Lanka are more individual (Fuglerud 1999).

According to Fuglerud (1997) there are three overlapping 'social fields' of Tamil networks in the diaspora, related to date of migration, political stance and family, village and caste membership. It is possible to divide the Tamil migrants into four groups according to date of arrival: 1. labour migrants arriving in 1968-1975, 2. 'folkehøyskole' students arriving in 1975-1988, 3. refugees arriving in 1980-1986 and 4. those arriving as asylum seekers after 1986. While these groups mix with each other, the differences related to the migration experience and length of exile are of significance. The second 'social field' is related to politics, where differences are articulated in terms of pro- or anti-LTTE, the LTTE being the only Tamil organization with a functioning structure and 'official' representatives in most towns where Tamils live. The third 'social field' is related to family, village and caste membership. While most Tamils in Norway originate from the Jaffna, the issue of caste membership is hard to investigate, though most Tamils in Norway seem to have similar caste 'status' in the caste hierarchy.

² <http://tux1.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/d202517.htm> (up-dated 04.04.01) (down-loaded 13.02.06)

Fuglerud (1997, 1999, 2004) emphasizes the significance of Tamil identity in exile, and presents two models, the traditional and the revolutionary. Without going into detail, it should be mentioned that the traditional model of Tamil identity retains the focus on difference in terms of seniority, caste and gender, while the revolutionary rejects these differences, and rejects the traditional Tamil society, striving for a new Tamil society. The revolutionary model is represented by the LTTE, and by those in the diaspora who support the LTTE, while the traditional model is represented by other members of the Tamil diaspora. The LTTE has very clearly rejected the ideas of seniority, gender and caste, in terms of the way the LTTE is organized, and it is a stated aim of the organization to fight the dowry tradition and the caste system among Tamils. However, Fuglerud points out that the divisions between the two models are not always this clear, and people shift from one to the other, perhaps most frequently from the revolutionary to the traditional, as they grow older. However, these models have bearings for Tamil life in the diaspora. The traditional model sees the possibility of a complete Tamil identity in exile, while the revolutionary does not. The traditional model seeks to reconstruct the local Tamil setting from the North-East in the diaspora, while the revolutionary aims all its activities towards the 'Tamil 'home'land'.

It is significant to note the dominating role of the LTTE in and for the Tamil diaspora, because "when the refugee migrants arrive the LTTE are already there, claiming to represent their views" (Fuglerud, 1999:155). However, the ways in which the LTTE is significant to different members of the Tamil diaspora vary. For Tamils in Norway, ironically, in exile they perhaps "become what they have fled from" (Fuglerud, 1999:178) in the sense that they fled from the LTTE, whereas in exile they support the organization, at least financially. The Tamil identity, whether constructed as traditional or revolutionary, is very important in exile and for many it is the "transformation created by the condition of exile ... [which lead to a] ... development of a national consciousness" (Fuglerud, 1999:178). Therefore in the case of Tamil diasporas, the LTTE is not simply a liberation movement in Sri Lanka, it is an important actor in exile, and it actively participates in the construction of Tamil exile experiences and of Tamil identity in exile.

However, there are differences among Tamils in Norway in terms of the ways in which their Tamil identity is constituted, in which ways this is related to the LTTE, and how this translates into political views and choices. Broadly, Tamils in Norway can be divided into

three groups in terms of political activism, firstly, a very small group of LTTE representatives/members and a slightly larger circle of active supporters, secondly, a very small group of members of other Tamil organizations (competing with the LTTE) or non-members but actively critical of and opposing the LTTE and thirdly, the majority who do not take an active political stand, but support the LTTE financially, either directly or through the TRO or other organizations affiliated to the LTTE, and who feel affinity with the LTTEs struggle for the 'Tamil 'home'land' (Fuglerud, 1999).

5. The Tamil diaspora in Norway: transnational activities and ‘home’

5.1 Introduction: The meaning of ‘home’

The role of processes of globalization in relation to migration and transnationalism is unclear (Fuglerud 2001), however, there is no doubt that globalization has some impact on contemporary migration. Clearly, the new technologies of travel and information have enabled the growth of transnationalism, making multiple identities and localities possible, as well as globalizing family ties and playing some part in the growth of remittances (Cohen and Vertovec 1999). This leads to changes in the boundaries between host and ‘home’ societies, but there is little evidence of how. For a majority of the world’s population, globalization has not so far made international travel more easily accessible, however, the knowledge that it can be possible is there (Kibreab 1999). In terms of the ways in which ‘home’ is seen by members of diaspora populations, new technologies of travel and information are of great significance. The possibility of travel, of keeping up to date via the internet and of following satellite television has revolutionised the ways in which diaspora populations relate to ‘home’ on a daily basis.

The everyday practices and routines of members of a diaspora may give tangible insights into meanings of ‘home’ (Rapport and Dawson 1998). It is therefore interesting “how [...] transnational social fields and practices manifest themselves in daily lives and how (if at all) [...] they impact on abstract conceptualizations of ‘home’?” (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:7). The everyday practices and routines of members of the Tamil diaspora include surfing on Tamil web-sites as well as watching Tamil satellite television, however, there are also other activities of interest. This chapter will discuss the transnational social fields and practices, as they manifest themselves in the daily lives of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, and seek to address how they impact on conceptualizations of ‘home’, as this is of immediate relevance to the following investigation into transnational activities of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka.

The meaning of ‘home’ entails different things for different people, but usually ‘home’ is understood as related to identity and belonging. For diaspora members ‘home’

encompasses the “‘double consciousness’ of being in a ‘new place’ but connected to an ‘old place’” (Mohan 2002:88). The meaning of ‘home’ therefore is constructed based on both ‘here’ and ‘there’, and often also with a strong emphasis on the in between in which many diaspora members operate. The meaning of ‘home’ includes both the imagined and mythical ‘home’, in the minds of members of the diaspora and the ways they remember or imagine ‘home’. But it may also include the very real ‘home’, as the Tamil ‘home’land in the North East of Sri Lanka, where buildings and roads have been devastated by two decades of war. ‘home’ may also include the recreating of Tamil ‘home’s in the diaspora, the physical places of dwelling, as well as the focus on culture, tradition and language in the diaspora, as tools for supporting Tamil identity and increasing a sense of belonging in the Tamil diaspora. Whereas chapters 6 and 7 discuss the contributions of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway towards development and political change in the North East of Sri Lanka, this chapter investigates all transnational activities in the diaspora. This is because the transnational activities of direct relevance to development or political change in the North East of Sri Lanka, are intrinsically tied to those of no direct seeming relevance. It is through the various diaspora activities that Tamil culture and tradition are recreated and that meanings of ‘home’ are constituted among members of the Tamil diaspora, particularly through the Tamil schools and through various cultural and social events. Notably, the issues of identity, belonging and ‘home’ are subject to impacts from the context, therefore the role of the LTTE in terms of Tamil identity construction in the diaspora, will be discussed.

Transnational activities using the new technologies of travel and information, with a focus on the internet, will be investigated, prior to a discussion of how (if at all) transnational activities focusing mainly on education and culture impact on abstract conceptualizations of ‘home’ and identity, and how participation in such general transnational activities relates to the will and interest in contributing towards the development of ‘home’ through transnational activities.

5.2 Tamil diaspora activities in Norway

The key activities among the Tamil diaspora in Norway centre around three main issues. Firstly, the education and Tamil identity of Tamil children and youth, secondly, around

the social and cultural needs and interests of adult Tamils, and thirdly, around support for the North East of Sri Lanka, both in terms of financial support for development efforts, financial support for the Tamil struggle and involvement with development efforts in the North East. Often transnational activities encompass economic, political, social and cultural/religious dimensions. For instance Tamil cultural shows are organized by adults with a cultural interest. Meanwhile Tamil children are taught Tamil dances, as a part of strengthening their Tamil identity and creating a feeling of community with other young Tamils. These dances are then performed at the cultural event. While the event itself may have as its main aim to collect funds for a development project in the North East of Sri Lanka, or indeed to collect money for the LTTE.

Among the first group of activities, related to the education and Tamil identity of Tamil children and youth growing up in Norway, the Tamil schools are the most significant. Despite the fact that Tamil parents do not believe that they and their children will 'return' to Sri Lanka, the identity of second generation Tamils in Norway is very much in focus among the parents. Vast resources, both time, money and voluntary efforts, are invested in the Tamil schools, focusing on Tamil language, history and cultural activities. In Norway such Tamils schools exist in most places where Tamils live, and in Bergen and Oslo there are several different Tamil schools.

The Tamil Resource and Instruction centre in Oslo (Tamilsk Ressurs- og Veiledningscenter - TRVS) is the largest Tamil diaspora initiative in Norway, and also the largest organizer of 'Tamil schools'. It has both an educational, cultural and social focus, and while mostly catering to children and youth, also includes activities for women and for the elderly.

"During a weekend we have about 1500 people come through the centre. We have 'home' work support, then there are Tamil lessons, and lessons in dance and music. We also have groups for women and the elderly, who use the centre. (...) Today, in addition to the centre in Rommen, there are 7 local branches, among other in Drammen, Bergen, Trondheim, Stavanger and Ulsteinvik. (...) All the parents of children who use the centre contribute financially. But the main reason we can operate this is that nearly everything is done on a voluntary basis."

(Kasinathan Nirmalanthan, Verdensmagasinet X, 1/2004:32-33, translated from Norwegian).

Though the TRVS is a dominant actor there are also other Tamil schools. All the Tamil schools have a combined focus on Tamil identity, through lessons in the Tamil language, dance and music, as well as a focus on supporting Tamil children's educational merits in Norway, through providing 'home' work support. This support mainly focuses on subjects such as maths, physics and chemistry, but may also include law and economics³. While these activities mainly have a host country focus, it may be argued that there is a feature of 'home' country focus, in the sense that Tamil children are encouraged to explore and uphold their Tamil identity, and also encouraged to do well in education, with the partial motivation that they one day may be able to use their knowledge and skills to help re-build the North East of Sri Lanka. In this sense the activities in the Tamil schools may be seen as lived experiences of a transnational nature, bridging 'here' and 'there', with a sense of 'home' in between.

In several interviews there were references to the different profiles Tamil schools. Parents experience that some schools more than others focus on the Tamil liberation struggle. There is a case for arguing that children in some schools are taught that supporting the Tamil cause equals supporting the LTTE.

"There is a Tamil school in Stavanger. It used to be independent of LTTE, but in 2004 it was "taken over" by LTTE people. No one talks about this, no one comments on this in public. (...) Most parents want schools without propaganda, but they just keep quiet..."

Though it seems that the direct 'political' activities are limited and that the focus of all schools is on the Tamil language and on cultural activities, it may be argued that the Tamil schools have a vital function in terms of Tamil identity construction in the diaspora, which has very clear political aspects (Fuglerud 1999, McDowell 1996). The LTTE as the only dominant Tamil organization in Norway, is an important actor in terms of the running of the Tamil schools in Norway, and it seems that the LTTE view of the conflict in Sri Lanka, as well as support for the LTTE, are significant factors in most of the Tamils schools in Norway. Through these schools and the related social and cultural activities, the LTTE constructs a Tamil identity among the diaspora population, through re-creating particular traditions and creating a common memory of a particular reading of Tamil history and the conflict in Sri Lanka.

³ Time table for lessons at TRVS, <http://www.trvs.no/timeplan.shtml> (down-loaded 13.02.06).

There are differing views as to how issues of Tamil identity and the conflict in Sri Lanka, should be put forward to Tamil children and youth growing up in Norway. The issue of LTTE involvement in diaspora activities will be discussed toward the end of this section. However, as the following quote shows, for most Tamils in Norway, when it comes to Tamil activities with a main focus in Norway, it is perhaps most important to encourage their children's Tamil identity:

“Most Tamils try to make sure their children speak Tamil and go to Tamil school on Saturdays to learn Tamil, dancing and other cultural activities. The teachers are all volunteers, and the parents too prioritize the Tamil school.”

The Tamil radio, based in Bergen, may serve as an example of one of the activities among the Tamil diaspora in Norway, relating to the second key issues, social and cultural needs and interests of adults, though the radio also tries to reach children and youth:

“Radio Tamil is a local radio station here in Bergen. The Radio has been broadcasting for 15 years now. It's based on voluntary work, but we have received some financial support for equipment. The radio broadcasts twice a week, for a couple of hours each time. The radio has religious and cultural programs, plays a lot of music, poetry and news. The news is mostly taken from sources on the internet and from newspapers. We also discuss issues related to being a Tamil here in Norway. In particular this is important for the children and youth, who are in many ways both Tamil and Norwegian. We speak about the political situation and the peace process in Sri Lanka too. Of course the peace process is very important, the war lasted for 20 years, which brings new perspectives on the value of peace.”

A second example of Tamil diaspora activities with a combined focus are women's groups. One of which is described by one of its members in the following quote:

“We have a women's group. We started with young women in 1989. The women's group has different activities: singing, cooking, sowing, discussion about health issues.”

A third example are the many different semi-organized groups playing football and cricket, all the groups in connection to Catholic parishes in Norway, the celebration of various Hindu festivals in more or less organized forms and other semi-organized community groups.

According to one of the interviewees:

“It is all the small things that the Tamils do together which create the networks. We play football and cricket, and there are groups for youth and women's groups. Wherever there are Tamils, there are Tamil activities”.

These non-formal networks are very significant as points of departure for more organized transnational activities. It is through everyday practices and routines related to

religion, food, music and culture that people create their meanings of 'home'. This is perhaps even more so when these practices are being handed on to a second generation in exile, when the parents feel a particular responsibility for transferring cultural practices from 'home'.

Thirdly, there are a range of activities, which may be said to focus around support for the North East of Sri Lanka, both in terms of financial support for development efforts, financial support for the Tamil struggle, as well as more direct involvement with development efforts in the North East. As the below quote shows, the main diaspora involvement in development, and indeed directly into the North East of Sri Lanka is related to money transfers, both private remittances to family and money donations in organized collections.

“Today the diaspora is mostly involved in “development” in the North East of Sri Lanka through collecting money which is sent to Sri Lanka.”

Both in relation to the Tamil schools in Norway and in relation to organized transfers of money to Sri Lanka from Tamils in Norway, particularly in the case of the Tamil Rehabilitation Organization (the TRO), the issue of the role of the LTTE in the diaspora comes up. When asked directly about this, few interviewees wanted to discuss these issues at any length, and most did not want to be quoted when they did. However, the comments made by the interviewees seem to support the general picture of the situation as portrayed in *Verdensmagasinet X* (1/2004:33):

“In Norway it is the Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC) who takes care of the political work directed towards the ‘home’ country. This organization, which is part of an international network, has about 50 members here in Norway, has close links with the Tamil liberation movement LTTE (...)The TCC has for many years organized collection of money in support of the LTTEs struggle in Sri Lanka. According to Aftenposten, during the 1990s, Tamils in Norway annually sent more than 1 million NOK from Norway to the LTTE.”

However, it should also be noted that there are Tamils in the diaspora who do not share the strong support for the LTTE of some, or the more pragmatic and weaker support, which seems to be dominating among the majority:

“It should be discovered and openly displayed how the diaspora is controlled by the LTTE. The Norwegians should explore how this works, and to what extent it is possible for individual Tamils in Norway to participate and influence what is going on.”

The LTTE has a strong bearing on diaspora activities, among other, through the Tamil Coordinating Committee (TCC) in different countries, though there are differences in opinion both as to the extent of this and of whether or not this is a good thing (McDowell, 1996). It

also seems that there are transnational activities across diaspora communities in different host countries, which are coordinated by networks such as the TCC, the TRO and Tamil Economic Consultancy House (TECH), Organizations with some LTTE connections, and other organizations and networks, such as Sri Lanka Democracy Forum (SLDF), have local branches/members in many different host countries.

5.3 Information, 'home' and the internet

The ideas which people have about 'home' are of significance for their participation in transnational activities (Mohan, 2002), while processes and outcomes of globalization are also of significance to transnational activities of migrants (Dicken 2003, Cohen and Vertovec 1999). What is the relationship between migrants' ideas about 'home' and the new technologies of information and travel? Does the non-stop availability of news from the country of origin on the internet or e-mail contact with family and friends, change the ways in which migrants think about 'home'?

In this section there will be an investigation into the ways in which members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway get information from the North East of Sri Lanka, and how the new technologies of travel and information may be seen to have a great impact on the Tamil diaspora in Norway. All the interviewees followed news from Sri Lanka, mostly on a daily basis, via newspapers on the internet, news on web-sites, TV and radio. Most refer to personal contact, through visits to Sri Lanka and telephone conversations, as a significant source of information about the situation in the country and a source which is deemed as reliable.

The internet, together with personal communications and visits, seems to be the most significant source of information about 'home', as well as an important site for Tamil transnationalism as such. The internet has provided the Tamil diaspora with new spaces, where the diaspora can communicate, within host countries, between different host countries, and with Tamils in Sri Lanka (Parham 2004). Though the internet is challenging as a research site, it is possible to make some observations as to diaspora use of the internet, and discuss the internet both as transnational activism and as a tool for transnational activities.

There are many Tamil diaspora web-sites, representing diaspora organizations, looser networks, individuals, public websites and other semi-private discussion groups, some in English, some in Tamil and some in other European languages. The internet displays the same differences within the diaspora which may be found in real terms, and includes the same focus on the conflict in Sri Lanka, which is found among the diaspora (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2006). Though it is hard to categorize web-sites, the table below includes 5 different, but over-lapping, kinds of web-sites which cover a majority of the different kinds of web-sites; news web-sites, diaspora web-sites, Norwegian Tamil web-sites, discussion groups and development organization web-sites.

Table 5.1: Tamil diaspora web-sites

Category	Example of web-sites	Comment
News	www.tamilnet.com www.tamilcanadian.com www.bbcnews.com www.cnn.com	www.tamilnet.com is probably the most significant news web-site. It is a pro-LTTE web-site, in English and has frequent up-dates. Tamils in the diaspora also read news on international web-sites such as the BBC and the CNN.
Diaspora	www.tamilcanadian.com www.fetna.org www.tamilnation.org www.sangam.org www.tyo.no www.tyo.ch www.tyo-online.dk www.tyo-uk.org www.tyocanada.org www.tyo-ev.com www.tyoaustralia.com www.tyousa.org www.tyoholland.nl www.tyofrance.com	Many English language Tamil web sites focus on local diaspora activities in host countries. For instance www.tamilcanadian.com - Canada, www.tamilaustralian.com - Australia and www.fetna.org - USA. There are also web-sites for the diaspora across the world, www.tamilnation.org and www.sangam.org . TamilNation in particular has focus on the diaspora as a strong force. TamilNation also has separate sub-sites for the diaspora in more than 30 different countries around the world, including Norway. Both TamilNation and Sangam, and other diaspora web-sites are clearly significant in terms of Tamil identity and culture in the diaspora. The Tamil Youth Organization, a pro-LTTE organization, has branches in many diaspora countries, with web-sites in 10 different countries.
Norwegian	www.trvs.no ,	There are many Norwegian Tamil diaspora web-sites.

diaspora Norwegian diaspora (continued)	www.tyo.no www.ntho.no www.norsktamil.no	It seems that web-sites are constructed frequently, but perhaps not up-dated as frequently. The Norwegian Tamil diaspora web-sites include web-sites relating to diaspora activities, such as the web-site of Tamilsk Ressurs- og Veiledningscenter www.trvs.no , the web-site of Tamil Youth Organization in Norway www.tyo.no as well as development related web-sites, the Norwegian Tamil Health Organization www.ntho.no and the North East Development Fund www.norsktamil.no ⁴ .
Tamil discussion groups	www.norwaytamil.info www.denunge.dk www.tamilchatworld.com	There are discussion groups on many different web-sites. A Norwegian Tamil web-site, with what appears to be active discussion groups, is www.norwaytamil.info ⁵ . The slogan on this web-site is simply: "Connecting Tamil People...". The "chat room" is one of 6 key features of the web-site, including sections on Tamil food recipes and on baby names. Most of the content on this web-site seems to be on Tamil popular culture in the diaspora. In contrast, another Tamil chatting web-site, based in Denmark, www.denunge.dk , with the slogan: "Leverandør av ytringsfrihet til Tamilere" ("Supplier of freedom of expression to Tamils") contains expressions of different opinions on the situation in Sri Lanka. This Danish web-site, seems to be mainly used by Tamil youth in Denmark. This web-site has discussion groups on some political issues, though many are related to Tamil popular culture in the diaspora. Most Tamil chat/discussion group web-sites are related to popular culture, and meeting people on the Internet.
Tamil	www.troonline.org	There are web-sites for a number of Tamil

⁴ Information from all the above mentioned web-sited down-loaded 16.02.06.

⁵ Information from the web-site www.norwaytamil.info down-loaded 17.02.06.

<p>development organizations</p> <p>Tamil development organizations</p> <p>(continued)</p>	<p>www.techonnet.org</p> <p>www.teedor.org</p>	<p>development organization though those of the “main” organizations TRO, TECH and TEEDOR, are the most comprehensive and well-developed. The TRO web-site www.troonline.org, gives details of TRO projects, aims as well as including separate web-sites for the following countries with their own TRO sections: Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the USA. The Tamil Economic Consultancy House web-site www.techonnet.org gives details about among other TECH projects, aims and partners. The Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR) web-site www.teedor.org⁶, gives details of, their projects and aims. While these development organizations have clear links with the diaspora, including references on the web-sites, or even separate sections, they seem to be mainly run from and in the North East of Sri Lanka. Smaller development schemes have more direct involvement from the diaspora, do not seem to have the same kind of web-sites, probably because it takes a lot of resources to construct and maintain web-sites.</p>
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It seems that the internet is widely used by members of the Tamil diaspora, and that it is used for different purposes ranging from news to entertainment, including active participation in discussion groups and down-loading information and tips on Tamil cooking or baby-names. Using the internet may be seen as some kind of transnational activism, however, one would need a lot more information as to the actual extent and nature of internet use among the members of the Tamil diaspora, in Norway and elsewhere, and perhaps also significantly in Sri Lanka, in order to be able to say more about the role of the internet.

In terms of the significance of the internet for the diasporas involvement in transnational activities, it may be argued that the internet serves several functions. Firstly, in

⁶ Information from all the above mentioned web-sited down-loaded 17.02.06.

terms of news and general information from Sri Lanka, as well as specific information related to development issues (web-site categories 1 and 5 above). These keep the link with ‘home’ very much alive, and may be seen as part of keeping Tamil identity strong in the diaspora and as such of relevance for both the motivation to participate and actual participation in further transnational activities. Secondly, the internet may also be seen as part of keeping Tamil identity strong in the diaspora, through all the cultural and ‘national’ postings on web-sites, particularly on the diaspora web-sites (web-site categories 2 and 3 above). Thirdly, the internet may be seen as significant for diaspora involvement in transnational activities through discussion groups (web-site category 4 above). These involve members of the Tamils diaspora in discussions with other Tamils in the diaspora, about cultural issues, identity, life in the host country, about political issues related to the conflict in Sri Lanka and issues related to the need for development and reconstruction in the North East. The discussion groups encourage a continuing focus and interest in these issues, and through this may lead to diaspora involvement in transnational activities.

As with information and news in general, on the internet too, there are severe issues of reliability. Many of the interviewees mentioned the reliability of the news from the North East of Sri Lanka as problematic:

“I follow the news from Sri Lanka, I listen a lot to news on Tamil TV. And on the internet also. I also listen to what other people have heard and tell me about news from Sri Lanka. I often also check news stories I hear on the web-sites of NRK, CNN or the BBC. Sometimes it’s hard to know what is true, and what actually has happened and why. When the foreign minister was killed, it was quite hard to get the picture of what had happened. He was a Tamil who lived in Colombo, and had little to do with Tamils in general. No one knows who shot him. It’s really difficult to tell. Some say it was terrorism, that it was the Tigers, other say other things. It seems there are always things to hide, evidence that disappears.”

The question of reliability of news from Sri Lanka is directly related to the polarization of the news picture from Sri Lanka. There are Sri Lankan media in three languages, Sinhala, Tamil and in English. The observations made by my interviewees refer to both Tamil and English language media. In general terms one may describe the media in Sri Lanka as polarized in the sense that different media are either pro-LTTE or Sinhala-nationalist, though of course there are also media who have a position in between these two extremes. Based on the limited information from my interviews it is hard to establish any direct consequences of the polarized media picture in Sri Lanka for the diaspora, other than that there is a definite awareness of

this polarization of the news picture, and a related uncertainty about any political news from Sri Lanka.

Many Tamils in Norway have been back to Sri Lanka at least once, often 2-3 times or more, since the ceasefire in 2002, and many Tamils travelled to Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami in 2005, both because of casualties in their families and in order to support relief efforts in the devastated areas. The tsunami was also referred to in relation to the issue of reliable information, in terms of the aid distribution in Sri Lanka after the tsunami (www.tamilnet.com⁷) the fact that the UN secretary general was not allowed by the Sri Lankan government to travel to the North East (www.tamilnet.com⁸) and the general conflicting views on the Sri Lankan government and army, and the LTTEs efforts and role in the relief effort after the tsunami. Members of the diaspora were deeply concerned with the well-being of their family in the North East, and though some were disenchanted with the fact that both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government seemed to try to gain political capital from the situation by trying to gain control over relief and aid to Sri Lanka, most were quite simply angry with the Sri Lankan government, for what was perceived as yet another strike against Tamils in Sri Lanka by the Sinhala majority (Stokke 2006).

The case of the tsunami illustrates not only how development and aid may be used as political tools, but that how these events and positions are portrayed, and how this information is presented by different information sources and media, in particular the internet, has significance in the diaspora. In the case of the tsunami personal visits to Sri Lanka, as well as direct communication with people living in Sri Lanka, or who had recently visited Sri Lanka, were seen as the most reliable and useful information sources. This has a direct impact on the transnational activities among the diaspora. Using events related to the tsunami as an example, there may be seen to be two direct and related results. Firstly, the combination of news from the North East that the LTTE and the TRO quickly seized control of the situation and managed to help a great number of people with emergency relief, and that the Sri Lankan government very soon was accused of not doing enough for the Tamils in the North East, encouraged Tamils in the diaspora to channel their support to those affected by the disaster

⁷ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=13971> (January 13th 2005, down-loaded 17.02.06)

⁸ <http://www.tamilnet.com/art.html?catid=13&artid=13996> (January 15th 2005, down-loaded 17.02.06)

through the TRO system only. Secondly, the fact that the aid distribution was made into a political issue (by both the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government), which was not resolved to the benefit of those needing the disaster relief in the North East, fed into the Tamil disenchantment with the Sri Lankan government in general over many decades and resulted in a strengthening of the support for the LTTE among members of the diaspora (Stokke, 2006).

5.4 Going ‘home’: Permanent return or transnational lives?

“It is highly unlikely that the majority of members of the diaspora will return to the ‘home’land on a permanent basis” (Cheran 2003:12). The Tamil diaspora is probably similar to most other diaspora populations, programs encouraging permanent return have been tried out, among other by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), but it has been found that these programs are very resource demanding, and that though there are individual success stories, over all the return and re-integration of professionals is not likely to happen at a large scale (Pieres, 1992).

The reason which was most often given for why permanent return is impossible, is children growing up as Norwegian Tamils, but currently also the political situation in Sri Lanka. These are only two of the factors which are at work, there are also professional, economic and other factors matter. There seem to be three interesting features in terms of the idea of permanent return, firstly, that this is unlikely to happen for the majority, secondly, that there are issues related to both gender and generation which make permanent return difficult, and finally that leading transnational lives ‘here and there’ seems to be the favoured solution, particularly for retirement.

The fact that their children are growing up in Norway, and have multiple identities with strong affiliations to Norway, seems to be the factor of greatest importance in terms of considering the possibility of permanent return to Sri Lanka for Tamils in Norway:

“My children are happy here in Norway. They are born in Norway, they only want to go to Sri Lanka for holidays. They are Norwegian Tamils.”

“Many Tamils have 3-4 children, if the children want to stay in Norway, I think the parents will stay here in Norway too. Or at least not move permanently to Sri Lanka. It would be too hard...”

"To move 'home' is hard. I have actually tried, I quit my job and was going to move back. But it's not that simple. Our children want to be in Norway. They want to have snow and winter!"

The above quotes illustrate a clear sentiment from the interviews with Tamils who have children who are growing up in Norway. A permanent move back to Sri Lanka is impossible with the children, and impossible for the parents without the children. This is not surprising, the title of an article about the return of Malawian refugees illustrates this point: "Returning Strangers: The children of Malawian Refugees Come 'home'?" (Cornish, Peltzer and MacLachlan, 1999). Understanding identity as something flexible and dynamic, which may be influenced, even constructed, moving to a country to which you have been twice, and where your parents moved from 20 years ago, need not mean 'going 'home''.

There were also other issues which were pointed to as possible challenges to 'going back'. Gender equality was one of these issues:

"I think that the role of women and the possibilities of women in society in Norway, would be a challenge for many Tamil women, if they were to return to Sri Lanka. The Tamil women in Norway mostly prefer to work outside of the 'home' now."

The views of younger Tamils of society in the North East, was another:

"Young Tamils, the second generation, don't want to move back, because in the West we have freedom of expression, you don't have this in Sri Lanka. There you are forced to listen to the elders. In Sri Lanka development in this area is delayed with a generation, what is important is status and prestige. Additionally the caste mentality is still very strong."

Both these quotes illustrate the complexities of discussions of return. Living in another country, in the diaspora, makes an impact on people's lives, and on the ways in which they want to live their lives and of their meanings of 'home'.

While permanent return for most seems unlikely, the issue of returning to Sri Lanka for retirement, and particularly the idea of living 'here and there' came up frequently:

"Many Tamils from Norway speak about retiring in Sri Lanka. Since the peace process started, I think maybe 80% of Tamils have been for a trip to Sri Lanka. Very many of these have bought houses or land in Sri Lanka."

"I think about moving to Sri Lanka permanently, but I don't know if or when this might happen. If there is lasting peace, then there may be a chance. But I also think about living in Norway and in Sri Lanka, maybe a little here and there. (...) But we do plan to return to Sri Lanka, in one way or another. I don't want to live my retirement years here in Norway. (...)"

If we were to go back, I know even we wouldn't feel completely at 'home' there anymore, though we haven't tried yet. Some people we know try to live both here and there. In Norway they are retired, but they have a house in Norway, and they are Norwegian citizens. But then they travel to Sri Lanka and help in different projects there for parts of the year. Maybe we will do something similar. This means safety for the family, financially and otherwise. It's good that people do things in Sri Lanka."

Leading a transnational life, 'here and 'there' seems a viable option for many in the diaspora. It is interesting to note that there is an awareness about the fact that 'going back' may not be as simple in term of feeling at 'home', as one might think, even for those who have lived a part of their adult lives in the North East of Sri Lanka, prior to migrating. It is also interesting that the idea of living 'here and there' often seems to involve participating in development efforts when in the North East, perhaps this may even be a part of the motivation for trying to lead such a transnational life. Both the realisation that a return to Sri Lanka may not entail a return 'home' and the popularity of the idea of living 'here and there', raise questions about the meaning of 'home' among Tamils in Norway. Permanent return for the majority of members of the Tamil diaspora does not seem to be a realistic option, and thus as such is not likely to be of significance for development in the North East.

5.4 The meaning of 'home'?

The meaning of 'home' to members of diaspora populations is of great significance in terms of their interest in participation in transnational activities. Often attention has only been paid to cultural and social activities or only to activities of direct and demonstrable significance to development in the country of origin (Al-Ali, Black and Koser, 2001). Post modern approaches on migration and transnationalism tend to focus on the subjective and the individual, and on social and cultural activities, while political economy approaches may focus on real and concrete and 'objective' issues, such as for instance development initiatives resulting in the building of schools or roads. When this is the case one risks losing sight of the complete picture of the lived experiences of members of diaspora populations and their transnational activities.

It is in this context that there is a need for an investigation including insights from both the post modern and the political economy approaches in order to make sense of the meanings of 'home', and the impacts of these directly or indirectly on diaspora involvement with development in the country of origin. There is a need for a total picture of the

transnational activities of the members of the Tamil diaspora, including activities spanning the economic, political, social and cultural/religious.

Table 5.2: Transnational activities among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway

	Economic	Political	Social	Cultural/Religious
'home' country focus (NE of Sri Lanka)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial remittances - Charitable donations - Other remittances (medicines, clothes) - Investments in small businesses - Investments in properties/houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Encouraging support for the LTTE through 'home'-visits and at gatherings. - Collecting money for the LTTE - Internet activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visiting family and friends - Voluntary work with development and reconstruction in the NE - 'Social remittances' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collecting money for the LTTE at cultural events
Host country focus (Norway)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donations to Tamil community organizations and schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lobbying political contacts in Norway. - Political appeals at social and cultural gatherings. - Tamil web-sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tamil school for children and youth - Membership of Tamil associations - Attendance at social gatherings - Tamil Radio - Tamil web-sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tamil school for children and youth - Tamil dance classes for children and youth - Cultural events (music, dance, religious festivals) - Participating in religious activities (Hindu and Roman Catholic)

Sources: Interviews with Tamils in Bergen and Oslo in 2004/2005, Aftenposten 04.04.01.⁹, Notam (May 2003), Verdensmagasinet X (1/2004: 32-33), Fuglerud (1999, 2004).

Table 5.2 reveals that the transnational activities of Tamils in Norway include many 'cultural' activities of great personal, individual and subjective significance for individual members of the diaspora and support individual and differentiated identity constructions and the creation and re-creation of meanings of 'home'. Such insights may be gained adopting

⁹ <http://tux1.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/d202517.htm> (up-dated 04.04.01) (down-loaded 13.02.06) and <http://tux1.aftenposten.no/nyheter/uriks/d202520.htm> (up-dated 04.04.01) (down-loaded 13.02.06).

post modern approaches to the study of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. On the other hand, adopting an approach tending towards political economy, it is possible to make sense of diaspora participation in transnational activities of significance to development in the country of origin, whether through financial remittances, financial support for development organizations or political activism. These transnational activities which make up the everyday routines and practices of Tamils in Norway and constitute their lived experiences of diaspora life, need to be investigated, in order to be able to understand the abstract conceptualizations of 'home' and identity, and how participation in such general transnational activities relates to the will and interest in contributing towards the development of 'home'. These activities are strongly interrelated with one another, with a single activity often including tending to both the individual cultural needs of Tamils in Norway and money collections for the LTTE or the TROs projects in the North East of Sri Lanka. Tamils participating in transnational activities understand 'home' in a variety of ways. These understandings include a physical understanding of 'home' as a village in North East Sri Lanka, a more abstract understanding of 'home' as the Tamil 'homeland, or the even more abstract understanding of 'home' as the recreated sense of a Tamil 'home' in the diaspora.

There is a very strong link between participation in transnational activities of an educational or cultural character, and abstract conceptualizations of 'home' and the will to contribute to the development in the North East of Sri Lanka. Though this is not a simple and straightforward issue, the interest in Tamil cultural activities is strongly linked with a notion of Tamil identity. This Tamil identity is created and recreated through the participation in such cultural transnational activities. This in turn relates to the interest in the Tamil 'home'land, whether a political interest motivating an active support or opposition of the LTTE, or active participation and support for development of the North East of Sri Lanka. If attention is only paid to activities of direct and demonstrable significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, or only to cultural activities, one risks losing sight of the complete picture of the lived experiences of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, which is necessary in order to make sense of the meaning of 'home' among the Tamil diaspora, which leads to the possibility of understanding both their interest in, and their actual contributions to, the development of the North East of Sri Lanka.

The new technologies of information and travel, here represented mainly by the internet and by satellite television, though also by cheaper phone connections and the availability of more frequent and affordable flights, have arguably revolutionized the diasporas relationship with 'home'. This may best be seen in terms of the everyday practices and routines among members of the Tamil diaspora, who on a daily basis watch Tamil television, have e-mail contact with family and friends (often also in the diaspora) and use Tamil web-sites for both news, entertainment and cultural purposes. Before access to the internet became commonly available (in Norway and most other diaspora countries) in the late 1990s, this site for contact and diaspora activity was simply not there. Though the effect of the internet is hard to measure, arguably, it has revolutionized the diasporas relationship with 'home'.

The question is: does the non-stop availability of news from the country of origin on the internet or e-mail contact with family and friends, change the ways in which migrants think about 'home'? Though the scope of this study does not permit for conclusive comments, it may be suggested that this is the case, in at least three ways. Firstly, members of the diaspora have the possibility of daily contact with family allows for 'living' both 'here and there' in a completely new way. Secondly, the possibility of continuing news up-dates means that it is possible to follow events at 'home' as they unfold, and therefore be far more involved in what is going on 'at home'. The continuing up-dates on Tamil web-sites suggest that many in the diaspora actually follow the web-sites quite closely, perhaps resulting in a larger investment of emotions and thought into what goes on at 'home', than was possible earlier, when news was perhaps delivered weekly through news-papers, or through radio broadcasts. Finally, the internet has also revolutionized the diasporas relationship with 'home' in terms of being a site for exchanging opinions, for discussing cultural, social and political issues, and for promoting Tamil culture and identity. So perhaps more than changing the ways in which migrants think about 'home', it may be argued that these new possibilities have enhanced the degree and frequency of migrants thoughts about and interactions with 'home'.

While permanent return to Sri Lanka is unlikely for a majority of Tamils in Norway, both the realisation that a return to Sri Lanka may not entail a return 'home' as well as the popularity of the idea of living 'here and there', raise questions about the meaning of 'home' among Tamils in Norway. While feeling rejected and 'outside' in the host country may have impacts on the relation to 'home' country, this does not mean that there is a simple solution

of ‘going ‘home’’ in terms of returning. One aspect of this is related to the fact that “transnational relations do not always seem to forge the sense of belonging *simultaneously* to two countries. On the contrary, they may paradoxically reinforce migrants’ feelings of living in more than one country but belonging to ‘neither’ place” (Salih, 2002, emphasis in original). This understanding is associated with a particular understanding of ‘home’ in relation to displacement, if displacement is seen not as a fact about socio political context, but as a pathological condition of the displaced (Malkki, 1992), then recreating ‘home’ elsewhere is impossible.

A more optimistic approach to these issues argues that “[t]ransnationalism allows an understanding of migrants as no longer caught in the trap between either assimilation or nostalgia and the ‘myth of return’ (Anwar, 1979). Rather it is argued, migrants are more and more able to construct their lives across borders, creating economic, social, political and cultural activities which allow them to maintain membership in both their immigration country and their country of origin” (Salih, 2002).

5.5 Conclusion

Members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway are in a ‘new place’ but connected to an ‘old place’. Through mainly social and cultural activities, such as Tamil schools for children and youth and cultural events for everyone, members of the diaspora shape and re-shape their identities as Tamils, and nourish their longing for ‘home’. At a far more practical level members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway are involved in economic and political activities, of direct relevance to ‘home’, mainly in terms of financial remittances and money donations to development organizations, and to the LTTE. Members of the Tamil diaspora follow the news from Sri Lanka on a daily basis, mainly through the internet and Tamil TV, though also via personal communication. Through the many Tamil diaspora web-sites the internet itself may be seen as a space for transnational activities, while it is simultaneously also a space which is used to strengthen Tamil national identity, and interest and awareness about Tamil issues. While permanent return to Sri Lanka does not seem to be realistic for most Tamils in Norway, the idea of living both ‘here and there’ seems to have great appeal, particularly as an

option for retirement, and is strongly connected to the idea of making contributions towards development in the North East of Sri Lanka.

The participation in different transnational activities, spanning economic, social, political and cultural categories, seems to be strongly intertwined, making an investigation into certain kinds of transnational activities, intrinsically bound with an understanding of other transnational activities. The everyday practices and lived experiences of members of the Tamil diaspora, reveal the total picture of the transnational activities which enables an understanding of both activities related to Tamil culture and identity, as well as those related to the reconstruction of the North East of Sri Lanka. Many of the activities in which members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway take part, may be seen as transnational, and therefore the Tamil diaspora in Norway may be described as a “transnational community”. However, following Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) it should be noted that it “is problematic to use the phrase ‘transnational community’ without analysing how different people are more or less likely to be involved” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:594), and how various factors such as level of education, class, gender, caste, origin, affect the ways and extent to which these people are involved.

6. Contributing to development in Sri Lanka?

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the ways in which members of the Tamil diaspora contribute to development in the North East and the significance of these contributions. The extent of Tamil transnational activities suggests a high level of involvement in transnational activities relating to reconstruction in the North East of Sri Lanka.

“There is a great will and wish to contribute to development, both at the individual and family level and for the entire society. Many people want to go and work voluntarily and many people want to invest.”

“Tamils in Sri Lanka are very conscious of the fact that the diaspora has a lot to contribute, that there are many resources to draw on in terms of development.”

“Development in Sri Lanka is dependent on the diaspora.”

Firstly there will be a discussion of different kinds of contributions to development in the North East, financial remittances, support for Tamil development organizations and contributions in term of social remittances, temporary return visits and two examples small development schemes. Secondly, there will be a discussion of different ways of understanding development among members of the Tamil diaspora. Finally, there will be a discussion of whether or not the contributions of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway may be seen as ‘significant’ to development in the North East.

The ‘North East’ of Sri Lanka as a large area with great differences both in the mix of populations, in geography and in economic terms should undergo an in-depth investigation in order to fully answer the question of diaspora contributions to ‘the North East’, with a particular focus on contributions in the different areas within the North East. However, due to the limited scope of this study, this will only be very briefly commented on here.

6.2 Financial remittances: Family support systems

Members of the Tamil diaspora world-wide and in Norway have a great concern for the North East of Sri Lanka, which materializes in helping both their families, and the Tamil

society in the North East. Most Tamils are engaged in sending financial remittances to family members in the North East of Sri Lanka.

“Generally speaking Tamils are very good at sending money ‘home’. Statistics from SSB¹⁰, show that Tamils are the group of immigrants in Norway who send the most money ‘home’”.

According to Carling (2005) Sri Lanka received a net of 1100 million USD in 2002, making Sri Lanka one of the top-25 remittance-receiving countries in 2002. In terms of remittances to Sri Lanka, it should be noted that these are not only remittances from Tamils abroad to the North East of the country, but also include all other remittances to Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, the number of Tamils living in diaspora 800 000 (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2006), suggests the importance of remittances for the North East (Sriskandarajah 2002, Carling 2005). With the 20 year war and its devastation of livelihoods in mind, many people in the North East would not survive without remittances (Van Hear et al 2004). In terms of exact numbers on remittances from Norway to Sri Lanka, these are not known, but Carling (2004) has found that according to numbers from 1996, more than 60% of adult immigrants from Sri Lanka in Norway sent financial remittances, while nearly 40% of those who were children of immigrants from Sri Lanka, or who had come to Norway as children sent financial remittances to Sri Lanka.

Financial remittances, may be seen mainly as family support systems. These are interesting in their transnational nature as they involve family members in the diaspora in many different countries, taking part in supporting family members in the North East of Sri Lanka. Information from Tamils in Norway shows that most Tamils have family members in several different diaspora countries, often including countries where there are significant numbers of Tamils. This study does not reveal how these family support networks function, whether there are conflicts within these networks as to who supports how much, nor whether there are demands from the family in the diaspora as to how the family members receiving remittances should spend these. Just as those who ‘give’ development aid often have an agenda, this may also be the case in relation to financial remittances. How does the fact that

¹⁰ Samfunnspeilet nr. 6, 2004, ”Innvandrere prioriterer å sende penger til familien”

members of the Tamil diaspora remit money to their family remaining in the North East, impact on the power relations between them? Is it a case of a donor with power, and a receiving part without? Or is it the case of a guilt-ridden donor who fled the North East and now lives 'a good life' in the West, and feels an obligation to give to those who were more courageous and stayed on? Or are there more complex processes at work? These are interesting questions, which if answered would help shed further light on the nature of transnationalism within the Tamil diaspora, and between the diaspora and people in the North East.

Research on the effects of remittances for development has for a long time suggested that the direct effect is small, that remittances tend to be spent on consumption and therefore create a need for future consumption and thus dependency on remittances, rather than promoting development. More recent research has shown that remittances may be seen as investments, if expenses to cover education or health care, are seen as investments and not simply as consumption. There may be significant effects on the local economy, when remittances are spent on goods and services. There are development effects of remittances, however, it is not possible to say anything here about the effects of the financial remittances of Tamils in Norway to the North East of Sri Lanka, as this has not been investigated. However, there remains a lot of room for diaspora populations and governments in remittance sending and receiving countries, to contribute to greater effects on development in remittance-receiving societies (Carling 2004 and 2005, Van Hear et al 2004).

Despite the general view of members of the Tamil diaspora as resourceful, highly-educated and well integrated in the Norwegian society, there are also individuals and families who struggle. Some of these do not contribute to development in the North East with financial remittances, nor in other ways. For some this may relate to financial circumstances, while for others it may relate to other issues.

6.3 Money donations to Tamil development organizations

Together with financial remittances to family members, money donations to Tamil development organizations, mainly the TRO, are among the most usual ways of making contributions to development in the North East. Diaspora contributions are of great

significance to the TRO, as the TRO is largely funded through these contributions (Stokke 2006). Other development organizations that were mentioned among members of the Tamil diaspora were Tamil Economic Consultancy House (TECH) and Tamil Eelam Economic Development Organization (TEEDOR), as well as Caritas (the Catholic Church's development organization) and a range of smaller development initiatives.

The TROs development efforts in the North East are huge, and are seen as very important by members of the Tamil diaspora. Even those who are critical of the TRO, in terms of their relationship with the LTTE, have great respect for the work which the TRO does among the people in the North East. The Tamil development organizations in Norway include those which are sections of development organizations in Sri Lanka, such as TRO, TECH and TEEDOR, and smaller Norwegian organizations such as the North East Development Fund and the Norwegian Tamil Health Organization, which is part of a wider network of diaspora organizations.

According to information from interviewees, it seems that diaspora contributions to development through development organizations, is an area where contacts between diaspora populations in different countries are particularly strong. The fact that organizations such as the TRO and TECH have country sections in many countries is perhaps an enabling factor for diaspora co-operation, however, the fact that the NTHO is part of a diaspora organization network, confirms the initiative to co-operate within the diaspora. The potential of the co-operation between the diaspora populations in different countries is great, and it is likely that there will be more visible results of this co-operation in the future, particularly if all involved actors support facilitating this co-operation.

All of these organizations have a focus on diaspora contributions to the development, in terms of money donations as well as voluntary work. TRO is by far the biggest development organization in the North East, and its role in the diaspora corresponds to this. TRO Norway focuses mainly on money collections among Tamils in Norway and through this helps fund the TROs work in the North East:

"TRO Norway supports TROs work in Sri Lanka, among other in relation to orphanages and other development projects. TRO Norway transfers a set amount of money to TRO Sri Lanka. TRO Norways projects are funded out of any money over and above the set transfer to TRO Sri Lanka, which goes toward covering TROs costs of working in Sri Lanka."

TECH is another Tamil development organization based in the North East, but with sections all over the world, including Norway.

“I was in Sri Lanka 2 months ago, doing TECH work. TECH helps all people in the North East of Sri Lanka. TECH in Norway was established 2 years ago, but in Sri Lanka TECH has existed for the last 20 years. Because of the longstanding war, the society is not developed now. People need support to obtain a normal life, for self-sufficiency. Everything that existed before the war, is now destroyed: the roads, human resources, buildings, electric systems, fisheries – everything. There are a lot of resources in the North East, but there is a lack of knowledge about how to use them. People do not know their crafts like they used to do. During the war everyone has had to do everything as best they can. Now everyone can be a builder – but few people really know how they should build. There is a need for guidance, for education. People with higher education from the diaspora, with very different professional backgrounds can now come to help. Anyone can join in, if they can spare 2-3 weeks of their time, and go to Sri Lanka and teach about whatever they know. I have been to Sri Lanka 3 times during holidays to do this. I have been teaching computer skills. TECH in Sri Lanka co-operates with both UNESCO and FORUT and other NGOs. TECH works through micro projects. For example to help widows to gain a livelihood after the war. TECH helps widows by providing them with 2 cows, the widows then can run their milk farm.”

Based on the information from interviews with Tamils in Norway, the ways in which development projects are being carried out in the North East, are quite similar regardless of the stated aims of the organizations, with a focus on the needs of local people, including their participation. In many cases these individual development projects are understood within the greater context, and may be seen to address several important issues simultaneously, for instance:

“When we have projects for village areas, it is because it is important to have development for ordinary people, so they can obtain normal lives. Important projects include a milk factory and a yoghurt factory. 5 families benefit from this project. This may stop the children from going off fighting, as the parents will have money for school fees.”

Often these larger issues, such as keeping children from “going off fighting”, and thus contributing to peace building, are not spelled out as part of a larger aim of peace building. These aims may perhaps be present and so perhaps diaspora contributions to development through Tamil development organizations contribute to both development and to peace building in the North East, to a greater extent and in ways which may not be obvious at first sight.

6.4 Social remittances and temporary return visits

Though remittances in migration literature usually refer to financial remittances, Levitt (1998) has developed the concept of ‘social remittances’. Levitt defines social remittances as the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that flow from the diaspora to the country of origin. In the case of the Tamil diaspora there is a significant ‘flow’ of ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital from Sri Lanka to the diaspora, for instance in relation to Tamil identity construction in the diaspora. Whether these flows outweigh one another, or whether one of them may be seen as more significant than the other is hard to establish. Perhaps they have different degrees of significance in terms of different issues, whereas there may be some issues where they overlap or even clash. It is hard to both ‘measure’ social remittances and to hypothesize about the strength of flows in both directions, or about how they work and to what extent they may be affected by financial remittances and support for development projects.

Responses of the interviewees show that ‘social remittances’ are an issue which members of the Tamil diaspora think about and which is seen as relevant. This was particularly the case in terms of how society functions in Norway, on issues such as democracy and human rights:

”The people who live here make a great influence, because of what they see in terms of democracy and human rights in the West. This is indirect influence. But when they are in Sri Lanka, they demand the same there as here in the West. It will take a long time before one reaches the same level economically and otherwise, the war is to blame.”

For many the concept of transfer of ideas or values was related to visits to Sri Lanka, and perhaps particularly in relation to the possibility of temporary return visits to work voluntarily. Several interviewees pointed to the diasporas role in term of influencing societal development in terms of challenges related to the caste system, gender equality and relations between the generations. There seems to be an awareness of these issues, whereas there seems to be little use of involvement through development related work in these issues. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of transfer of skills as well organizational models, or what may be labelled capacity building and institution building:

”It is possible to contribute to the administrative organization.(...) It is important to transfer knowledge and skills. There are different organizations and models here in Norway, different ways of doing things. This goes for everything from organizing a switch-board to

principles for leadership and administration at a higher level. It is good to give people training through direct co-operation between organizations, real training, not just on the paper.”

Both in terms of capacity building and institution building, this is most likely to happen in relation to temporary visits to Sri Lanka, though it may also occur through visit from Sri Lanka. Some interviewees referred to the visit of an LTTE delegation to Switzerland, where the LTTE gathered information about how the issues of a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society are solved in Switzerland.

The realisation that diaspora contributions through temporary return visits may be of significance to development in the North East, is not only occurring among members of the Tamil diaspora, but is increasingly a part of the LTTEs and the TROs statements at ‘home’ and abroad:

“The expatriate Tamil community has an important role to play at this time in history. It has a role in contributing to the development of the North and East. The expatriate community should organize itself and begin timed visits to place of their birth and participate in activities in partnership with their local kith and kin.”

Mr K P Regi, TRO, Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka, talk in Norway in 2003¹¹.

Many Tamils from Norway have travelled to Sri Lanka, particularly since the cease fire. Mostly these have been holiday visits, with personal motivations of visiting family and friends. As the below quote points to, travels to Sri Lanka, for the elderly, but also for the younger, are of significance in terms of re-living memories and experiencing a familiar cultural and social setting:

“People go to Sri Lanka for shorter periods of time, during holidays. Often they are involved in some kind of voluntary work. The elderly people often nearly ‘live’ more in Sri Lanka than here in Norway, even though they are physically more in Norway. In their thoughts and minds they are more in Sri Lanka. These people will continue to travel back and forth to Sri Lanka.”

Some people also participate in voluntary work in development in the North East of Sri Lanka, though it seems that quite few among the diaspora in Norway do. Those who work voluntarily in Sri Lanka mostly do so during their holidays.

¹¹ <http://www.norsktamil.no/norwaytalk.html>, down-loaded 29.12.04.

"Tamils from the diaspora go to Sri Lanka to contribute with their skills and their knowledge. For example an engineer and doctors go to Sri Lanka to work with different projects. One Tamil from Norway has moved to Sri Lanka to start a driving school based on the Norwegian model. Computers and internet access are other fields where members of the diaspora are particularly active. Many people do not want to invest yet, because of the tense situation and the possibility that the war might continue."

"Volunteers go to Sri Lanka, but a lot more from other countries than from Norway. Some doctors go to work as volunteers, some go to work with administrative development or organizational processes. Many of the ideas for the Tiger projects are taken from abroad, for instance the tax collection system which the Tigers operate in the North East."

The idea of going to Sri Lanka to work voluntarily is discussed in the diaspora, and is seen as an important and a good thing to do. It seems that the participation of the diaspora in this way is welcome. Indeed both the TRO and the LTTE encourage members of the diaspora to come to Sri Lanka to contribute with their knowledge and skills. Cheran (2003) points to these kinds of temporary visits, which he describes as 'diaspora circulation,' as a significant way in which the diaspora contributes to development in the North East. According to Cheran (2003) there are three major areas in which 'circulating' members of the diaspora may be involved, firstly, knowledge capital and transfers, secondly, capacity building and investment, and thirdly, peace building and strengthening of the civil society. Cheran has found that there is evidence of a great deal of contributions within the two first areas, whereas there is perhaps less in the third. It seems that the quotes above suggest that Tamils in the diaspora in Norway also participate actively in terms of knowledge capital and transfer, and capacity building. There is some investment, though perhaps not a great deal, while there is less evidence of contributions towards peace building and strengthening of the civil society. There are some efforts in this area as well, sometimes as the further consequences of development projects, and sometimes more directly, as will be discussed in chapter 7 on political involvement of the diaspora.

The interviews indicated that the main reason why more Tamils in the diaspora in Norway do not travel to Sri Lanka for temporary voluntary work, are financial and other commitments in Norway. For most it is financially impossible to take un-paid leave from their jobs in Norway in order to go to Sri Lanka and work their voluntarily:

"For people who are working, even a stay of 3-6 months is very difficult, because of mortgages and work, but some people try. After the tsunami, some professional staff went to

the North East to help out, among other 2 medical doctors and 3 nurses. Others would like to go to help, but it is difficult for financial reasons.”

Seeing as there is an interest in contributing, including through voluntary work for periods of time, some have thought about ways of making this easier for people:

”The [Norwegian]government should perhaps consider measures which would enable Tamils from Norway to go to Sri Lanka and contribute (...) One could perhaps pay the salaries of members of the diaspora in Norway, while sending to Sri Lanka for periods to work there. Every one would gain something: Tamils here in Norway, Tamils in Sri Lanka, the Norwegian society and it would be a far more efficient use of Norwegian foreign aid money.”

For such measures to be put into place it would require the Norwegian government to have a very inclusive approach to issues of foreign aid, immigration and integration, which is not the case as yet. The possibilities which lie in the transnational nature of diaspora populations in Norway, have still to be discovered and explored in government circles, though limited investigations into these issues have been made (Carling 2005).

Little information is available as to the number of Tamils from the diaspora who participate in development in the North East through temporary voluntary work and about who these people are. From my interviews it may seem that it is usually men with higher education who are involved in such temporary returns and Cheran (2003) describes professionals and experts as the dominating group, however, this is a question which should be further investigated. While my interviews did not touch upon this, Cheran (2003) has found that most diaspora involvement through circulation seems to be centred around the Vanni and Jaffna regions.

6.5 Examples of development initiatives from the Norwegian diaspora

Tamils in the diaspora participate in development initiatives, some related to temporary visits to Sri Lanka, some through ‘social remittances’ and some through development organizations. This section will look at two examples of development initiatives from members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway.

A female interviewee described what she and some of her friends were involved in:

“I think Tamil women contribute to development mainly by sending money to family and friends. But there are also some initiatives to help out with development issues in other ways. For instance we sent 5 sewing machines to a village to help set up a small business for making clothes. This was already quite a challenge, as they needed electricity, and there were often power-cuts, or they had no electricity in their ‘home’s. Also they needed cloth, to start making clothes, so we sent them some materials. Earlier all attempts like this at trying to help people live their lives, would often be destroyed by the war.”

This is an example of a small development initiative, which is of great significance to those in the village who received the help. There are many examples of similar initiatives among the members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway. The Tamil women in Norway, have supplied the women in the village with the means to gain a livelihood, for some period of time. This possibility enables these women to “live their lives”, support their families, but perhaps also opens up new possibilities of empowerment. Though several interviewees referred to the significance of the war in terms of changing the role of women in Tamil society, most would still argue that there is some way to go before gender equality is a reality in Tamil society in Sri Lanka. This is an issue where Tamil women in the diaspora, including Norway, may have an important role to play.

Another development initiative focuses on disabled people in the Kilinochi area:

“We got in touch with some nuns who live in the forest close to Kilionchi, and work helping the disabled. We were met very warmly by the nuns, who worked very hard and lived in rough living conditions. (...)The nuns told us that they knew CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation), having studied this in the UK, but they did not have a doctor who could give them the right diagnose for the disabled patients. We agreed to help them with sending doctors who can work with them to help them diagnose the patients. When we were back in Norway we organized a dance show, in order to raise money for the nuns and their work with the disabled. We involved many different people from Norway in a support group for their work, both Tamils and Norwegians, mainly medical professionals. On our second visit to the nuns we started training assistants, as well as meeting with the disabled, who met with a doctor and received a diagnose.”

The above quote shows how the transnational connection between a local initiative and members of the diaspora was made during a visit to the North East, and resulted in a constructive partnership, involving activities both in the diaspora (fund-raising, information about the situation for the disabled in Sri Lanka), in the North East, as well as frequent contact, exchange of information and visits between Norway and the North East. Though the most significant effect of this initiative is no doubt in the North East, the effect of information about these issues to the diaspora population should not be underestimated. For many it is

also interesting to see the information about the situation in the North East, compared to what they know from Norway.

“The number of disabled people in Sri Lanka is very high, something like 10% of the population. There are a lot of issues which are family related, some related to accidents during birth, some war related and some because of traffic accidents. In Norway we define all chronically ill as disabled too, this should be the case in Sri Lanka as well. If people cannot function normally, they should receive some kind of help with their problem. In Sri Lanka 50% of children are undernourished or wrongly nourished. Something like 40-50% of children are likely to suffer some kind of stress syndrome after the war. There is a need to address the physical, but also the psycho-social issues.”

This initiative includes training of assistants to work with the disabled. This is a very good example of the kinds of capacity building projects in which members of the diaspora participate. The capacity building in this case relates to the health sector, training staff for work among disabled in the Kilinochi area.

“There is a great lack of professional staff, and there is a lack of educational facilities to train professionals. We have started a program with Norwegian professionals, where we are trying to establish a training program for professionals in the Kilinochi area. The aim is to establish a college level education program for staff in the health sector. We would like to use the model of the Norwegian health services, but of course it is difficult to do something similar in Sri Lanka. We cooperate and trust the TRO there. It is important that all actors are trusted and have an equal opportunity to work in the different areas. We hope to be able to have an influence, so that all actors are treated seriously and with respect.”

The nuns in the Kilinochi area now run a local NGO, which is the frame-work for their work with the disabled. For the Tamils from Norway it is important to actively encourage democratic decision-making processes, involving all stakeholders at the grass-root level:

“It is important in our work to stimulate local NGOs in their work. In our organization, it is the disabled themselves, and their families, who are responsible for decision making. Our work is based on the idea of CBR (Community Based Rehabilitation). We work with the grassroots, with awareness programs, everything is user-led, this is what is needed in the North East of Sri Lanka right now.”

This example of a development initiative from the diaspora adopts a ‘mainstream’ approach to development, making stakeholder decision-making and the training of local staff, as well as securing the quality of services provided, its key features. With development involvement such as this, the work of the members of the Tamil diaspora makes its mark on the people and society in the North East receiving the help, and co-operating with the members of the diaspora. There is an open relationship, where dialogue is a key component, and where the aims of the members of the diaspora are to encourage local participation and stakeholder

decision-making, which means that they actively try to limit the extent to which they are making decisions affecting the people involved in the North East without their participation. Though this is by no means the only example of this kind of development initiative from the diaspora, the majority of development initiatives are smaller, less ambitious and adopt a narrower approach to development, however, they no doubt give support to Tamils in the North East of Sri Lanka, which makes a difference.

6.6 How is development understood among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway?

Based on information from interviews with members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, it seems that they understand development mainly in a 'narrow' sense. This understanding of development may be said to correspond with disaster relief, but also with a technocratic understanding of development, which seems to be dominating the LTTE and the TRO organizations. There is less emphasis on broader aims of transforming society as part of the development process, for instance in terms of empowerment of women and the poor, or addressing issues of inequality in society, aims which would be part of what Nederveen Pietersee (2001) terms 'mainstream development'. The dominant development understanding among members of the Tamil diaspora seems to reflect the two decades of war and the 2004 tsunami disaster, in the sense that development means rebuilding infrastructure and helping people with their immediate needs for food and shelter. The understanding of development a majority of the diaspora, differs from the 'mainstream development' approach which currently dominates most international development organizations.

The situation in parts of the North East of Sri Lanka calls for disaster relief, both because of the war and the tsunami, and most actors working there respond to this. However, even when involved in disaster relief, most organizations adopt a 'mainstream development' approach where human rights, empowerment and decision-making at the grass root level are the foundations. Tamil development organizations based in Norway, such as the North East Development Fund, also adopt this broader approach in their aims: *"The North East Development Funds primary aim is to start development projects which the civil society in*

*these areas point to as necessary*¹². Whereas the TRO in their aims focus on more immediate needs of the displaced and war affected population of the North East of Sri Lanka, though they also state that they emphasize working with local NGOs on local issues¹³. This illustrates the contrasting uses of the term ‘development’ and it may be argued that Western development agencies have a wider and more holistic approach, whereas development initiated in the North East (here represented by the TRO), may be seen as more technocratic and focused on meeting material and immediate needs.

Though the relationship between the LTTE and the TRO is somewhat unclear, the LTTEs views on development are of immediate relevance to the development initiatives which are taken in the North East, both by Tamil development organizations and by international organizations. Though the LTTE does not have a development policy as such, in the short-term they operate a technocratic and needs-based approach to development efforts in the North East (Stokke 2006). Not surprisingly, as the TRO may be seen as the LTTEs development branch, the LTTEs and the TROs approach to development match well.

In the light of the two decades of war and the tsunami disaster, the technocratic approach adopted by many Tamils in the diaspora and by the LTTE, is entirely understandable, and perhaps may be seen as a more practical approach than other development approaches, as there are very real and practical issues which need to be addressed on a short-term basis. It may be argued that it is likely that a broader and more nuanced understanding of development will emerge in time, should the cease fire in Sri Lanka be upheld and particularly so if there is permanent peace.

There are different understandings of development and these point to underlying ideological underpinnings, though often there may also be practical explanations. But should development and disaster relief, in the context of the North East of Sri Lanka, be seen as political or not? When development is seen a technical question, as may often be the case here, this amounts to depoliticizing development (Mohan and Stokke forthcoming). However,

¹² <http://www.norsktamil.no/maal.htm>, down-loaded 05.02.06., *translated from Norwegian*.

¹³ <http://www.troonline.org>, information down-loaded 05.02.06.

while development as such may be depoliticized, both development and disaster relief may be used as political tools, which may be the case in the North East.

Members of the diaspora find the relationship between the LTTE and the TRO somewhat unclear, and this reveals a tension between the political issues and the desire for development issues to be 'non-political' in the current context of North East Sri Lanka:

"All Tamils in the diaspora have supported the NE after the tsunami. In Norway it has mainly been through the TRO. They have done good work. But I think in Norway people support through TRO because of pressure also, maybe even coercion, they don't see other possibilities to help the people in the North East. The TRO are very well organized. They do 'home' visits, where you are more or less obliged to choose between paying a support giro of either 200 kr/500 kr/1000 kr. Many people are afraid of not paying, because they worry this may affect their family in the North East. (...)The LTTE have a system where you get a number if you pay to support them, here in Norway. When you get to SL they ask for you number. If you don't have a number, they ask you to pay there. Some people here in Norway have paid every month for more than 20 years..."

"I am sceptical to the TRO and to TECH, and their money collections, because they say they work independently of the LTTE, whereas this is not really the case."

"Nearly all the (Tamil) organizations in Norway are in some way associated with TRO or the LTTE. The reason for this is perhaps mainly that it is hard to resist the pressure. The LTTE is around you all the time, it is very straining. I have never had mine name on my door, because they could come and ring the door bell. They find out where everyone lives."

The above quotes suggest an extent of "forced transnationalism" in terms of a social pressure to contribute financially to the TRO and to the LTTE. Al-Ali, Black and Koser (2001) found that there was pressure to contribute to the government of Eritrea, among the Eritrean diaspora. It is hard to estimate the levels of pressure or coercion, however, it seems pressure exists and is felt among members of the diaspora. The element of coercion, gives new perspectives on the issue of the role of those 'giving' aid and those 'receiving' aid. Perhaps in this case, the role of the 'funding' Tamil diaspora is far more passive than one could suspect, in relation to the organizations which are receiving funding. There are different opinions as to whether the money collections, and the pressure to contribute, is a bad thing, as the above quotes suggest, or whether contributing through organized money collections should be seen as the right thing to do:

"Many people give financial support to the TRO and the LTTE, but this doesn't mean that they accept everything, agree with everything. There are very many different opinions among Tamils in exile, in Norway too. But supporting the Tamils in Sri Lanka, is something nearly everyone does, its something one owes those who are still there, its solidarity. Everyone knows that the money goes to the LTTE through the TRO system, but we also believe that the

money reaches those who are in need. It's obvious that a system like the one the LTTE runs has to be financed somehow, soldiers need uniforms and food, so it's not unnatural to think that some of the money from the diaspora goes towards this. But a lot is also channelled directly to the needy in the North East."

The above illustrates the mixture of political and other issues; remembering that the Tamil struggle is a national struggle, it should not be surprising that all issues are interrelated. So a question about financial support for development in the North East, may be understood, as in the above quote, as a question about the moral obligation to support the Tamils in Sri Lanka, and to support the Tamil cause. Equally, in the previous quotes, the question about financial contributions to development was met with responses questioning the independence of both the TRO and TECH of the LTTE, and making accusations towards both the TRO and the LTTE. Interestingly, many seem to have an understanding of development as a technical question, while they also have very strong political reactions to all questions related to development in the North East. Though this is hard to verify, it seems that a majority supplies funding for the TRO and/or the LTTE, though they may not always agree 100% with the LTTE:

"Some people support the Tigers, some don't, but most people are neutral. When the Tigers ask for money, many people give them money, but this does not mean they support the Tigers 100%. No one really knows exactly where the money goes. Some of the money may be used for guns, some for orphans, some for food..."

The dominance of the LTTE in the North East, is directly related to the current situation where there is a cease fire between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan army, a cease fire which after 4 years, is increasingly being challenged and violated by both parts. It may be argued that in the context of this conflict, the LTTE as the representative of the Tamil people, and the TRO as their development branch, increase their support among Tamils every time the Sri Lankan army violates the cease fire agreement, and that any critical questions are left un-asked, until the situation is normalized. The understanding of development as a technical issue is related to the political context of a dominant LTTE in the North East, and that this is less an expression of passive opposition to the LTTE or fear of the LTTE, than perhaps a pragmatic stance of 'wait and see', but try to help out in the ways that are possible in the mean time. An entirely understandable stance, when the political situation is based on a fragile balance of power, where any sudden and unforeseen moves are very dangerous.

There have been attempts at utilizing 'development' as part of the ongoing peace process. The start of reconstruction efforts in the North East was one of the results of the 2002 ceasefire agreement, and these efforts were to take place before continued peace talks would address the issues of a permanent political solution (Shanmugaratnam and Stokke 2005). However, this attempt at using development as a tool in a political process, where development was seen as a de-politicized field, has not worked in the ways which may have been wished for. Rather it has turned out that development has become politicized.

The case of aid after the tsunami in 2004 also illustrates the politicization of development (Stokke 2006). As several of the interviews took place in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, many interviewees mentioned the tsunami in their responses. One of the interviewees made the following comment about the tsunami, aid and the political situation:

"One could speak of a hope that this disaster could contribute to the peace process in a positive way. But this would just be a hope. The army of Sri Lanka is controlling all the transports of disaster relief and aid – you just loose hope! The help does not even get to its destinations. The TRO is very well organized. The help has to reach the affected people. Now the Sri Lankan government are afraid that this can lead to an acknowledgement of the LTTE and the TRO system in the international community. They want to portray their adversary (the LTTE) as suicide bombers and terrorists."

This quote illustrates that there is not only a case of using development or disaster relief as political tools, there is a far greater issue of using information about this, and actively portraying the adversary in certain ways. The Sri Lankan government portrays the LTTE in specific ways, for political reasons, while the LTTE portrays the Sri Lankan government in specific ways, for political reasons. Ironically, though there may be a dominant understanding of actual development processes as technical questions, amounting to depoliticizing development, development does play a significant political role, and as such is part of the contested field of politics in the North East.

The understanding of development among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway entails a largely depoliticized view of development. How may one seek to explain why members of the Tamil in the diaspora seem to see 'development' mostly as technical and non-political? Firstly, the understanding of development as mainly disaster relief, may have very practical reasons in the awareness about the desperate need for 'just' disaster relief in the North East. Perhaps broader ideas about the development of society, do not seem relevant, in

a situation where so many people do not have their most basic needs met. Secondly, the average person in Norway does not have a very high level of reflection about different approaches to development, arguably, this may also be the case among the diaspora population in Norway. There is no reason why their high degree of concern for their families and for the Tamil society in the North East of Sri Lanka, automatically should translate itself into an interest into ideas underlying development thinking. Therefore trying to read anything into their understandings of development, may be an academic exercise which has no real basis.

Thirdly, there is a possibility that the apparent lacking interest in development as a broader project may be explained in terms of the current political context. Involvement in development as a broader project, with a radical emphasis on human rights, empowerment and local decision-making, may not be seen as possible, advisable or useful, in a situation where the LTTE runs a 'state' in parts of the North East (Stokke 2006).

These explanations seem to fit nicely with the categories of responses which were identified among interviewees in relation to political issues, in the sense that a majority of the members of the Tamil diaspora seem to be politically passive, often funding the LTTE and simultaneously criticizing the LTTE privately. For this majority it seems likely that a combination of the three explanations above addresses the issue of a depoliticized understanding of development. Of course there are also small minorities who either actively support the LTTE, or actively oppose the LTTE, and have more radical ideas about the politics of development. The political context of the North East, may be seen as the reason why the majority is politically passive, and subscribe to an understanding of development as a technical issue, amounting to depoliticizing development, while ironically, they are also aware that development plays a significant political role, and as such is part of the contested field of politics in the North East.

6.7 Are diaspora contributions 'significant to development'?

Establishing the significance of diaspora contributions to development in the North East of Sri Lanka is a complex issue, nevertheless, an attempt should be made at investigating different aspects of this question. Firstly, the issue of significance of diaspora contributions to

development in the North East should be questioned in terms of significance for whom, where and in which ways. The families of migrants are the receivers of most financial remittances, and so there must be a growing gap between those who receive remittances and those who do not (Shanmugaratnam and Stokke 2005). There are also further consequences of remittances in terms of money being spent on goods and services in the North East, which may benefit a larger circle of people.

An interesting question in terms of money donations to Tamil development organizations is who benefits from their work, who does not and why? The places where small development projects are being carried out are most often the villages from which Tamils in the diaspora have left. Since there are so many Tamils in the diaspora, it is likely that most places may benefit from some project initiated by an earlier inhabitant, however, it may be the case that some places are left out of these development efforts. In terms of who benefits from the development projects of Tamil development organizations, what is known is that they try to work for all Tamils and some for all people in Tamil areas. According to Cheran (2003) there is evidence that diaspora contributions are centred around the districts of Vanni and Jaffna. This suggests that place matters, in terms of where diaspora contributions are or are not significant. There has been some discussion of the ways in which diaspora development contributions are of significance, for instance in terms of financial remittances as part of a survival strategy for families in a war torn area and in terms of development projects supplying new livelihood strategies for families. However, there is a great scope for further investigations into both the ways in which diaspora contributions to development are significant, and to whom, where and why.

Secondly, financial remittances to family and friends and money donations to Tamil development organizations, have been found to be of some significance. This is due to the amount of money which is transferred and makes financial contributions from the Tamil diaspora of significance to development in the North East.

Thirdly, all the ways of contributing to development which Cheran (2003) has included in his concept of 'diaspora circulation', such as knowledge transfers and capacity building, here also discussed in terms of social remittances and voluntary work, are arguably of significance. It is very hard to measure the significance of these contributions. However, the fact that the TRO and the LTTE encourage professionals from the diaspora to come to

the North East and contribute to knowledge transfers and capacity building, suggests that these contributions matter. When it comes to social remittances related to values or issues of equality, it is impossible to measure the extent and the effect of these. But as long as this is happening, it no doubt has some effect. Whether this may lead to greater equality in Tamil society in the North East, or whether it may lead to an alienation of members of the Tamil diaspora from their family or friends in the North East, is unknown.

Finally, one should also consider the views among members of the diaspora as to the significance of their contributions to development in the North East. “*Development in Sri Lanka is dependent on the diaspora*”, according to a quote at the outset of this chapter. The quote describes the dominant view among the diaspora, that diaspora contributions are of great significance to development in the North East.

“In my view, the key issue is the lack of educated professionals and the lack of educational facilities. The brain drain is still a huge problem in the North East of Sri Lanka. It is very important that there are professionals in place, in all professions, particularly in a rehabilitation phase, so that good systems can be set up.”

“I believe the diaspora can have an influence on the systems that are set up, because they support so much financially. It should follow, that the diaspora then also can influence the developments, with ideas from abroad. I think this is expected of the diaspora.”

The above quotes illustrate the ways in which members of the diaspora see their contributions as significant, in terms of capacity building and knowledge transfers, while their financial contributions are seen not only as a direct contribution, but also as a reason why the diaspora should be consulted on development issues in the North East. The views of members of the Tamil diaspora on the significance of their own contributions are biased, but they nevertheless give interesting insights. The views of members of the diaspora correspond well with the views expressed from Sri Lanka, as well as with what has been found in the limited research on the issue, that the diasporas contributions to development in the North East are of great significance, and that the significance could increase should more of the potential for diaspora contributions be realised (Carling 2004).

6.8 Conclusion

Most members of the Tamil diaspora contribute to the development of the North East, as much as they feel they can. For most this means sending remittances to their family in the North East, and donating money to the TRO and the LTTE. The motivations seem to be mixed, and often a result of each individual's relationship with 'home', moral obligations because of leaving Sri Lanka and leading 'a good life' in Norway and a feeling of solidarity with the people in the North East. Sometimes pressure is quoted as part of the reason why money is being donated, particularly in the case of door-to-door money collections in support of the TRO or the LTTE. Most members of the Tamil diaspora do not see their contributions to the development in the North East as political, but rather as part of helping fellow Tamils and supporting the Tamil cause. This means that often their contributions may have political significance after all, and reveals ambiguity and complexity in terms of Tamil politics in the diaspora.

The unclear relationship between the TRO and the LTTE, illustrates the ambiguity of the relationship between political issues and development issues, in the context of the North East of Sri Lanka. For members of the diaspora this unclear relationship becomes a difficult issue as the efforts to be non-political are not rewarded, when it is impossible to separate development issues and support for the TRO, from political issues and the LTTE's struggle for a Tamil homeland in the North East of Sri Lanka.

Development as such has been found to be understood mainly as a technical question. However, it seems that though this is the stated understanding, the actual applied understanding of development is perhaps more similar to the 'mainstream development' approach. Members of the Tamil diaspora participate in a vast range of activities which contribute to development in the North East, and it seems that most would like to contribute more, through voluntary work during temporary return visits. Though it is difficult to establish the extent of the significance of the diaspora's contributions to development in the North East, there is a broad agreement both in the diaspora and in the North East, that the contributions of the diaspora to development matter.

7. Political involvement the North East of Sri Lanka?

7.1 “I’m not interested in politics” ?!

The term ‘political’ itself is controversial among members of the Tamil diaspora. Several interviewees underlined the fact that what they were saying was ‘not political’ or that they were not ‘interested in politics’. In the Tamil diaspora it seems that supporting the Tamil cause equals supporting the LTTE. However, the quotes below demonstrate that there are reasons to question whether this support is always real:

“At the moment it is not accepted to not agree with the LTTE, to raise serious questions about how things are handled. In the 1980s when the LTTE and the other Tamil groups fought for dominance, the LTTE “cleaned” out most of the opposition. Some were killed, and the rest were confronted with a “either you’re with us, or you’re against us” question. The result is now that many people choose to keep their opinions to themselves, as the freedom of expression is still limited”.

The climate described in the above quote does not encourage political pluralism. However, the fact that a majority of the Tamil diaspora funds the LTTE, does not signify that they support all the LTTEs actions, but due to the domination the LTTE has won, there is limited space for non-LTTE political involvement (Orjuela and Sriskandarajah 2006).

There has been little investigation of transnational political activities among the Tamil diaspora, apart from funding the LTTE (Orjuela & Sriskandarajah 2006). Activities such as ‘social remittances’ are difficult to measure, both at the sending and at the receiving end. Perhaps it will be possible to pin-point the diaspora contributions to development in terms of democratization, human rights or empowerment, with the benefit of hindsight. The quotes from interviewees in this chapter will attempt at supporting the case that these contributions are and can be of significance. Meanwhile, both the EU and the USA have banned the LTTE as a terrorist organization, and so the most direct diaspora political involvement, namely supporting the LTTE both financially and otherwise, is now frowned upon in many diaspora countries. This means that even these contributions, are hard to measure as both financial flows and contributions of different kinds do not happen openly.

The fact that interviewees choose to state that what they are saying is ‘not political’, when the issues being discussed are political, says something about the political context in the Tamil diaspora as well as in Sri Lanka, including the North East. Through the discussions in this chapter, there will be an investigation into the reasons why many Tamils in the diaspora choose to distance themselves from what they see as ‘politics’, while they are highly interested in the political processes in the North East.

Applying a ‘mainstream’ understanding of development, which includes democratization, human rights and empowerment perspectives, this chapter will discuss the views of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway on democracy, some human rights issues of relevance in the North East and the future of the peace process. As the internet is increasingly being utilized as a space for political activism in a transnational context, the views of members of the Tamil diaspora will be discussed in relation to views expressed on the internet. Throughout there will be a discussion of support and opposition to the LTTE in the diaspora. The limited but existing opposition to the LTTE, mainly in the diaspora, but also in the North East, is perhaps not an ‘opposition’ as much as voices calling for democracy, for respect for human rights and for spaces for multiple political opinions among Tamils. As to the question of the rights of the Tamils in Sri Lanka, none of the non-LTTE actors have differing views from those of the LTTE.

7.2 Democracy: bad experiences and pessimism, but hope for the future...

Different perspectives define democracy and democratization in different ways, here democracy is understood in a substantial rather than a formalistic way (Grugel 2002). Following a substantial definition of democracy, the fact that there are elections for members of parliament in the North East is not seen as sufficient for arguing that there is democracy in the North East of Sri Lanka.

When asked questions about democracy in Sri Lanka many Tamils are very frustrated:

“Tamils today are fighting for democracy. We started out with democracy. If the Sri Lankan government respected democracy, Tamils would not have asked for their own country”

“Sri Lankan democracy is a minimalist democracy, this kind of democracy was part of the reason for the conflict. Historically ethnic issues have been used politically by Sinhala

parties. Democracy itself has become a hindrance to finding a solution to the conflict. There are drawbacks in a democratic system. You need a special form of democracy, where multiple identities are included. But Sri Lankan leaders don't have the vision, or won't sacrifice their political futures."

Tamils have had bad experiences with democracy since independence in 1948, due to this the Sri Lankan democracy itself, is partly blamed for the armed conflict. The fact that Tamils are a minority in Sri Lanka, weakens the faith in a functioning democracy, and the faith in respect for Tamil rights being realised in Sri Lanka in the future.

For some Tamils the experience of equality in the Norwegian society, has made more evident the inequality in Tamil society. Gender, caste and generation are the three most significant factors in terms of inequality (Fuglerud 2004). These factors are quoted by interviewees as challenges to democracy in the North East of Sri Lanka:

"There are many challenges in the Tamil society, caste and dowry, both in Sri Lanka and abroad. Despite the LTTE's claims that they are working against both the caste system and dowries, it continues."

"In a way you can say that the caste system also is a challenge for democracy in Sri Lanka. As long as people are not equal in society, it is hard to see how democracy can work."

The experience of democracy in Norwegian society, affects the ways in which members of the diaspora see that democracy 'should' function in Sri Lanka. Most point out that it is important to remember that societies and cultures are different, and that it is not possible to transfer something from one society to another, however, there seems to be some agreement as to the fact that the greater equality which is seen in the Norwegian society is a good thing. Some interviewees point out that the caste system is upheld even among Tamils in Norway, when it comes to marriages. So there may seem to be some difference between theoretical ideas and practice in real life when it comes to equality in terms of caste. In relation to gender and generation, there are perhaps greater changes happening among members of the diaspora, perhaps leading to greater equality in the Tamil diaspora (Fuglerud 2004).

As gender, caste and generation are identified by members of the Tamil diaspora as challenges to democracy in the North East, one would suspect that members of the Tamil diaspora would seek to address these challenges. It is difficult to affect political developments in the North East from the diaspora, other than through financial support to the LTTE, or other support invited by the LTTE. The LTTE states that it wants to work against inequality in relation to gender (particularly the dowry system), caste and generation (Fuglerud 2004),

however, these inequalities for now persist. Some interviewees did point to the facts that the LTTE have recruited women and soldiers from different castes, as possible factors leading to changes in Tamil society in the North East, in terms of the ways in which women and members of different castes are viewed. Though greater equality is a goal for the LTTE, the fact that this has not been achieved in the past 20 years with LTTE dominance, does not mean that the LTTE has not tried to create change. Societal processes of change in terms of gender, caste and generational equality are long-term projects. Similarly, diaspora influence on these processes may be seen as a long-term project.

The general pessimism about democracy, translates into a pessimism about future prospects of democracy in the North East, but there is also a view that at some point there will be democracy in the North East.

“I hope there will be political pluralism and democracy in the future. I thought about writing something about “what may be” if there is lasting peace, but at the moment I feel it’s too risky to write anything about it. It’s hard to say what will happen. At the moment the LTTE seems to be in control of most of Tamil politics. But if there is a lasting peace, at some point, there will have to be elections where people can vote for different alternatives. I don’t know how this will happen, but I’m pretty sure that it will. But of course, a dictatorship could also be the outcome...”

Many understand that from the LTTEs point of view, they cannot ‘afford’ to open up for political opposition now, because of the current situation. Some believe the LTTE can and will change, some believe the LTTE will not change, but will continue a one-party system of rule for some time. However, there is a definite sense that sooner or later change will force its way.

“I think that there will be a transition period of at least 10 years where the LTTE in practice will run a dictatorship and rule. I don’t think the LTTE is interested in democracy. But I think democracy will happen in time anyway.”

One interviewee pointed out that there is a need for action now from the diaspora in order to enhance democracy and that “*you can’t come dragging with democracy afterwards*”, but there seem to be few who express views of this kind:

“Most Tamils know what democracy is, and will demand democracy, despite the LTTE. This situation cannot last forever. In a liberation period, you can accept many things, but gradually the LTTE will have to become part of mainstream politics. The LTTE would like the interim period to have a chance to change its infrastructure from military to democratic. It’s hard to say whether or how this will happen. In similar cases in other countries, there have been many different outcomes.(...) If we were to work to enhance democracy in the

North East of Sri Lanka, we should be doing it right now. (...) But you can't come dragging with democracy afterwards. (...) At the moment the LTTE is in control of all fields, in the LTTE controlled areas in the NE. People can say and do as they wish, so in this sense it's democratic enough, but with political issues it's more difficult. (...) Many people think about these things, but few say anything."

However, as the interviewee points out, though many people may think about these issues, few say anything. This is related to the passive stance to all political issues of the majority of the Tamil diaspora, caused by among other fear of reactions from the LTTE, or the fact that people do not quite see how democracy can function, not only because of the current 'no peace, no war' situation and the LTTE, but also because of the inequality in society and previous bad experiences with democracy in Sri Lanka.

Some interviewees thought that North East would become more democratic when a peace solution was found, because the LTTE would then adapt to the situation:

"The LTTE organization understands reality, if there is peace, the political situation will mean that the LTTE will have to accommodate to the democratic standards of the international community. This will happen when there is a solution."

Members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway are committed to democracy and seem certain that sooner or later, a democracy which they can be satisfied with, will be a reality in the North East. Democracy as it seems to be understood, entails equal rights for Tamils as for Singhalese in Sri Lanka, as well as freedom of expression and respect for human rights throughout Sri Lanka.

7.3 Human rights

Human rights issues are of great concern to Tamils, as the Tamils experienced serious violations of their human rights in Sri Lanka in the time after independence and increasingly until the civil war broke out in 1983. Here the human rights discussion will centre around the human rights violation allegations which have been put forward against the LTTE. Particularly those relating to child soldiers and political killings. The responses of Tamils in the diaspora to these issues are interesting, as they may be revealing in terms of whether loyalties lie with the LTTE or with the human rights principles. Claiming that there are only two ways of looking at these issues amounts to an oversimplification, but to some extent this

may give interesting insights into the ways in which members of the Tamils in the diaspora relate to issues in the North East of Sri Lanka.

In 2004 Human Rights Watch (HRW), a USA based human rights organization, published a report on LTTE recruitment of Child Soldiers, “Living in fear: Child soldiers and the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka”. In connection with the launch of this report, Jo Becker of HRW published an article in the Toronto Star (19.12.2004) raising questions about Canadian Tamils support for the LTTE (“Canada’s Tamils must rethink LTTE support”¹⁴) in relation to the fact that the LTTE, according to HRW and UNICEF, recruit and use child soldiers. At a public forum where the HRW report was presented to Canadian Tamils, presumed LTTE supporters, disrupted the meeting and threatened Tamil human rights activists¹⁵. The HRW report provoked critical responses not only in Toronto, but also many other places in the diaspora, and many Tamil web-sites wrote about both the report and reactions among Tamils in the diaspora.

Among members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, the HRW report and the issue of child soldiers and the LTTE was met with three kinds of responses, which clearly match the three kinds of political stances among members of the diaspora, actively pro-LTTE, actively critical of the LTTE or politically passive but donating money to the LTTE. Those who are pro-LTTE made responses such as:

“Human Rights Watch report is biased. The LTTE has many orphanages in the areas which it controls. Here the children are looked after, they have food, education etc.(...) But some people are critical of the LTTE – and this colours the way they see these orphanages.”

“The renewed focus on the LTTE and child soldiers is an attack from the Sri Lankan government, they are trying to portray this in a very particular way. Does the Sri Lankan army have child soldiers? No one is talking about this.”

These responses show that the HRW report is seen as an attack and as biased, and therefore absolutely not reliable. However, those who take a more passive political stance, seem to raise other questions relating to the HRW report:

¹⁴ <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/12/20/slanka9918.htm> (down-loaded 01.03.06)

¹⁵ <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/12/20/canada9914.htm> (down-loaded 01.03.06)

“There is a problem of definition and of age limit. If 15 years is the limit, the LTTE is not recruiting child soldiers, if 18 years is the limit, the LTTE is recruiting child soldiers.”

“In relation to child soldiers, it is easy to moralise, but the situation can be very difficult. Children may need a place to live and food to eat, the situation is complex. It’s too simple to just say that the LTTE are terrorists. In fact many children have found an escape by going to the LTTE. They are the only “visible” actor one can approach in the NE.”

Though these responses in a sense try to defend what is happening in the LTTE, they do not discredit the HRW report as an attack from the Sri Lankan government. Rather they raise honest questions as to how the report defines child soldiers, and whether it is not possible to view the issue from a different angle.

Another human rights issue which has been focused on are political killings and disappearances, which happen with both Tamils and Sinhalese people as victims and as perpetrators. However, there has particularly been focus on political killings and disappearances, allegedly at the hand of members of the LTTE (HRW report 2005¹⁶), where Tamil human rights defenders or members of competing Tamil groups are targeted. Interviewees responded strongly to questions about allegations of political killings at the hands of the LTTE, often with similar attacks at those making the accusations, as was seen with the HRW, in the case of child soldiers. Again, there seems to be a certain pattern where pro-LTTE respondents defend the LTTE:

“Political killings and disappearing has to be understood in the context of war of the North East. In war and love everything is permitted. Human rights are so many things, and violations are so many things.”

“It is very hard to justify political killings and disappearances. But this is complicated. The Sri Lankan army are using these people. Therefore these killings are seen as acts of defence from the LTTE. These are acts of war in a no peace - no war situation, it’s about keeping a military balance. This balance is necessary if there is to be a dialogue. Both sides do provocative acts in order to change the balance in their own favour. These killings come as a response to provocations from the Sri Lankan army, they use a so called Tamil opposition, they want to stamp Tamils as terrorists, so the government can “win”.”

Whereas those critical of the LTTE would condemn political killings as outrageous and unacceptable human rights violations:

¹⁶ http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/slanka12252_txt.htm (down-loaded 29.01.06).

“I am very strongly opposed to the political killings by the LTTE. All LTTE people know that these killings happen. They also know it must stop. This must stop before there will even be peace in Sri Lanka. Killings never solve problems, they just create more conflicts.”

Among those neither openly critical or entirely supporting the LTTE, responses were more mixed and varied. Some accept that living in the diaspora they perhaps do not understand the reality in the North East, and that they therefore cannot condemn what is happening. Others were reluctant to discuss human rights issues at all, and particularly political killings. Whereas in terms of child soldiers, there is a real discussion about the age limit, as well as about what might happen to some of the children, if the LTTE did not take care of them, though this does not validate the LTTEs use of child soldiers, in terms of political killings, there are no such circumstances. Rather the views of those members of the Tamil diaspora who do not condemn political killings, may be seen as an example of a striking paradox, members of the Tamil diaspora participate in democracy and enjoy human rights in Norway, while they fund the LTTE, and do not raise questions about democracy or the respect of human rights in the North East of Sri Lanka.

A third human rights issue which was raised, did not seem to stir as many feelings. Namely the respect for the Muslims in the North East. It seems that a majority among the members of the Tamil diaspora take for granted that Muslims in the North East should enjoy human rights in the same way as Tamils in the North East. When confronted with past conflicts between Tamils and Muslims, most would argue that these are now history. However, the LTTE does not want to accept a Muslim representative in the peace talks with the Sri Lankan government, as it is seen that only the two warring parties should be negotiating. Meanwhile Muslims are worried about their future. As the following quote demonstrates, trust seems to be a key issue:

“The LTTE sees Muslims neither as a Tamil speaking community, nor as a separate group with the right to a separate nation, rather the LTTE regards the Muslims as a cultural minority which has a specific cultural and religious identity, and needs some kind of autonomy in cultural affairs. But there is a problem with trust building.”

At least in principle, all the respondents were in favour of granting minority rights to Muslims, as well as Tamils in Sri Lanka, as well as ensuring Muslims their rights in Tamil areas.

In terms of human rights in general, there are at least two different stories. On the one hand, the LTTE has established a human rights commission to monitor the human rights situation in the LTTE controlled areas (Stokke 2006), in the words of one of the interviewees:

“In the LTTE controlled areas there is now an commission which is monitoring that human rights are being respected. The LTTE is taking responsibility for the human rights situation and co-operating with the UNHCR and UNICEF. They are willing to learn about human rights.”

On the other hand there is a story following the lines of HRW, and their monitoring of the human rights situation in the North East. One respondent pointed out what seems to be the situation in terms of human rights, the diaspora and the LTTE:

“The issue of human rights is difficult. Few Tamils here know about efforts of Tamils in Sri Lanka to promote human rights and a human rights culture in the NE. When the LTTE do not distance themselves from methods such as suicide attacks, how should one then understand their human rights profile? What does it imply, when all LTTE associated people give exactly the same answer, when confronted with the issue of suicide attacks, or political killings or children fighters? This must mean that they have all been trained and instructed to give these answers – so in a sense they have been brain-washed.”

The two key questions are, firstly, why does a majority among the Tamil diaspora not speak up against the human rights violations which the LTTE is responsible for? And secondly, why do all LTTE associated people give exactly the same answers when confronted with human rights issues?

The answer to the first question, may at least partly be fear of reactions from the LTTE. However, one should perhaps ask, would the diaspora have any power to influence the LTTEs actions, if they wanted to? This is impossible to answer in the context of the Tamil diaspora and the LTTE, however, it is perhaps possible to draw insights from similar situations. For instance, there is some evidence that the fact that the Irish diaspora in the USA stopped funding the IRA, was of significance in terms of the Irish peace process and the IRAs stand in the process. Also, it seems that the fact that the Irish diasporas funding decreased, was directly related to the decrease in bombs and violence on the IRAs part (Kalansooriya 2001). Though a different situation, with a different history and context, perhaps it may be drawn from this example, that it is likely, that should the Tamil diaspora choose to use its funding as a tool for reaching certain goals, it is not impossible that this might work.

Interestingly, discussion groups on the internet are used to discuss human rights issues in the Tamil diaspora. There were many discussions of the HRW report on the internet, including a discussion of this on the web-site www.denunge.dk. An article published on both www.denunge.dk and www.tamildemocraticforum.dk titled "Det tavse Tamiske flertal i Vesten" (in Danish, The silent Tamil majority in the West¹⁷) triggered a series of responses and comments. The article presents the HRW report, gives a summary of the report including some quotes from Tamil children about the ways in which they were abducted by the LTTE. Among the responses were both comments defending the LTTE and condemning the human rights violations at the hands of the LTTE. Those defending the LTTE, were using the same arguments as the respondents quoted above. However, there are also many significant comments raising questions:

"How many thousands of children must be kidnapped and brainwashed by the LTTE before the Tamil Diaspora stop funding the LTTE? How many Tamil leaders have to be assassinated by the LTTE before the Tamils say enough is enough?"

from "Scandinavian Tamils very important in the liberation struggle"¹⁸

There are voices questioning the human rights violations and questioning the silence of the majority of the diaspora. Following some comments questioning the LTTEs human rights record, and some comments defending the LTTE and questioning the Tamil identity of those questioning the LTTE, the editor of the web-site www.denunge.dk posted the following comment (the quote below is only a short part):

"We do not seek to criticize just to criticize, but to create an understanding among people that something should be done in order to change the path which the LTTE has chosen to follow. If you are entirely honest and ask yourself: How many Tamils are afraid of criticizing the LTTE? Why?"

Translated from Danish¹⁹.

Arguably, the above discussion shows that fear is the key reason why more members of the Tamil diaspora do not speak up against human rights violations at the hands of the LTTE.

¹⁷ <http://denunge.dk/article/view/2207/1/34/> (down-loaded 02.03.06)

¹⁸ <http://denunge.dk/phpbb/viewtopic/p=31072> (down-loaded 04.02.06)

¹⁹ <http://denunge.dk/article/view/2207/1/34/> (down-loaded 02.03.06)

This is understandable, though it is also worrying. Because, as the editor of www.denunge.dk points out:

"Let us imagine that tomorrow we will have our Tamileelam. Do you think democracy will fall down from heaven? Do you think the oppression of Tamils, which we experience today, will disappear straight away?(...)It is here and now we should correct things (...) It does not help much to stand together with the group which claims that people who criticize are traitors and anti-tamils. This will not lead us anywhere."

If it is the case that a majority of Tamils in the diaspora do not speak up against human rights violations at the hands of the LTTE, due to fear of the LTTE, this is a worrying prospect, mainly for the future of Tamils in the North East. However, there is always hope that change will occur in time, as an interviewee previously quoted stated '*despite the LTTE*'. Though it should also be noted, that any alternative to the LTTE, need not be a better alternative. However, this should be for the population of the North East to decide in democratic, free and fair elections. Whether or not the diaspora should participate in elections is a separate discussion, but there are examples of diaspora participation in elections in the country of origin.

The second key question which was identified was why do all LTTE associated people give exactly the same answers, when confronted with human rights issues. Perhaps there is a case for arguing that some brain-washing may happen, however, in the diaspora, one would think that this would perhaps not work? The logic in all responses from LTTE supporters on human rights issues, followed the exact same path: "*this is a situation of war and different rules apply than in peace, we are on the outside so we cannot understand, we are on the outside so we have no right to comment, interfere or condemn, the LTTE is fighting a legitimate battle for a free Tamil Eelam and therefore may do what is necessary in order to reach this goal*". In addition there was always some element of accusation against those making the critical comments, mainly that they are probably paid by the Sinhalese.

Fear of the LTTE can also be a factor contributing to continued support for the LTTE, among LTTE supporters. However, the most likely explanation is perhaps that the LTTE does supply the 'right answers' to its supporters, but that this does not amount to brain-washing. Rather the reasons why people continue to support the LTTE may perhaps be found in terms of their Tamil identity, and the fact that this identity is linked with the idea of Tamil Eelam, which is linked with the LTTE fighting for a free Tamil Eelam. Often there may

also be personal factors, perhaps parents or other family members were killed by the Sri Lankan Army during the civil war, indirectly fuelling support and loyalty to the LTTE? There may also be a range of other issues explaining why some Tamils support the LTTE, and continue to do so. In terms of the two ways of looking at human rights issues in the context of the North East of Sri Lanka, introduced at the beginning of this section, either supporting human rights principles or the LTTE, it seems that most members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway largely try to do both. This is not really possible, so there is a paradox in terms of their commitment to human rights principles, combined with a lack of criticism of the human rights violations the LTTE is (allegedly) responsible for.

7.4 The internet and politics

The internet is an enabling and important tool for different transnational campaigns, as well as for diaspora populations all around the world (Fuglerud 2004). The internet as a space for political activism has some strengths and some weaknesses, for instance it is a strength in term of diaspora political activism that the internet is so flexible, that it may be used by many people in different places at different times. It may also be a strength for some that the internet, to some extent, may provide anonymity, while for others this may be a weakness, as it is hard to verify who is behind different web-sites, and who this may be representative of.

In terms of the Tamil use of the internet, there are some web-sites which are 'propaganda tools' for the LTTE, for instance www.eelam.com, and www.tamilnet.com and www.tamilcanadian.com. Similarly, there are also a number of web-sites run by group who are critical of the LTTE, such as www.uthr.org (University Teachers for Human Rights, Jaffna), www.lankademocracy.org (Sri Lanka Democracy Forum), www.tamildemocraticforum.dk (Danish exile organization – promoting democracy among Tamils in exile), and <http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~sydney/ltte.htm> (an anti-LTTE web-site, listing all UK organizations who are seen as pro-LTTE). All of these anti-LTTE web-sites are based outside Sri Lanka, though the UTHR is a group which started at the University in Jaffna, and still is has university teachers there as its members.

Tamil organizations in the diaspora who are critical of the LTTE, such as the Sri Lanka Democracy Forum (based in the USA), the Tamil Democratic Forum (based in

Denmark), the Tamil Democratic Congress (based in the UK) or the Liberal Democratic Tamils in Norway, are all very elusive and hard to find information about, probably because of fear of the LTTE. It is likely that many of these organizations have some connections with groups which were competing with the LTTE for dominance among Tamils in the 1980s. It is hard to say whether the fact that there may be such connections has any influence on their stance towards the LTTE. In terms of an investigation into different Tamil web-sites and the organizations behind these web-sites, the nature of the internet is of course a challenge, in the sense that there is no way of scrutinizing what is written on different web-sites in any systematic way.

However, there is a lot of interesting information on issues of politics in the Tamil diaspora on different web-sites. In the discussions in the following sections there will be quotes and references to the discussion-groups on the war in Sri Lanka, on politics and on news on the web-site www.denunge.dk. This is a Danish web-site, catering to young Tamils in Denmark. The web-site is mainly in Danish, but there is also frequent use of English. The web-site is run by two young Tamils in Denmark and its stated aim is to be the supplier of freedom of expression to Tamils ("*Leverandør af ydringsfrihed til Tamilere*"). In addition to discussion-groups, which include many topics other than those related to political issues, the web-sites also gives the users the possibility to comment the different news stories which are posted.

An analysis of some of these comments²⁰ gives interesting insights into different opinions among young Tamils, mostly in Denmark, and allows for some general observations about the internet as a site for Tamil diaspora transnational activism. Firstly, the discussions reveal the great involvement, heat and intensity in Tamil politics, both in the diaspora, in the North East and particularly on the internet. Secondly, they display the complexity in Tamil politics with numerous actors with unclear agendas, the complete lack of trust and accusations being made in all directions. Finally, the possibilities of (mis)using the internet as a tool for political activism are revealed, for instance through false e-mails and the posting of articles written under false on web-sites.

²⁰ <http://denunge.dk/article/view/2376/1/44/> (down-loaded 28.02.06)

Perhaps the greatest challenge with the internet as a tool for political activism, is that there is no way of knowing who is behind which web-site, there is no way of knowing how many people are working on any web-site, how many people use any web-site, how many people a web-site may be representative of or how many web-sites are perhaps constructed and up-dated by a single person. In terms of Tamil politics both in the diaspora and in the North East, there is a certain element of secrecy and elusiveness in real terms, particularly among other groups than the LTTE, but also in relation to the LTTE, as it is a military organization, and perhaps also because of the 'terrorist' label the LTTE has received in the EU and in the USA.

Nevertheless, the internet may be seen as an interesting space for transnational politics in the context of the Tamil case, in at least three ways. Firstly, there is an extensive use of the internet in terms of news, opinions and discussion-groups on political issues. Secondly, both the LTTE and groups who are critical of the LTTE actively use the internet, via a range of different web-sites, to spread information and either encourage or discourage support for the LTTE. There is also a certain use of the internet in terms of smearing, and misusing e-mails and web-sites as technical tools, because this is fairly simple to do, but can lead to results which may have significant repercussions. Thirdly, in the light of the issue of fear of the LTTE among members of the diaspora, the internet is a space where political dissidents who criticize the LTTE, may to some extent remain anonymous and safe, while still engaging in interactions with other political dissidents.

7.5 The Peace process

At the time the interviews were conducted, November 2004 – August 2005, the peace process was at a stand still. The ceasefire agreement from 2002 and the first rounds of the peace talks, up to April 2003, were increasingly distant, and the prospect for new peace talks did not look bright. Interviews conducted after Hero's Day 2004 were influenced by the speech of the head of the LTTE, which was pointing in the direction of a possible renewal of the armed conflict. However, the tsunami (December 26th 2004) changed the focus from war to help for those affected and sorrow over the loss of loved ones. Throughout the period of interviews the political situation in Sri Lanka has not seemed conducive to the peace process.

Though at the time of writing (March 2006) a new meeting between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka has just been held in Geneva, with the main focus on resolving the issues of violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. However, at the time of interviews, there was no clear prospect of new talks happening in the near future.

In general most interviewees were pessimistic in relation to the peace process, partly due to the fact that there had been no developments for more than 2 years, but also partly due to a lacking faith in politicians and formal political processes. This relates directly to the experiences and feelings of members of the Tamil diaspora to formal democracy in Sri Lanka. There was also fear that neither the LTTE nor the Sri Lankan government were committed enough for the peace talks to be able to lead to an agreement. However, mainly there was a frustration with the lack of progress:

“There is not so much difference between the LTTE and the SL government. The LTTE has shown some interest in the peace process, and has tried. But I am afraid that both parties find their living through continued conflict. The situation is chaotic and difficult. Everything is so uncertain. There are disagreements, but nothing is happening. How long can this last?”

“In a way the peace process seems like a TV soap opera, it never ends! They can never seem to decide what is what, and who has what kind of a stand. Nothing worthwhile seems to come out of it. They talk and talk about it, but nothing happens. It’s hopeless.”

These feelings towards the peace process were largely shared by all interviewees, regardless of their stance towards the LTTE. The frustration with the Sri Lankan government, both in relation to the peace process and in general, was another common feature.

However, in terms of the way in which Tamils are represented in the peace process, there were more divided opinions. LTTE supporters would argue that:

“The Tigers are the sole representative of the Tamil people in the negotiations, who else has the right to do this? The ones who work against the Tigers cannot represent the Tamils. The ordinary Tamil people are content with the situation, they do not have a choice. The ones protecting them, are the ones negotiating.”

LTTE critics would question this, and argue that there should be some place for other Tamil voices, as well as some representation for the Moslems. In terms of representation in the peace talks, there is no choice, and to some extent Tamils in the diaspora accept that this is reasonable, though some LTTE critics do not. Tamils in the diaspora accept that when dealing with ‘the outside’ there is a need for unity, while there may be disagreement within

the Tamil population about the issue. This is also to some extent the way in which the Tamil diaspora in Norway seeks to portray itself, as one unified group, whereas the reality is far more complex.

Most of the members of the Tamil diaspora follow the peace process closely. Some referred to having read the LTTEs proposal for interim rule, and commented on whether or not they felt a federal solution might work or not. Their thoughts about the peace process reflect this high level of interest:

“The future is very complex. It is difficult to find a political solution. I think this is the case for at least two reasons, firstly, there is not enough political will among Sinhalese leaders to face the situation, and secondly, the Sri Lankan government does not accept the Timphu principles of 1985. The Timphu principles are 1. The Tamils are a nation, 2. the Tamils have a right to a ‘home’ land in the North East of Sri Lanka, 3. the Tamils have right to self-determination. All Tamil organizations have supported these three principles. (...) My view is that the LTTE will not compromise the three principles from Timbu. A political solution to the conflict is very hard.”

Despite bad experiences with democracy in a united Sri Lanka, most Tamils favour a federal solution, with some degree of self-determination in the North East. However, it seems that few believe a political solution to the conflict is possible, within the context of Sri Lankan politics today. The lack of political will among Sri Lankan politicians in the South was frequently quoted as a key challenge. Similarly the increasing Sinhala and Buddhist mobilisation in the South, was quoted as a key challenge to a peace agreement. Interestingly, these two issues were pointed out by interviewees regardless of view of the LTTE, and even those critical of the LTTE did not see the LTTE itself as a challenge in the peace talks, apart from the fact that they felt that there should be some Tamil representation which would be independent of the LTTE. Nevertheless, the Sri Lankan political context was clearly seen as the key challenge to continued peace talks and a lasting peace.

A few interviewees also pointed out that the peace talks at the top level are one thing, but that peace is something which needs to be built from the bottom of society, for it to be real and viable. In order for peace to be built, there is a need for reconciliation, as one interviewee stated:

“Reconciliation work has not been seen as the most significant, but I think it should be focused very much on. Reconciliation and communication are very important. If a federal solution is to be reached, there is a need for real reconciliation between people. It is

important that people really learn to live together. Both the politicians and the media have a lot of responsibility here”.

The peace movement in Sri Lanka is actively involved in peace building at the grass root level, with exchange visits for individuals from the South to the North and East, peace education programs in schools throughout the country, and organizing activities groups with both Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim members such as English classes or women’s groups. These activities are generally welcomed by people at the grass root level, and the process of trust building and cooperation among people at the grass root level seems promising. Very often they have no personal experiences of the ‘others’, but only base their assumptions on what they have heard, which often has been propaganda against the enemy at a time of war. Experiencing personal contact with the ‘others’ displays the falseness of the propaganda, and enables personal relationships and trust to develop²¹.

Though some members of the diaspora pointed to these kinds of processes, interestingly most did not. Other diaspora examples show that it is easier for diaspora populations to keep up the idea of an armed struggle and to continue funding it, as for them it is an idea, more than a lived reality (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001). Perhaps the propaganda of the warring party, as well as the identity in exile which may well be constructed around the ideas underlying the fight, may contribute to this continued support for war. However, on the basis of this study, it is hard to say anything about this issue, and it may well be difficult to find more answers to this question without the benefit of hindsight, though in general it seems that members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway want peace in the North East.

7.6 Tamil politics in the diaspora

Tamil politics in the diaspora is dominated by the LTTE in most diaspora countries. Despite differences within the diaspora population, this seems to be the case in Norway too. There is a pattern in terms of responses where those who are critical of the LTTE, tend to be more concerned about human rights violations and more worried about the prospects for

²¹ One example of peace building at the grass root level is the National Peace Program of SEDEC (Social and Economic Centre, Caritas Sri Lanka) <http://www.caritassrilanka.org/national.htm> (down-loaded 03.03.06)

democracy in Sri Lanka, whereas those who support the LTTE seem to dismiss criticism of the LTTE on grounds of it being ‘enemy propaganda’.

A majority of the Tamil diaspora supports the LTTE and the TRO financially, and to a large extent also agrees with the LTTEs struggle. This leads to a division of the diaspora population into roughly three groups, in relation to their political involvement, the group who support the LTTE actively, the group who oppose the LTTE actively, and the majority, who support the LTTE passively, but privately may well raise questions related to the LTTE and democracy and human rights. There are differences within the diaspora, and these differences are likely to have a significant effect on which of these groups a member of the diaspora is likely to be in. A study of the different ‘generations of migration’ as well as level of education and caste, is likely to reveal interesting connections. One interviewee suggested that among Tamils in Norway, those who arrived first tend to be more critical of the LTTE, whereas those who arrived in the mid- to late-1980s are more loyal to the LTTE. Those who have arrived in the 1990s and later perhaps tend to have less strong feelings, and that there is also a number of Tamils in Norway who have come to Norway to escape from the LTTE, and also a number of Tamils in Norway who have more or less been sent to Norway by the LTTE to collect money and encourage support for the LTTE among the diaspora

If Tamils are critical of some of the LTTEs actions, why do they continue to support the LTTE? One answer has been suggested, namely that Tamils choose a passive stance as a result of the current context in the North East, with the LTTE as the dominant actor and the Tamil’s representative in the peace process. Within this answer there may be a range of different factors, among other fear of the LTTE, but also a pragmatic point of view of ‘wait and see’. This ‘wait and see’ attitude may be understood in terms of either the fact that one may agree that for now it is best to have only one dominating Tamil actor because of the current context, or perhaps because of a lack of interest and a distancing from the conflict, where the fact that money is being sent to Sri Lanka is more related to bad conscience than to a moral obligation. It is likely that several of these factors combine into the resulting passive attitude of many Tamils in the diaspora.

However, there are voices who challenge the LTTE and also who challenge the majority’s silence:

“The Tamil diaspora has a great possibility to influence. Generally speaking members of the diaspora are more open. Here in Norway the diaspora should question the war, and the recruiting of child soldiers, and that not all children get to go to school. Whether you choose to support the LTTE and TRO is one thing, but it should be possible to ask questions. Most Tamils in Norway agree, but they do not dare to say so. There is a kind of hypocrisy here... People are afraid of the consequences if they speak up.”

“When people support the LTTE, I often think that the information is too one-sided, and people don’t always have the ability to think critically enough. The people who support the LTTE close their eyes, and still support them despite of the killings. This is politics, and people should open their eyes.”

Drawing on the above quotes, the questions about Tamil politics in the diaspora are, firstly, is the LTTE dominant in the diaspora because the diaspora really support the LTTE, or because the diaspora is afraid of the LTTE, or is there a mixture of different factors contributing to the situation? Though few among Tamils in Norway criticize the LTTE openly, many do so in private. The Norwegian magazine “Ny Tid” published a news story in February 2006 about the LTTEs pressure on Tamils in Norway, including death threats as well as severe pressure to donate money, even large amounts of money (www.nytid.no)²². Most Tamils in Norway “Ny Tid” had been in touch with would not appear with name and photo, when criticizing the LTTE. This supports the findings from interviews with Tamils in Norway, which suggest that a fear of the LTTE is perhaps a more significant issue, than one would think.

A second important question is, what is the diasporas possibility for influence on Tamil politics in Sri Lanka, what possibilities does the massive funding give the diaspora? Arguably, if fear of the LTTE is an important element in the donation of money, then it is not very likely that much influence on the LTTE can be exerted on the diasporas part. At least not influence, which is not directly invited by the LTTE.

A third question is, what are the responsibilities of the diaspora in terms of influence on Tamil politics in Sri Lanka and how does living in functioning democracies influence the diaspora and their involvement with Tamil politics? The quotes above suggest answers to all the three questions raised, and expresses a clear opinion that the diaspora should question the war and the recruitment of child soldiers, because of the possibility which the diaspora has to do so. However, the quotes also state that people do not dare to ask questions and express

²² <http://www.nytid.no/index.php?sk=8&id=3454> (Ny Tid 17.02.06)(down-loaded 28.02.06).

criticism, so the element of fear is already given as one of the reasons why questions are not being asked. In terms of politics in the Tamil diaspora it may then be suggested that there seems to be a striking paradox among a majority of members of the Tamil diaspora, in terms of participating in democracy and enjoying human rights in Norway, while funding the LTTE, but largely not raising questions about democracy or the respect of human rights in the North East of Sri Lanka. This lack of active criticism, may be explained in terms of fear of reactions from the LTTE.

7.7 Conclusion

“I’m not interested in politics” was the title of the first section of this chapter. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, members of the Tamil diaspora are interested in political issues, but most choose to take a passive stance as to politics in the North East of Sri Lanka. This has been found to be partly due to the political context of the LTTE being the dominant Tamil political actor and the sole Tamil representative in the on-going peace process, but it has also been found that fear of reactions from the LTTE, is perhaps a more important factor than might be suspected.

Questions have been raised about the financial support of the LTTE combined with a silent criticism of the LTTEs record on human rights, as well as the lack of space for political pluralism in the North East. Some interviewees have pointed out that the diaspora has a responsibility in terms of democracy and human rights in the North East, and that it may be too late to address these issues ‘after’ a peace agreement has been made. However, the fear of reactions from the LTTE, seems to be silencing a majority of the diaspora, for now.

Nevertheless, there is an anticipation among the Tamil diaspora that democracy and human rights will be the reality in the North East of Sri Lanka one day. In addition to fear of reactions from the LTTE, there also seems to be another factor contributing to the largely passive political stance of members of the Tamil diaspora: as long as the peace process is ongoing (and as long as there is a ceasefire), members of the Tamil diaspora seem to be patient, and have a great degree of understanding for the LTTEs position in terms of the negotiations with the Sri Lankan government, and the need for a certain control with the situation among Tamils. While many Tamils in the diaspora may question some of the LTTEs

actions (actions attributed to the LTTE), they do not see it as in the interest of Tamils, to work against the LTTE at this point. The LTTE has waged a war against the Sri Lankan army and has won itself a position in the negotiations with the Sri Lankan government. It would seem that though Tamils in the diaspora favour democracy and respect for human rights, including freedom of expression and political pluralism, demands for developments in these directions in the North East will wait until there is a permanent peace settlement.

The views as to whether or not the LTTE will be able to transform itself into a solely political actor, within a context of political pluralism vary. Often there is a pessimistic view in the short-term, while the view is definitely optimistic as to the development towards a multi-party democracy in the North East in the long term. Stokke (2006) discusses the emerging state formation of the LTTE in the North East:

“The dominant form of governance embedded in the LTTE state institutions is that of a strong and centralised state with few formal institutions for democratic representation, but there are also elements of partnership arrangements and institutional experiments that may serve as a basis for more democratic forms of representation and governance. This is contingent, however, on both a peaceful resolution of the current state of insecurity for Tamils and the LTTE, and on the facilitation and dynamics of pro-democracy forces within the LTTE and in Tamil society at large.” (Stokke 2006)

The prospects for democracy are contingent on both a peace agreement and on pro-democracy forces within the LTTE and in the Tamil society. It is perhaps in this future context that the potential role for diaspora contributions lies. Arguably, both members of the Tamil diaspora who are pro-LTTE, critical of the LTTE, and for now passive, have a possibility to contribute towards democracy in the North East, given a context of lasting peace and invitations from the LTTE to do so. However, it may be questioned whether delaying a democratization process till after a peace settlement is necessary, and whether the LTTE really is committed to democratic principles. Therefore despite the future optimism of members of the Tamil diaspora, in the long-term, caution and even pessimism, in the short-term, is perhaps understandable.

The influence of the diaspora in the political sphere is significant in terms of funding the LTTE. Arguably, the fact that many among the Tamil diaspora choose to be silent about the aspects of the LTTEs operations in terms of lack of democracy or human rights violations, may also have some significance. There is a great potential for diaspora contributions in the political sphere, a potential which currently is not being realised by a

majority among the Tamil diaspora, largely for pragmatic reasons. An interesting question in terms of future contributions is how one can facilitate realising this potential to a greater extent.

8. Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis has been to investigate the extent and nature of transnational activities, of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka, among the Tamil diaspora in Norway. This has been set within the broader context of processes and outcomes of globalization, international migration and the transnational networks and activities in which migrants participate. The theoretical framework of transnationalism was chosen for this study, despite some limitations in terms of both conceptual and methodological challenges. Both the conceptual and the methodological approach to this study has sought to draw on insights from two differing epistemological approaches, political economy and postmodernism. The purpose of combining insights from these approaches has been to bridge the gap between the realist, often economic, focus of political economy, and the cultural focus on hybridity, fluidity and multiple identities of post modern approaches. It has been argued that there is a need for a mixture of insights from both perspectives, while retaining an understanding of the significance of geographical places, in order to make sense of transnational networks and activities (Mitchell 1997).

This chapter will summarize the key findings about the transnational activities of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway, and their significance for development in the North East of Sri Lanka. Secondly, this chapter will discuss the potential for diaspora contributions to development, peace building and the strengthening of democracy in the country of origin, including some comments as to possible policy issues and the roles of diaspora groups, host and 'home' governments in this context.

8.2 Transnational activities of significance to development?

Members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway to participate in a range of diaspora activities, but are these activities transnational in their nature? Following the definition of transnational networks and activities as those who involve a significant number of people engaging in sustained social contacts over time (Portes 1999) and include both the dimension

of transnational activities, “which can be observed and measured and [those of] transnational capabilities, which encompass willingness and ability of migrant groups to engage in activities that transcend national borders” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001:581), it may be concluded that the diaspora activities of Tamils in Norway, may be seen as transnational in their nature.

It has been found that member of the Tamil diaspora involve themselves to a great extent in transnational activities of both economic, political, social and cultural characters (as summarized in table 5.1). Through social and cultural activities, members of the diaspora shape and re-shape their identities as Tamils, and nourish their longing for ‘home’. But at a far more practical level members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway are involved in economic and political activities, of direct relevance to ‘home’, mainly in terms of financial remittances and money donations to development organizations, and to the LTTE. Members of the Tamil diaspora follow the news from Sri Lanka on a daily basis, mainly through the internet, though also via personal communication. While permanent return to Sri Lanka does not seem to be realistic for most Tamils in Norway, the idea of living both ‘here and there’ seems to have great appeal, particularly as an option for retirement, and is strongly connected to the idea of making contributions towards development in the North East of Sri Lanka. The everyday practices and lived experiences of members of the Tamil diaspora, reveal the total picture of the transnational activities which enables an understanding of both activities related to Tamil culture and identity, as well as those related to the reconstruction of the North East of Sri Lanka.

Chapter 6 concluded that most members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway contribute to the development of the North East, mainly by sending remittances to their family in the North East, and donating money to the TRO and the LTTE. The unclear relationship between the TRO and the LTTE, illustrates the ambiguity of the relationship between political issues and development issues, in the context of the North East of Sri Lanka well. This seems to affect the ways in which development is understood among members of the Tamil diaspora, leading to a largely depoliticized and technical view of development, despite the fact that most issues related to the North East are understood in the context of the political conflict there. Though it is difficult to establish the extent of the significance of the diasporas contributions to development in the North East, it seems clear that there is a broad agreement

both in the diaspora and in the North East, that the contributions of the diaspora to development matter.

Having adopted a ‘mainstream’ understanding of development, including issues of empowerment, equality, participation as well as human rights and democratization perspectives, an investigation of the political involvement of member of the diaspora was called for. In chapter 7 it was found that most members of the Tamil diaspora are interested in political issues, but most choose to take a passive stance as to politics in the North East of Sri Lanka, stating that “I’m not interested in politics. Most issues related to development, and even more so to peace building in the North East, are directly related to the politics of the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. The influence of the diaspora in the political sphere is significant and mainly so in terms of funding the LTTE. The fact that many among the Tamil diaspora choose to be silent about the aspects of the LTTEs operations in terms of lack of democracy or human rights violations, may also have some significance. This silence and pragmatism has been found to be partly due to the political context of the LTTE being the dominant Tamil political actor and the sole Tamil representative in the on-going peace process, but it has also been found that fear of reactions from the LTTE, is perhaps a more important factor than might be suspected.

Questions have been raised about the diasporas responsibility in terms of pushing for democracy and human rights in the North East, and the fact that it may be too late to address these issues ‘after’ a peace agreement has been made. However, most members of the Tamil diaspora seem to be patient, and have a great degree of understanding for the LTTEs position in terms of the negotiations with the Sri Lankan government, and the need for a certain control with the situation among Tamils. The prospects for democracy are contingent on both a peace agreement and on pro-democracy forces within the LTTE and in the Tamil society (Stokke 2006). It is perhaps in this context that the potential role for diaspora contributions lies, which raises interesting questions about how one can facilitate realising this potential to a greater extent.

Based on these findings it seems that the chosen concept of transnationalism, with the applied definition, has been both applicable and relevant to this empirical context. The combined focus on the economic and political activities of a concrete and objective nature, and the focus on the social and cultural activities of a more personal and subjective nature,

has revealed the interrelatedness of these different transnational activities, including those of significance to development in the North East of Sri Lanka. Arguably, these empirical results suggest that the use of transnationalism as a concept for studying the contributions of diaspora populations to the development of their countries of origin, gains relevance when drawing on mixed theoretical approaches. The concept of transnationalism and its effect, should be considered with caution, when there has been little analysis of how different people are more or less likely to be involved, and how various factors such as level of education, class, gender, caste, origin, affect the ways and extent to which these individual people are involved (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001).

8.3 The potential of diasporas for contribution to development in the country of origin

It has been found that members of the Tamil diaspora participate in a wide range of what has been found to be transnational activities. The desires and capabilities of the members of the Tamil diaspora to participate in transnational activities are also suggested to be strong, for the findings of this study have underlined not only the current contributions of members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway to social, economic and political development in the North East of Sri Lanka, but also the great potential for diaspora contributions, which to date is not realised. The potential of diaspora populations for contributions towards development, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction has been the focus of a number of recent studies, but as yet most of the cases investigated, are open, for instance in terms of the role of the Tamil diaspora in relation to Sri Lanka, or similarly the role of diasporas in Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Bosnia or Iraq. None of these countries may be seen as peaceful or 'developed'. Notably, the role of diaspora populations in relation to their 'home' countries can take many different forms, in some cases diaspora populations are more divided, in others more united, in some cases they support war, in others peace. Whether this is seen as beneficial or detrimental, to a great extent depends on who is looking. This has recently become evident, when after September 11th the remittance channels of diaspora populations were thoroughly scrutinized, while allegations of terrorist activities were freely spread. In the wake of September 11th the role of diaspora populations has therefore increasingly been seen as (potentially) detrimental, particularly in terms of funding 'terrorist groups' (Carling 2005). The LTTE being one of these listed so called 'terrorist groups' means that this negative focus on diaspora contributions has also included the Tamil diaspora in various Western countries.

Despite this focus on the potential ‘negative’ role of diaspora populations, there is also an increasing attention among Western governments towards the need for policies related to diaspora participation in transnational activities more generally. Although the fact that some terrorist groups may be funded from diaspora populations, it is widely acknowledged that they key role for diaspora populations, and where their interest and potentials lie, are in the sphere of contributions towards development and peace in their ‘home’ countries.

In order to make sense of the factors affecting the potential of the role of the diaspora, the dimensions of capabilities and desires to participate in transnational activities need to be added. Here capabilities “include the extent to which individuals and communities identify with the social, economic or political processes in their ‘home’ countries” (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001: 581). Based on the investigation into the capabilities and desires of members of the Eritrean and Bosnian diasporas to participate in the reconstruction of their countries of origin (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 1999), table 8.1 summarizes the economic, political and social factors increasing the capacity and desire of individual members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway to participate in reconstruction of the North East of Sri Lanka.

Table 8.1 Factors increasing the capacity and desire for members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway to participate in reconstruction of the North East of Sri Lanka

	Economic	Political	Social
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employment - Access to information - Access to banking facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure legal status in Norway - Positive attitude of host government and population - “Political integration” of diaspora by the LTTE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freedom of movement within Norway - Gender equality - Successful social integration in Norway
Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial stability - Economic incentives (or lack of disincentives) for remittances and investments in ‘home’ country - Economic stability in ‘home’ country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure legal status in host country - Strong sense of Tamil national identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Links with family and friends in ‘home’ country - Links with friends and family in other countries - Integration within the diaspora in the host country - Desire to maintain ‘national consciousness’

(Information from SSB (Lie, 2004), and interviews; based on Al-Ali, Black and Koser 1999:23).

These findings suggest that members of the Tamil diaspora in Norway have a high level of identification with both social, economic and political processes in Sri Lanka. It seems that their capabilities and desires to participate in transnational activities of significance to development, reconstruction and peace building in the North East of Sri Lanka are strong, suggesting a great potential for participation in such activities.

While the findings of this study reveal a range of different transnational activities of some significance for development in the North East of Sri Lanka, it seems clear that there is also a potential for greater involvement and contributions of different kinds (Carling 2005). Measures aimed at a greater realisation of such diaspora potential for development in the country of origin, may be affected by three groups of actors. Diaspora populations and the governments of host and 'home' countries, in terms of the policies these governments adopt on diaspora activities. Firstly, in terms of diaspora populations, it seems that their interest in contributing towards development in their country of origin is contingent on a number of factors, listed in table 8.1. Many of these factors are related to host and 'home' country governments, but there is also a great role to play for diaspora organizations and transnational networks and NGOs. In this context it is interesting to note that the Tamil diaspora is very well organized, very resourceful and seems to participate actively in transnational activities (McDowell 1996, Gamage 1998, Fuglerud 2001, Van Hear et al 2004). These activities include political aspects related to the LTTE and the Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka and a focus on national consciousness, as well as social activities relating to the integration of Tamils within the Tamil diaspora communities in Norway. This suggest that there is not only a great potential for diaspora contributions, but that the realisation of this potential should be a feasible matter, given the right political context in the North East of Sri Lanka and given certain policy measures on the part of both host and 'home' authorities.

Secondly, the realisation of the potential for diaspora contributions depends on host country policies. Table 8.1 reveals that a secure legal and economic status in the host country, is of relevance to participating in transnational activities, while successful integration in the host society, opportunities for gender equality and a feeling of being respected in the host country are also of significance. In terms of the Tamils in Norway, though there are nuances, in general terms they are successful in their economic and social integration in Norway (Lie 2004), suggesting that the policies of the Norwegian government in general

encourage diaspora contributions to the 'home' country. However, more specific policy measures could be put in place, in order to realise the diaspora potential for contributions. One example could be a financial incentive to participate in knowledge transfers and capacity building, by paying an individual's salary in Norway while he/she was on unpaid leave from their employer, working voluntarily in their country of origin. Finally, in terms of 'home' country policies, in the context of the Tamil diaspora in Norway this is complicated because of the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government, but it seems clear that the actions of 'home' country actors are of great significance, and have a bearing on the diasporas contributions. Primarily the context of the conflict in Sri Lanka has a great significance in terms of the contributions and the involvement of members of the Tamil diaspora with Sri Lanka. The dynamics of the conflict to a large extent shape the actions of members of the diaspora towards Sri Lanka, so a peace agreement is likely to trigger certain actions, while an escalation of the conflict is likely to trigger different actions.

While it seems difficult to generalize about the necessary policies for boosting diaspora contributions to development in the country of origin, without setting these within a particular context, it also seems clear that policy measures can be taken, within specific contexts, which can boost diaspora contributions to development in the country of origin. Such policy measures on the part of host governments in the West, should perhaps be seen as part of development policy, as well as security, migration and integration policy. So far, in most Western countries, there has been a lack of cohesion in policies spanning these different fields (Carling 2005). For instance, surprisingly, the fact that many migrants in Western countries originate from conflict torn or poverty stricken societies in the South, has seldom been utilised within the field of development aid from Western countries. However, there seems to be some degree of realisation of the need for greater cohesion of such policies, suggesting the possibility for greater realisation of the potential of diaspora populations in the future, to the benefit of the conflict torn and poverty stricken societies and populations in countries of origin.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. Personal history

- Arrival in Norway: circumstances, year, labour/asylum/family reunion? - About reception in Norway and the initial period: job, community, education, situation for children, contact with other Tamils, language issues. - Background in Sri Lanka: family context, education and employment, political involvement? Organizational background? Religion? Other family and friends in exile? Other significant issues?

2. Tsunami in Sri Lanka

- Personal or general issues.- The involvement of the Tamil diaspora in Norway and abroad with relief work?

3. Life in Norway – the diaspora

- Employment and education, managing financially in Norway, language issues, the Norwegian society. - Tamil contacts in Norway – culture, religion, politics? - Tamil schools, Tamil organizations – involvement? - Tamil contacts in other countries, family members etc – the transnational networks?

4. Memories of Sri Lanka and knowledge about the context back “home” - information

- Memories of Sri Lanka and visits to Sri Lanka – frequency and length? - News from Sri Lanka today? Which sources? web-sites (url for web-sites)? TV? Papers? - organizations? Other channels of knowledge of the context back “home”? -To what extent do you follow the news from Sri Lanka?

5. Thoughts about the future

- Personal, for the family, for children etc? Staying in Norway or “going back”? - In a broader sense – for society, Tamils in Norway, Tamils other places, going back etc. - What are the different options for the future for Tamils in Sri Lanka, for the NE? - What do you think many Tamils in Norway in other countries (diaspora) and Tamils in the NE think about this issue?

6. The peace process

- What are your thoughts about the peace process in Sri Lanka? Before the ceasefire in 2002, after, and now after the tsunami?

7. Democracy

- Would you say that it should be possible for democracy to work as a system of governance for Tamils in the NE? Why, why not? - How do you think a transfer to multi-party democracy could happen in the NE of Sri Lanka? - Do you participate in the Norwegian democracy? In what ways? Committees, boards, groups, voting etc

8. Human rights, women’s rights and minorities

- Human rights issues – what are your views about child soldiers? LTTE allegedly recruiting minors? Alleged political killings and disappearances? - What do you think about the prospects for reconciliation in the NE are – if there is lasting peace? To what extent do you think this may include Tamils who are in opposition to the LTTE? - Respect for minorities – in Norway? In Sri Lanka – the Muslims? How can their rights be ensured? - Women’s rights in the NE? Changes?

9. In what ways do you contribute to development (the peace process and post-conflict reconstruction) in Sri Lanka?

- Financially? Visits etc? Development projects in a village etc? - Voluntary work in the NE? If yes – more about this – How long, with whom motivations, experiences, reflections afterwards etc. - What organizations work in this field in Norway? Otherwise?- Involvement with relation to the tsunami in December 2004 – any different from earlier involvement?

10. Is it possible for Tamils in Norway to have a political saying in the NE of Sri Lanka?

- If yes, in what ways? If no, how could this be made possible? Should this be the case? - Does the LTTE operate a taxation system in the diaspora? In Sri Lanka? How does this work? Is it possible to convey political opinions from the diaspora to the LTTE – how? - If relevant, example: Eritrea and the diaspora participation in the referendum on Eritrea's independence – could something similar be done with regard to the Tamil diaspora and a federal solution? Why? Why not?

11. To what extent and in which ways would you say that it is possible for Tamils in Norway to contribute to development in the NE in terms of:

A - Administration and institution building? B - Promoting an active civil society? C - Promoting a culture of democracy and human rights? - How? - Problems? – Examples of how this is done, or could be done?

12. If you were to say – what kinds of solutions should be pursued in the process of building peace, of post-conflict reconstruction and development in Sri Lanka?

- What about federalism?- If there were to be a federal solution – how should the language issue be solved?

13. What about multi-party democracy in the future?

- What role do you think that the opposition to the LTTE would play, if there were democracy? Would they be hated as traitors? Would there be a mixed opposition? - What about reconciliation? The need and possibility for reconciliation?

14. To what extent and in which ways would you say that there are transferable values/ideas/practices in the Norwegian society that may be applicable/useful in a Tamil context in Sri Lanka? And to what extent not?

- Which kinds of values or practices? E.g. Generational issues? Gender? - How are similar issues dealt with in the Tamil context in Sri Lanka and in the Tamil diaspora in Norway?- Thoughts about Westernization and secularization of the Tamil culture – in Norway and in Sri Lanka? Differences? Any thing of significance in terms of democracy and development?

15. Any other issues you would like to discuss?

- Thoughts about development, peace building and reconstruction in Sri Lanka?- About democracy, human rights and minorities – link to future development – the future of society in the NE? - Other thoughts about the participation of the Tamil diaspora?

