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Geography of 'Refuge Spaces' of Jaffnese Since the Beginning of the Conflict in Sri Lanka

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Civilians have been the main victims of the 25 years armed conflict between the Sri Lankan State and the LTTE separatists. In the Northern region, which was one of the main battlefronts, the intensity of the violence throughout the conflict forced Jaffnese civilians to move, either willingly or by force, to 'shelter areas' more or less far from the front. We will try to see in this article what areas were preferred by Jaffnese seeking shelter and if the choice of 'refuge spaces' has evolved during the different major phases of conflict.

Introduction

For nearly three decades, civilians in Sri Lanka have been victims of armed conflicts between the State and the Tamil separatist militants. After 25 years of war, the United Nations estimates that the interethnic conflict has caused between 80 and 100,000 deaths. Added to this already grim review is the hundreds of thousands of people displaced within the island and those who have left the country because of war.

The Northern region of Jaffna (see Figure 1) has been the heart of the Tamil resistance against discriminatory measures adopted by successive governments representing the interests of the Sinhalese majority (Madavan 2007). Indeed, this region, which sheltered the Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna between the 13th and 17th centuries, is considered as the historical and cultural home of the Tamils in Sri Lanka (Balasundarampillai 2002). The ethnic composition of the population is largely favorable to the Tamils, who represent over 80% of the population (see Figure 2). The establishment of prestigious schools by the colonial powers in the city of Jaffna allowed the elite of the peninsula to be recruited in the colonial administration in Ceylon and British possessions in Southeast Asia (Rajakrishnan 1986).

However, with the proclamation of independence, the Sinhalese leaders from the majority community of the island adopted discriminatory measures against the country's largest minority. Indeed, Sinhalese was made the sole official language and the meritocratic system for university admissions was replaced by a quota system which was very unfavorable to Tamil students, thus increasing the minority's anxiety. The Tamil elite's fear of losing its privileges and seeing the island's ethnic majority seize all the country's institutions, as well as the fear of acculturation, partly explain the deterioration of interethnic relations in Sri Lanka. Soon, the actions of the Tamil leaders in Parliament would be discredited: they had little influence and the pacts concluded with the two main Sinhalese political parties were not respected [1]. The hope of finding a political solution to solve the interethnic problem was narrowing in the minority and, increasingly, there was also a rise among Jaffnese youth looking to violent actions. In the early 1970s, many armed Tamil militant groups, which chose violent action for the creation of an independent Eelam [2], rose in the peninsula of Jaffna. This was the beginning of sabotages in the Northern Province and attacks against government forces or against Tamil politicians and intellectuals considered traitors to the Tamil cause.

In 1983, separatists' attack on an army unit in Jaffna resulted in the anti-Tamil pogrom in Colombo, costing a thousand of lives (Meyer 2001: 141-3).

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This violence resulted in the first large population movements that separated in many cities the two communities who had until then lived together. Thus, while 70,000 Tamils (Meyer 2001: 141) fleeing the Sinhala majority areas took refuge in the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the island, in Jaffna, thousands of Sinhalese preferred to leave Northern Province for fear of reprisals from angry Tamils. Since the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983, the Jaffna peninsula has become the stronghold of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [3] (LTTE) which prevailed over other Tamil separatist armed groups which were thrown out of the area in 1986. At the same time, the Army was being

undermined by the Tigers [4]. Given the increasing number of attacks and the challenge to its authority and territorial integrity of the country, the Sinhalese political class chose to settle the Tamil problem by force, launching a military operation against the North of the country. On 26th May 1987, this major offensive, which involved naval, air and land forces, sought an end to the rebel movement. This attack marked a new era in the interethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, with shellings that affected the hospital and a theater in Jaffna. By allowing the use of force that endangered the lives of civilians, the government was also helping feed the Jaffnese's feelings of oppression; confirming the idea that they did not matter to Sinhalese politicians. This operation, which was to annihilate the Tamil militant groups, was a military victory for the government. Indeed, the Sri Lankan army had taken over its opponents. However, this victory would quickly turn into political defeat.

The operation, which seemed as an uncontrolled aggression, strengthened the position of the Tamil militants and their claim for Eelam in the Tamil public's opinion. It seemed obvious to many Jaffnese that the creation of a sovereign Tamil State was the only solution to ensure the safety and vitality of Tamils. From this military operation, the island would further experience more than two decades of conflict in which civilians are trapped between the fires of the belligerents. We can distinguish three major phases in the Sri Lankan conflict.

From the first military offensive (Operation Liberation), launched in 1987 by the Sri Lankan Army, to the cease-fire agreement achieved with the help of Norwegian mediation in 2002, the island was in a state of declared war. The Northern region is one of the main battlefronts where the Tigers challenged the authority of the central government, and for a time, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) [5]. During this phase, the region saw many clashes that caused terror among the civilian population, forcing them to constantly flee whenever possible. The 2002 cease-fire agreement provided the civilians with a lull period that facilitated the return of some internally displaced people (IDPs) to their places of origin. Finally, since the resumption of military operations in the Eastern Province in 2006, war again weighed upon the lives of Jaffnese. The intensity of the violence throughout the conflict forced civilians to move, either willingly or by force, to 'shelter areas' [6] more or less far from the front. We will try to see what areas were preferred by Jaffnese seeking shelter and if the choice of 'refuge spaces' has evolved during the different phases of major conflict.

After describing the logic explaining the movements of population during the phase when the region of Jaffna was a strategic and symbolic gain for the belligerents, we will see by studying the Jaffna Municipal Council, whether or not the cease-fire agreement has helped the return of all socio-economic communities of the city. Finally, we will consider the consequences of resumption conflict to see if the government Army's victory put an end to the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka.

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I. 1987-2002: Jaffnese facing the war

Population displacements according the evolution of fronts

Faced with the atrocities of war, Jaffnese had often been forced to abandon their homes for safer areas in very difficult conditions. Jaffna station was bombed and the rail link that connected the city to Vavunia was suspended. Road networks also deteriorated very quickly, and the Northern peninsula was isolated from the rest of the island since the A9 road, which connected Jaffna to the South, became one of the war targets. The Jaffnese were forced to walk dozens of kilometers, or ride if they were lucky, hoping to avoid landmines, to flee the fighting and get away.

Away from the front

The evolution of the population in the divisional secretariat divisions (D.S.D.) [7] of Jaffna and Thenmarachchy inside

the Jaffna district between 1981 and 2003 revealed that population movements within the district have been particularly important (see Table 1 and Figure 3).

The influence of military operations on the mobility of civilians fleeing fronts to safer areas can be seen on the graphic. [8] Thus, there is no statistical data for Jaffna D.S.D. in 1995. Indeed, after the Army assault on Jaffna town, almost all the inhabitants deserted the city and tried to follow the rebels into the jungles of Wanni. At the same time, the population of Thenmarachchy D.S.D. more than quadrupled, increasing from 84,766 inhabitants in 1993 to 374,866 inhabitants in 1995. Thenmarachchy became the main refuge for displaced people and home to over half of the district's population while two years earlier only one in 10 lived in this D.S.D. The significant increase of population in this D.S.D. could be explained by the fact that Thenmarachchy was the gateway to the inhabitants of the peninsula to the Wanni region, still controlled by the Tigers. But soon the Army began preventing population movements to these areas, in order to keep civilians in the zone controlled by government. The following year, some IDPs returned to their homes. Thus, the Jaffna D.S.D. accounted to more than 38,000 inhabitants while the population of Thenmarachchy fell to 78,101 inhabitants. In 2000, the Tigers tried to regain control of the peninsula and Thenmarachchy D.S.D. became a major issue for the belligerents. The violence of fighting was such that Thenmarachchy D.S.D.'s population did not even count 700 inhabitants, while Jaffna D.S.D. lost half of its inhabitants to 22,958 people.

The analysis of the evolution of population trends [9] shows that mobility is partly due to the proximity of the fighting. However, this factor does not explain all population displacements.

Table 1. Evolution of population of Jaffna et Thenmarachchy D.S.D. (1981-2003)

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Change of logic: the terror which pushed to abandon everything

In 1987, armed clashes forced many civilians to flee their homes to reach refugee camps or relatives' houses in the Jaffna district, or regions nearby. The majority of Jaffnese preferred to shelter near their home, so they could quickly return there at the end of the conflict. The results of a questionnaire [10] (see Table 2) produced in the Jaffna Municipal Council (Madavan 2005: 112) put forward other explanations for the mobility of the civilian population of the municipality during the conflict.

Table 2. Localisation of 45 Jaffnese in 1987 and 1995

In 1987, half of Jaffnese interviewed remained in the municipality and, out of 45 respondents, 36 did not leave the district. The majority of the population still preferred to take shelter in refugee camps located in the municipality, or take refuge in the district, in a second home or with their relatives. Few chose to leave the Jaffna district and it is interesting to note that half of those who moved outside the peninsula were already in exile in India. Indeed, the destruction of livelihoods and transports had led fishermen to join Tamil Nadu. Thus, in 1987, Jaffnese movements were minor and mostly restricted to within the district.

However, the behavior of civilians and their decisions changed during the following armed conflicts partly because the religious buildings and the refugee camps in the Municipal Council in 1987 were affected during the onslaught of the Sri Lankan Army during Operation Liberation, then by the bombing of the IPKF, as the authors of Broken Palmyrah suggested:

'Many civilians sought refuge at temples and schools as advised by the Indian Army. These same temples and schools were shelled, resulting in a large number of civilian deaths. It was a tragedy that even refuge camps such as

Kokuvil Hindu College, Chundikuli Girl's College, Railway Station, Inuvil Pillayar Kovil and Karamban Roman Catholic Church turned out to be death traps.'

(Hoole *et al.* 1990: 283)

Therefore, refugee camps appeared more as a target than a refuge for the civilian population. These deliberate attacks against civilians affected Jaffnese deeply who then became convinced of the willingness of Tigers' opponents to kill indiscriminately Tamils, whether they were militants or civilians, under the pretext of fighting the terrorists of the LTTE. This helps explain why during the future progress of the Sri Lankan Army, civilians preferred to flee, fearing for their safety from what appeared to them not as a liberating armed force but as a hostile Army. Therefore the displacement of 1995, following the recapture of Jaffna town by the Army, had a different logic. None of the respondents remained in the city and the displacement of civilians seemed more organized. It was found that the Jaffnese refugees were primarily in areas controlled by the LTTE. Of the 21 people who remained in the district, 18 fled to Chavakachcheri which is the largest town in Thenmarachchy D.S.D. These civilians were stranded there by dams and Army raids. Among the 24 people who left the district, 20 joined the territories remaining under LTTE control.

The logic of these movements can also be explained by the willingness of the Tigers to maintain their status as the only legitimate representatives of Tamil interests. To this aim, the Tigers incited civilians to follow them, to affirm that the Tamil civilians reject Colombo's authority. Thus, there has been an evolution in the sense of movement of civilians who, at first, remained in the municipality or district of Jaffna in order to regain their home relatively quickly, whereas later many would prefer to leave their home to avoid facing the soldiers of the Sri Lankan Army.

Typology

In 2003, the Jaffna district did not regain the same number of inhabitants as in 1993. This is explained partly by the refusal of a number of Jaffnese to return to an area under government control, but also by the expulsion of Muslims from Jaffna by the Tigers. [11] We can distinguish different areas of refuge (see figure 4).

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Territories controlled by the Tigers

During the population displacements of 1995, Jaffnese had mostly sought refuge in the jungles of the Wanni with the LTTE. Subsequently, some civilians chose to settle, by conviction and solidarity with the separatist movement, in a territory the LTTE administered as a real independent State with its own police, justice and schools. Many of them waited for the reconquest by the LTTE to return to the peninsula and settle there. At the same time, the mobility to Colombo was restrained by the Tigers who feared a mass exodus of inhabitants of the peninsula. The LTTE justified its decision to limit the movement of people through the voice of its political spokesman Balasingham:

'... since the Eelam war No. 2, we had to impose certain restrictions otherwise many Tamils would leave to Colombo, would go to different embassies to complain about atrocities committed by the LTTE and living conditions in Jaffna. We do not want a mass exodus without concrete reason.'

Translated from French by the author

(Paul 1997: 220)

To preserve their image and especially their status of representative of the Tamils, the Tigers decided that only one member per family may leave the province to study or work.

Puttalam and other urban centers with a strong Muslim presence

Places where Muslims from Jaffna took refuge differed from those chosen by the Tamils. Thus, following the Tigers ultimatum of giving the Muslims 48 hours to leave the Jaffna region in 1990, Muslims headed to areas with a high Muslim concentration in the towns of Puttalam, Batticaloa and Colombo. The attitude of the LTTE towards Muslims created a disconnection, both social and geographical, of this community from the rest of the inhabitants.

The country's capital, Colombo

With rising tensions in the Eastern Province and armed operations in the North, the capital, Colombo, which had an important share of Tamils in its population, had emerged as a relatively safe place, economically vital for many Jaffnese families. Many sent one member to work and support the family with the money earned. The country's capital is also important because it is the main gateway to the world.

Foreign countries

Since the adoption by the Sri Lankan governments of discriminatory measures that made it more difficult for Tamils to access government jobs and university, many of the elite youths of Jaffna preferred to leave the country and tried their luck abroad. The riots of 1983, and even more armed operations that took place in the Jaffna peninsula, had accelerated the exile of many Jaffnese, often clandestinely, to Europe, North America or Australia to obtain political asylum. Other went to work in Middle Eastern countries to earn money. Tamil exiles quickly became an indispensable support for families back home by sending money and trying to help other family members leave the island. Pro Eelam diaspora members, and those who were forcibly taxed, provided financial support to armed militants as well as alerting the world on the fate of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

II. A double dynamic of migration during the cease-fire (2002-2006)

The return of displaced people

The return of displaced Jaffnese began in 1996 and happened in successive waves. At first, it was displaced people blocked in Thenmarachchi who went back home.

The Jaffnese who had managed to shelter in Wanni, controlled by the Tigers, had faced the reluctance of the rebels who resented the idea of seeing civilians abandon them to go to a territory that had fallen under the authority of the government. It is the cease-fire agreement between the warring parties which allowed many civilians in LTTE territory to return to their original city. The cease-fire also allowed Muslims to return.

In contrast, the share of displaced people leaving Colombo to return to Jaffna seemed marginal. Material facilities and especially opportunities to find a better-paying job pushed the Jaffnese to stay in the capital. Many preferred to enjoy the greater mobility granted to civilians thanks to the cease-fire to visit their family that remained in Jaffna.

The return of Jaffnese remained highly dependent on capacities and infrastructures. Indeed, the rehabilitation of buildings was laborious and the Army prohibited access to a number of spaces in the city (see Figure 5), preventing the return of inhabitants. There was a large heterogeneity in the repopulation of the various parts of the city (see Figure 6). This difference is partly explained by the fact that the Army still kept some strategic locations in the town as high security zones which prevented the return of displaced Jaffnese, as in Nedunkulam (J/61). To these areas, we must add the area of the Fort, one of the main issues of war which has been devastated and mined. Five years after the negotiations, some areas near the Fort still had not been demined and the majority of the houses remained empty. Conversely, some spaces that were classified as high security zones became restricted areas or were simply returned to the population. This facilitated the rapid resettlement of displaced people to Colombuthurai East (J/62) or to Colombuthurai West (J/63) (see Figure 7).

The cease-fire favors a dual migration dynamic

Despite the rapid growth of population in the city of Jaffna since the cease-fire, there was an important turning point in 2004, when for the first time, there was a decline in population in the Municipal Council, which lost 2,198 people in one year (see Table 3). This situation appeared paradoxical because all those displaced had not returned home. The comparative study of the 2001 and 2004 censuses of the Jaffna Municipal Council [12] showed that this decline in population only concerned specific spaces. The *grama sava* [13] dynamics map in the Jaffna Municipal Council (see Figure 6) showed that especially the Northern areas of the city were losing population, while the Southern areas' population grew steadily. By linking this with the traditional castes [14] distribution map (see Figure 8) in the Jaffna Municipal Council, we understand that it is mainly the areas traditionally occupied by Vellalars [15] (see Table 4) which were affected, often losing at least 500 people in 3 years. Vellalar community, through its financial resources, began to leave the peninsula to get away to the South or to Western countries.

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http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH275/Fig6DM_w-85638.jpg
http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L258xH400/Fig7DM_w-23fdd.jpg

Table 3. Population Growth in Jaffna Municipal Council (1871-2004)

Furthermore, we can hypothesize that part of Vellalar, who had been unwilling or unable to leave Jaffna, seized the opportunity of the truce for exile, aided undoubtedly by family members already living abroad. Finally, there was a double migratory movement in Jaffna. In the Southern areas of the city of Jaffna, there was the return of the most modest castes (Fishermen, Parayar [16], etc). Muslim areas were also among those less rehabilitated, and many of the several thousand Muslims who had resettled in their homes lived in precarious conditions and were struggling to restore their home. The resettlement of this community was even more difficult because Muslims areas were among those most destroyed in the city. In addition, some parts of these areas had been settled by Hindu families, which turned them into mixed areas. The most popular social classes took advantage of favorable political context to gradually return to their homes and tried to rebuild their lives in the city. Moreover, the reopening of the A9 road led to an exodus of doctors, teachers and cadres to the South or overseas. Higher wages and especially material comforts and leisures available in Colombo or abroad encouraged many Jaffnese to invest their talents out of Jaffna, thus depriving the city of their skills. This exodus of most skilled workers also affected the brightest students who preferred to study in the capital or, better still, abroad and settle there. It seems that the city experienced a certain impoverishment, with the return of displaced people who lost everything, while conversely the people belonging to more affluent social groups continued to leave and settle in the capital or abroad, where living conditions are more attractive.

Table 4. Simplified table of caste hierarchy in Jaffna

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The meeting with the diaspora and the dream of the West

Until the late 1990s, many Jaffnese emigrated to the West hoping to obtain political asylum. Since the cease-fire, it became much more difficult to claim that status. However, peace talks between the LTTE and the government did not put an end to the exile of Jaffnese. Many residents of the city saw in the West the hope for a better life. Relatives from diaspora, returning for the holidays with a high purchasing power, could only strengthen the will of other Jaffnese to try their luck out of the country where they felt discriminated against. Many parents hoped to send their children to the West to permanently settle them there and enabled them to have a better life. The Jaffnese were increasingly tempted by the idea of marrying their daughter or son to a member of the diaspora. This trend is explained by the fact that men from the diaspora do not generally ask for a dowry. Moreover, marrying one's child abroad is a safeguard for parents that their children will be in a safe environment and that they can help their family more easily than by staying in the island. The uncertain political future, difficulty of finding a job, and especially the unattractive living conditions grew exile of most skilled people, young students and, increasingly, young girls of marriageable age also leave the country.

III. Jaffneses and the return of war (2006-2010)

The plight of civilians varies according the place where they took refuge

The resumption of armed conflict in the Eastern province of the island in 2006 simply reflected the will of the new President of Sri Lanka, Rajapakse, and LTTE leader, Prabhakaran, to end the status quo and used weapons to seal their aspirations for the country. To restore the country's territorial integrity, the government launched an impressive military campaign to annihilate the LTTE organisation and solve the conflict. Thus, the Sri Lankan Army, which had already seized possessions of the Tigers in the Eastern province in 2007, managed to regain almost all of the Wanni region in the North of the island, capturing the cities Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu one after the other. Thus, bombings and clashes multiplied in the Northern and Eastern provinces. The civilian population once again became the victim of the belligerents. In all parts of the island civilians, especially Tamils suffered from the return of war.

In Jaffna peninsula

With the deteriorating political situation, Jaffnese were once again facing curfews and shortages of food, medicine and oil. The risk of becoming yet again a target to capture and conquer for both parties undermined the rebirth of the city. Its economic development had already been halted by a new closure of the A9 road. Many chose to leave Jaffna region as a precaution, aiming to reach the capital. Indeed, as the region was under the control of the Sri Lankan Army, Jaffnese feared for their safety. Civilians particularly feared the punitive expeditions of the Eelam People's Democratic Party [17]

(EPDP), which was allied to the government. Disappearances and killings of Tamils suspected of being LTTE sympathizers increased since 2006. Civilians, increasingly numerous, preferred to leave everything and reach the capital in the holds of military ships.

In the territories controlled by the LTTE

The population, whose mobility to the rest of the country was already very limited by Tamil separatists, lived in very basic material conditions on the front lines of the fight. The government Army tirelessly bombed Tiger positions in this part of the island. In addition, to cope with the escalation of armed hostilities, the LTTE required that each family living in its territory sent two children, a boy and a girl, to join the ranks of their paramilitary group. Civilians found themselves unwillingly involved in the conflict. The territories controlled by the LTTE were no longer a refuge for the people but the main target for the Sri Lankan Army to conquer. Faced with the victorious advance of the Army, over 300,000 [18] civilians followed, willingly or not, the LTTE militants in their retreat. In April 2009, the Sri Lankan Army managed to confine the rebels to a portion of 13 square kilometers in Puthukkudiyirupu. But these military victories, which were celebrated by the government as victories against terrorism, were mostly responsible for a major humanitarian disaster.

The final battle and its consequences for the civilian population

Combat zones

Deteriorating living conditions, and daily violation by the belligerents of international humanitarian laws protecting civilians in wartime caused a humanitarian catastrophe. The intensive shellings by the Army in areas densely populated by civilians reflected the low esteem of the government for the refugees who were no longer viewed as citizens of Sri Lanka but as terrorists or supporters of the LTTE. For months, the Army bombed and proceeded to send fire in and nearby an area it had unilaterally declared as a security zone. Schools, religious buildings, refugee camps and hospital had been targeted repeatedly by the Army. Just in the first two months of 2009, this military

operation killed over 2,000 people and left more than 5,000 injured (Reuters 24th February 2009). Many of the survivors were victims of post-traumatic stress disorder.

These displaced Tamils faced the pressure of the separatist movement which refused to let them flee the combat zone and did not hesitate to open fire on those trying to do so. To cope with its losses, the LTTE forcibly conscripted able-bodied people and children and did not hesitate to use civilians as human shields by mingling with them and installing its equipment in their vicinity.

Overcrowding, lack of water, food, care and shelter increased the suffering of civilians. This situation was further aggravated by the government's decision to ban access to combat zones for non-governmental organizations. Thus, only the International Committee of the Red Cross was there to evacuate the wounded by ferry to Trincomalee, while organizations such as Doctors Without Borders had staff and equipment needed to support the efforts of the Red Cross. Tens of thousands of civilians of all ages were left to their fate by the government which preferred to condemn innocent civilians rather than risk letting witnesses enter. It was only with the final assault of the Army, which killed the historic leader of the Tigers, that the war ended. However, the end of military operations did not result in the release of civilians. All the survivors were sent to detention camps controlled by the Sri Lankan Army.

Detention camps

Displaced Tamils, who managed to escape the combat zone, have been placed by the Sri Lankan Army in detention camps (officially called welfare centers). These camps, surrounded by barbed wire and under the direct authority of the Army, was officially supposed to allow to separate LTTE combatants from civilians. Tamils were mistreated and had to bear the psychological pressure of Sri Lankan soldiers who suspected them of belonging to the LTTE. The military nature of these camps, denial of the right of circulation to these people, limited access to relatives and humanitarian organizations, and the indefinite nature of their detention constituted severe violations of international law. In doing so, the government gave more the impression of treating these refugees as prisoners of war rather than citizens to reintegrate into the nation. There were about 280,000 [\[19\]](#) civilians who found themselves, after several months of fighting, locked in overcrowded camps without any presence of international observers. The government's decision to ban NGOs from providing the psychological assistance to these war-ravaged populations is another crucial problem whose consequences could be felt within months or in years to come.

Tamils in Colombo

Throughout the military operations, the capital appeared to be relatively safer for Jaffnese Tamils. Indeed, unlike Jaffna and Wanni, the ethnic composition of the capital suggested they were unlikely to be bombed by the Sri Lankan armed forces. In Colombo, Jaffnese often preferred to settle in neighborhoods like Wellawatte or Dehiwela, where already many members of their community were already living, and considered safe for that reason.

However, the multiplication of LTTE suicide bomb attacks in the capital had reinforced the sense of mistrust vis-à-vis the Tamils from the North and East. The Tamil minority faced many problems in the capital city. Thus, its members were obliged to register at the nearest police station. Indeed, Tamils had to provide their identity card and their residence permit for Colombo during roadside checks or identity screenings. Those who were unable to provide these documents could be arrested. Freedom of movement was thus very limited. The horizon of the Tamils were often reduced to the places they were forced to attend, that is to say their home, workplace and children's schools. Their social circle remained limited and they preferred to stay home as much as possible. But even under their roofs, Tamils didn't feel safe: security forces commonly raided neighborhoods known to host a large Tamil community to verify that there were no members or sympathizers LTTE in these places. Although they considered themselves luckier than the Tamils remained in Jaffna peninsula or in Wanni, the harassment they had to endure gave them the feeling of being vulnerable and endangered. Colombo was thus a relative refugee space because of the everyday

pressure on the Tamil minority.

Since the end of the war and the reopening of the A9 road

Resettlement in Jaffna peninsula

Many Jaffnese who lived in Colombo took advantage of the end of the conflict to return to their home region. The high cost of living in the capital and the prospect of finding a more peaceful life in familiar surroundings, where the Tamils are by far the majority, explain this return. The government has also begun to release some of the Tamils who were confined in camps. These people returned to their home region to try to rebuild their lives. But many have lost everything in the conflict or are not allowed to resettle in their houses, some of which are occupied by the Army. It will also pose a problem for civilians who have lost part or all of their families in conflict and have not received any psychological assistance. How are these people going to succeed in rebuilding their lives in a region where reconstruction and economic activity are likely to stagnate?

Colombo

Not all Tamils from Jaffna have returned to their places of origin. The arrival of Jaffnese to Colombo took place in successive waves since the conflict began. Thus, most of the people who have moved before and during the period of cease-fire are definitively established in the capital with their family. Some of the Tamils who arrived after 2006 have decided, despite the cost of living in Colombo, to stay in the capital. They prefer to stay because they believe schools for their children are better in the capital than in Jaffna. People already employed are also reluctant to abandon their jobs to return to the North where they will not be sure of finding a job with an equivalent wage. Others remain, waiting to find an opportunity to leave the country.

The West: the last refuge

The military victory of the Army does not resolve the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka. The minority appears shattered by decades of political and armed confrontations without having gained any benefit so far. The memory of the pogrom against Tamils in 1983, the various atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan Army, the experience of displacements and finally the fate of Tamils in the internment camps reinforce the sense of victimization and unhappiness of the minority. The refusal of the Sri Lankan state to find a satisfactory solution for all communities of the country reinforces the idea among Jaffnese Tamils that their future is not in Sri Lanka but abroad. All this reinforces the willingness of Tamils to leave their country. Whether through marriage with a member of the diaspora, family reunification or by obtaining a student or professional visa, Jaffnese use the various options, both legal and illegal, to leave the island.

The success of the diaspora is another element that pushes Jaffnese to join their relatives abroad. The West continues to be the best and most desired 'refuge space'.

Conclusion

The victory of the Sri Lankan Army put an end to several decades of status quo between the belligerents. While officially the Tamil civilian population is freed and the national unity restored, the government treatment of those war-displaced people raises questions. Indeed, the continuous shelling by the Army of areas where high densities of Tamil civilians were concentrated, and the internment of 280,000 Tamils in detention camps, have increased their malaise. This minority feels neither safe nor at home in its country. The clear disrespect of Human Rights and international regulations protecting those war-displaced people will deeply affect Tamils who see another example of

the arrogance and power of Sinhala leaders.

Moreover, the defeat of the LTTE has not been used to initiate a movement of national reconciliation. The victory of the Sri Lankan Army has served, instead, to flatter Sinhalese nationalism, finally victorious over its Tamil rival. The 2010 election campaign, which opposed President Rajapakse to its former commander Fonseka, is a good example. Both Sinhalese nationalists, representing the two major parties in the country, have not addressed the issue of national reconciliation or promoted a more equitable integration of minorities. With the defeat of LTTE, the Tamil grievances seem not to be taken into account in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the Tamils will have only a marginal role politically, economically and culturally in Sri Lanka. How can we avoid the further marginalization of minorities in the island and guarantee their security against an ethno-nationalist power which does not seem open to any compromise?

At the same time, economic and cultural vitality of the diaspora in the West will encourage the migration of the Jaffnese to these countries. Indeed, if Jaffna remains in their hearts as their historic capital, it is more and more into new territories of the Tamil diaspora, such as La Chapelle in Paris and East Ham in London, known as Little Jaffna, that their identity and Jaffnese Tamil culture seem to flourish. Between Sri Lanka, where Tamils feel oppressed and endangered, and the West, which seems to open up limitless horizons, the choice seems obvious.

For those who are lucky enough to reach the West, other questions arise: how to integrate into these foreign societies without losing one's identity? How to position oneself vis-à-vis the conflict in Sri Lanka, once abroad? Should they support the LTTE at any cost or, contrarily, use their distance to find a new way to help Tamils back home? Finally, what is the latitude of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora vis-à-vis the LTTE, knowing that the Tigers have decided to utilize the diaspora so they can continue to exist despite their military defeat, and advocate for the creation a sovereign state for Tamils in Sri Lanka: the Tamil Eelam?

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Post-scriptum :

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[1] Chelvanayakam, leader of the main Tamil political party (Federal Party), concluded pacts with political representatives of the two main political parties in the country.

In 1957, after months of hunger strikes and peaceful demonstrations, he came to a compromise with Prime Minister SWRD Bandaranaike, leader of Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) to make Tamil, the administrative language of North and East of the island. But faced with opposition from Sinhalese nationalists, the agreement was abandoned. Following this failure, Chelvanayakam decided to conclude a pact with Senanayake, elected Prime Minister of Ceylon in 1965 and leader of the United National Party (UNP). The Federal Party entered in the government but the combined pressure of the opposition and the Sinhalese extremists pushed the Prime Minister to disregard the agreement with the moderate Tamil politicians.

[2] Name given by separatists to the independent Tamil State which would include the North and East of the island

[3] LTTE (*Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam*): is an independentist movement, founded in 1976 by V. Prebhakaran, whose stated aim is to defend the Tamils of Sri Lanka. For this, the organization claims the right to self-determination and the creation of the State, the Tamil Eelam, including the North and East of the island. To obtain their independence, the Tigers engaged in an armed struggle with the central government. This independentist movement did not hesitate to use force to eliminate his political rivals to assert itself as the sole representative of the interests of Tamils in the island. The Tigers also used suicide bombings as a means of action to advance their cause (Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the President of the Republic of Sri Lanka, Ranasinghe Premadasa, etc.). The LTTE emerged since 1987 as the key player in national politics. Indeed, the movement managed to cope with different attacks of the government Army and even the Indian forces which tried to disarm the separatist organisation by force. The Tigers run as a sovereign State territories they controlled militarily in the North and East of the country. The military defeat of the Tigers, in 17th May 2009, has undermined the movement. Its historic leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, is dead and LTTE has lost all its territorial possessions in the island. Nevertheless, the separatist movement still has strong support from the Tamil diaspora and has not abandoned his dream of creating an independent state for Tamils in the island.

[4] Nickname given to the LTTE fighters.

[5] Operation Liberation led by the Sri Lankan Army was frowned upon by India. On 29th July 1987, an agreement was signed between Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Sri Lankan President Junius Richard Jayawardene. The agreement provided that the Government of Sri Lanka to make concessions to Tamil demands, which implied decentralization of powers to the provinces, a referendum on the future status of the Eastern and Northern provinces and granted the Tamil language an official status. The Indian government agreed to restore order in Northern and Eastern Sri Lanka, through an intervention force, the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF). The IPKF was in charge of enforcing the cessation of fighting and disarm the Tamil rebel groups. When the LTTE fighters refused to surrender, the IPKF tried to compel them by force, leading to a conflict with the separatists. Indian troops were accused of violations of human rights and were facing increasing hostility of the Tamil population. For their part, the Sinhalese nationalists opposed to the prolonged presence of the Indian Army in Sri Lanka. This situation prompted the Sri Lankan government to request the departure of Indian troops. The Indian government decided to evacuate its troops from Sri Lanka in March 1990.

[6] Shelter spaces are areas where civilians fled to escape the armed conflict in their region of origin. The choices of these 'shelter spaces' was very heterogeneous. Civilians according to the case had in mind to flee fightings or avoid being in a zone controlled by one of the belligerents. Moreover, the 'refuge' nature of these spaces are relative. In territories controlled by LTTE, the perception of civilian, who saw the Sri Lankan Army as a hostile force trying to destroy the Tamil people, explains that many have preferred to follow the Tigers in 1995. Meanwhile, civilians in the LTTE areas lived in harsh lifestyle and, for some, were forcibly recruited into the separatist forces. Their freedom of thinking and movement were also controlled by LTTE which claimed to be the sole representation of the Tamil people. Moreover, the territories under LTTE control became during the last phase of the war the new theater of fightings in which civilians were trapped. So finally, we justify the use of the term 'shelter space' by the fact that these areas appears to civilians as relatively safer than the district of Jaffna.

[7] These are administrative subdivisions of the districts in Sri Lanka.

[8] Source: District Rehabilitation Reconstruction Secretariat (Jaffna).

[9] Quantitative statistical governmental sources have some bias. This raises the problem of collecting data in conflict zones with populations fluids. Moreover, numbers have been also used as a justification of a successful government policy rather than examined the ground realities. During war time, Government, like LTTE, used statistics as propaganda tool to show that civilians remained on territories freed by Sri Lankan Army and did not follow separatists in their retreat. During lull time, to strengthen the return to normalcy, the government administration no longer register as IDP civilians returning in their original district whereas some continue to live there in displacement and/or are dependents on assistance. Therefore we must use these official statistics with reservation.

[10] Results of a study I conducted in the Jaffna Municipal Council in 2005 with 45 people. Respondents, interviewed face to face in Tamil, lived in various areas of the city and were from different socio-economic backgrounds (age, gender, caste, occupation). I asked these Jaffnese where they were in 1987 during clashes between the Tigers and the IPKF, and then in 1995, during the displacements.

[11] Faced with the hostility of Muslims in the Eastern province against the creation of an independent Tamil State, the LTTE, ordered, in October 1990, to 75,000 Muslims living in the Northern province to leave it. The separatist movement wanted to expel a population considered as dissenting.

[12] Censuses of population of Jaffna D.S.D. 18/10/2001 and 2004, and the population censuses of D.S.D. / A.G.A. Division of Nallur, 31/10/2001 and 2004.

[13] Smallest administrative unit in Sri Lanka

[14] Hierarchical division in traditional Indian societies according to the purity of birth of any group of individuals distinguished by their activity.

[15] Caste traditionally of rice farmers. This social group dominates the social pyramid in Jaffna and hold its authority from the possession of land.

[16] It is traditionally the most discredited in Jaffna.

[17] EPDP: is a Tamil paramilitary group, the rival of the LTTE in Jaffna region, which also fought for an independent State. Face with the hegemony of Tigers, the EPDP opted to join the central government. The movement, which formally surrendered its weapons, was an ally of the government during last elections.

[18] source : <http://www.amnestyinternational.be/doc/article14689.html>

[19] http://www.msf.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/uploads/communiques/images_2009/pdf/2009_top_ten_fr_72dpi.pdf