

**IDENTITY, BELONGING AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN  
THE SRI LANKAN COMMUNITIES IN GERMANY**

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the dynamic relationship of Sinhalese and Tamils living in Germany in regards to their home and host country, and seeks to better understand the complexities of their political involvement. The research is based on qualitative research methodologies. The author conducted 30 interviews in Berlin during the period 2006–2008 to inform this research.

The research not only provides an overview of the historical contexts of Sri Lanka and Germany, it also links these histories with the processes of out-migration from Sri Lanka and in-migration to Germany. It then continues to analyse the construction of belonging in the context of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin. The research examines how far concepts of home, citizenship, nationalism and identity construction shape the sense of belonging of first and second generation Sinhalese and Tamils in Berlin. Finally, it analyses the ways the members of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities engage in economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities in the home and host country, and how far these activities shape belonging and are politically motivated. The research also considers and studies the gendered nature of belonging and transnational political practices.

The research uniquely combines the study of the Tamil diaspora with the study of the Sinhalese diaspora in Berlin. It allows new insights into the complex and multiple constructions of belonging and identity and into the interplay of gender, ethnicity and generations, and it highlights the importance of political activism in the conceptualization of belonging.

Key words: belonging, diaspora, gender, Germany, identity, Sri Lanka, transnationalism, qualitative research.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADS	Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes (Federal Anti-Discrimination Office)
AGG	Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz (General Equal Treatment Act)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
CP	Communist Party of Sri Lanka
CSU	Christlich Sozialistische Union (Christian Socialist Union)
DDC	District Development Council
EC	European Community
EPRLF	Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front
EROS	Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students
EU	European Union
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FP	Federal Party (of Sri Lanka)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
IATJ	International Association of Tamil Journalists
INSD	International Network of Sri Lankan Diaspora
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
JDS	Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka
JHU	Jathika Hela Urumaya (Buddhist Monks' Party)
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschland (Communist Party of Germany)
LSSP	Lanka Sama Samaja Party
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NFR	Networking for Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization

PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
PLOTE	People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam
PSO	Public Service Ordinance
PTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
PTOMs	Post-Tsunami Operational Management
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SLA	Sri Lanka Association Berlin e.V.
SLDF	Sri Lanka Democratic Forum
SLFP	Sri Lankan Freedom Party
SLMC	Sri Lanka Muslim Congress
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
TELO	Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation
TMVP	Thamil Makkal Vidudal Puligal
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
TRO	Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation
TULF	Tamil United Liberation Front
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNP	United National Party
UPFA	United People's Freedom Party
US	United States
VOIP	Voice Over Internet Protocol
WW II	World War II

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# DEDICATION

To my father,  
his wisdom, love and sense of justice

and

in solidarity with those  
struggling for peace and justice

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Most countries of the world are affected by migration flows, be it as a source, transit or destination country – or a combination of these. Migration patterns can be observed in various directions and the reasons for migration are manifold. In a globalized and interconnected world, international migration is gaining more importance, both in national and international politics. In 2010, an estimated 214 million people were on the move, of whom 49% were female (A/67/254, 2012; UN, 2009). This figure, however, only considers long-term international migrants and excludes undocumented migrants, short-term travellers and internally displaced persons. Even though the number of migrants is steadily growing, they only represent around 3% of the current world population (UN, 2009).

The first special rapporteur on the Human Rights of Migrants, Ms Gabriela Rodríguez Pizarro, defined migrants (in her report to the then UN Commission on Human Rights (E/CN.4/2000/82) in the context of protecting their human rights) as:

- “(a) Persons who are outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens, are not subject to its legal protection and are in the territory of another State;
  
- (b) Persons who do not enjoy the general legal recognition of rights which is inherent in the granting by the host State of the status of refugee, permanent resident or naturalized person or of similar status; and
  
- (c) Persons who do not enjoy either general legal protection of their fundamental rights by virtue of diplomatic agreements, visas or other agreements.” (Pizarro, 2000)

This working definition focuses on the legal protection of the rights of migrants and encompasses a broad conceptual framework without concentrating on the

reasons for departure from the country of origin or the legal status within the destination country. Indeed, international migration can therefore be considered as a move of people from one place to another for a longer period of time (Hammar et al., 1997b) and by crossing national borders (Hammar et al., 1997a); usually, a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence is part of this move (Lee, 1966).

For the purpose of this research, these definitions will apply. However, the target of investigation will not only concern 'international migrants' as described above, including asylum seekers, refugees, otherwise displaced or uprooted people, and economic migrants, but will also include persons who have become citizens of the host country after a period of being an international migrant.

These broad definitions are useful because they consider the increasingly complex and intersecting conditions that urge people to move: political persecution, conflict, economic instability and poverty, natural disasters or environmental degradation, as well as family links in foreign countries, study opportunities abroad, starting a family or generally the personal life situation all constitute reasons for leaving the home country, but a clear distinction between these causes of migration and the search for better living conditions is often difficult to establish. Richmond (1994) precisely points at the intertwining of political and economic causes, placing 'proactive' and 'reactive' migration at the two opposite ends of a migration continuum. The circumstances and conditions around the migrant define these opposite categories. Similar to this understanding, Van Hear (1998) refers to 'voluntary' and 'involuntary' migration, distinguishing the two through the level of choice one has to leave a country. However, these distinctions often do not reflect the reality of today's migration population, whose decision is frequently based within a continuum between 'voluntary' or 'proactive' and 'forced' or 'reactive' migration. These two conceptual frameworks are not interchangeable and can only be compared if they are considered circumstantial because a person who is 'forced' to leave is also proactive in the search for the best option to travel, for example, and, therefore, has a clear agency and is not just reactive. The important aspect,

however, is that very often there is not a clear-cut single reason to leave or settle in a country.

The contacts in the Sri Lankan diaspora communities across Europe confirm this continuum: many were forced to leave due to political reasons; at the same time, they have chosen a particular destination country because of their family or community ties in that country. In the case of Sri Lanka, this quite often happened among the Tamil population forced to leave and choosing either France, Switzerland or the UK where previous ties existed. Sometimes, this same 'forced' migrant may also turn into a 'voluntary' migrant; for example, once settled in a country, he may bring along his family from back home and stay on voluntarily, regardless of his legal status. Among the Sri Lankan Tamil population, mainly men left the country in order to escape either the threats or recruitment policies of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) or government repression. They then brought along their wives and children at a later stage and then, when they would have been actually able to return, they have chosen to stay on for a better future for their children.

Even though Sri Lanka has a significant number of women migrating to the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, as domestic helpers, the predominant female migration pattern in the context of this research is tied to men, either as wives or through arranged marriages.

*"I came to Berlin in 1995 as a wife of a Jaffna man. I did not know my husband before but we were three sisters in the family and we all wanted to get out. The two other sisters are now settled in Norway and Canada. My parents passed away, so we are a dispersed family. Our children speak different languages but we keep our relations somehow." (Theva, Tamil, female, first generation)*

It is neither unusual for women to come to Western countries to marry Tamil men nor for family members to settle in different countries of the West. Often, brothers from the same family migrate to the same country, whereas sisters settle in different countries due to their marriage. Despite the alienation and loss

of family that many women experience, they are still bound by family and community, even at a global level. An arranged marriage can be ‘voluntary’ as in the case above, and may then “lead to a lifelong supportive partnership, but some of them can be accurately described as ‘forced’.” (Caritas Internationalis, 2011: 5)

The continuum from a ‘forced’ migrant to a ‘voluntary’ one may also apply to ‘voluntary’ migrants who suddenly become ‘forced’ to stay outside their country of origin when the political situation in the country changes and prevents them from returning back home. This experience may be faced by a male interviewee from the Sinhalese community who left for Germany as a student and, given his involvement in the diaspora networks in Germany, may now find it difficult to return. All these examples just show that many mixed forms of migration exist and that these dichotomies between ‘voluntary’ or ‘proactive’ and ‘forced’ or ‘reactive’ migration are often created by states and do not consider the viewpoint of the migrant (Martin, 2001; Hammar et al., 1997b).

Castles and Miller (2009) apply a different categorization of an ‘international migrant’, defining eight sub-categories, namely temporary labour migrants, highly skilled and business migrants, irregular migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, forced migrants, family members reunification and return migrants. This categorization as such neither considers Richmond’s and Van Hear’s continuum concept, nor does it differentiate between the reason for migration and the legal status of the migrant, but, rather, such categorizations allow – as Castles himself mentions – migration flows to be better controlled. States create these differentiations in order to establish their policies of reception and return. In the European Union, asylum application procedures or temporary study and employment visas<sup>1</sup> (Daily News, 2011), as well as family reunification, are currently the only ways to gain legal entry. Consequently, states have imposed restrictive admission mechanisms, such as strict visa regimes or carrier sanctions, in order to control access. Yet, these mechanisms – often targeted

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<sup>1</sup> Italy, for example, signed an agreement in 2011 to provide 3,500 jobs for Sri Lankan passport holders in Italy (see Daily News, 22 October 2011). Germany has provided work and study visa for Sri Lankans, but on a much smaller scale.

towards and affecting asylum seekers – neither adequately address the protection needs of migrants nor their rights, precisely because failed asylum seekers, economic or irregular migrants are often not considered in this framework as they should be (Martin, 2001). However, the system is undergoing major modifications as the EU is facing demographic changes that will require large numbers of skilled workers in the near future. As a response, channels for regular and legal immigration into the EU are currently under discussion.

The determination of the legal status indeed often remains secondary in regards to the migrants' relations to the country of origin, although the level of integration can be considered as an important facet of the relationship between the country of origin and the destination country. Therefore, rather than deciding on a useful classification of international migrants, the focus here shall be on the characteristics of the migrants in regards to their settlement in the destination country. Motte et al. (1999) describe “transnational migration” as a particular case of international migration characterized not only by a change of location and a certain pluri-locality, but also by building different social relations across borders that link the country of origin and destination country. Other characteristics would involve the identification with both cultures, which is facilitated through transport and communications technology. Many of the interview partners have confirmed this pluri-locality and shift between cultures, even though the dynamics are often more complex and will be extensively analysed in the next chapter. The research focuses particularly on transnational migrants, regardless of their legal status and motives for departure.

### ***Relevance of this research and research questions***

The causes and patterns of migration have frequently been subject to research in regards to both Sri Lanka and Germany (Schröder, 2003; Fair, 2005; Vimalarajah et al., 2010; Cheran, 2003; Deshingkar et al., 2006). Nevertheless, specific research on the particularities of Sri Lankan migration into Berlin has never been conducted. Berlin has been uniquely characterized as a divided city

until 1989, which also included different migration policies between the then German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The historical circumstances therefore have not only been shaped by the conflict in Sri Lanka itself, but also by the political context in Germany.

A number of diaspora and transnational communities have been researched by different scholars, for example, Kurds, Bosnians, Armenians, Iranians and Somalis, and lessons can be drawn from these research projects. Even though the academic world discovered Sri Lanka and its diaspora population in the aftermath of the tsunami, the focus of research remained on the developmental aspects of the relationship between the diaspora as a transnational community with its country of origin. This research focuses, however, on the political dimensions of the relationship between home and abroad and the emergence of collective identities among Sinhalese and Tamil communities, even though the lines between politics and development are at times blurred.

In addition, the main attention in current Sri Lankan research is given to the Tamil population organized through the structures of non-state bodies, such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This does not take due account of the heterogeneity among the Tamil as well as Sinhalese population living abroad. Even though the research will recognize the importance of the Tamil diaspora, it will also bring to the fore other community networks that are equally well organized and functioning with similar mechanisms as the Tamil diaspora. Therefore, the perspective and angle of this research is rather unique in attempting to analyse the political engagement of the two major Sri Lankan ethnic communities in Sri Lanka and Germany and to compare their perceptions – in order to prove their commonalities and differences.

Diaspora and transnationalism studies have been an emerging field of study in recent years. Despite the wide range of available literature, only limited attempts have been made to integrate concepts of diaspora/transnationalism with concepts of citizenship, identity, gender and belonging. The available literature highlights specific aspects of these theoretical concepts, but does not

necessarily link them together in the context of transnationalism and political activism.

Therefore, this research will examine the relationship of Sri Lankans in Germany towards their country of origin and their 'host' country, as well as the ways in which a particular Sri Lankan identity develops among those living in Germany, resulting in a certain sense of belonging and a particular notion of 'home'. These concepts are interrelated and are constructed differently by women and men. The research analyses how economic, political, social, cultural, and virtual activities develop abroad and how they impact on the political engagement of Sinhalese and Tamils.

Within this context, the following four research questions guided this research:

- Which historical circumstances resulted in out-migration from Sri Lanka and what are the different forms of settlement in Berlin?
- What kind of belonging and what collective identities have emerged among Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin?
- What is the gendered character of collective identities and political processes involved in the development of transnationalism and diaspora politics of these communities?
- How are members of the Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin perceiving and assessing their political engagement in nationalist projects?

Overall, by following the above-mentioned guiding questions, this research allows an examination of migration patterns into Berlin, exemplified through the Sri Lankan communities. It attempts to fill a significant gap of information and analysis that exists in relation to collective politics of the Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities. The analysis of the diaspora communities as agents participating at material and ideological levels in national projects reveals the dynamics between home and 'abroad'.

## ***The structure of this thesis***

In order to examine the research questions, this research is divided into six substantive chapters:

Following this introduction, chapter 2 outlines the epistemological and methodological framework in which the research is located. Knowledge is situated (Harding, 1987; Haraway, 1988) and thus, this research is defined by the researcher's feminist ontological and epistemological position, which is shaped by her political and academic involvement with and for Sri Lanka. The research is based on qualitative research conducted through in-depth, semi-structured interviews among 30 Sri Lankans, both Sinhalese and Tamils, in Berlin. This methodological approach facilitates the development of an understanding of processes and meanings involved in the research questions. The social construction of the realities of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin is emphasized, the relationship between the researcher and the topic of research, the situational limitations involved in the research process, as well as an exploration of the creation of social experiences and their meaning is taken into account (Denzin et al., 2008). Ethical considerations that have been considered during the research process are outlined. Therefore, the chapter provides a brief description of the overall research design.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to the history of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka after independence until the end of the war in 2009. It contextualizes the research and allows gaining a better understanding on the manifold reasons for migration out of Sri Lanka, but also provides an important background against which the experiences and the positions of the diaspora communities in Berlin can be assessed. The different ethnic groups in Sri Lanka have their distinct history of migration linked to the political and economic situation in the country. Sinhalese came to Germany due to political reasons in the early 1970s; 20 years later, they were mainly economic migrants. Tamils, in contrast, left Sri Lanka from the early 80s onwards due to the conflict situation in the north and east of the country (McDowell, 1996; Fuglerud, 1999; Cheran, 2003).

Chapter 4 provides an overview of Germany's migration history, from the end of World War II until 2009. Germany has for long rejected the notion of an 'immigration country' and its economic miracle of the 1960s and 1970s was based on the 'guest workers' from Turkey, Italy and Portugal, among others. Sri Lankan migrants arrived mainly in the mid-1980s, which can be directly linked to the anti-Tamil riots of 1983. At the time, entry to Germany was through East Germany. The fall of the Berlin Wall had a major impact on asylum seekers and refugees, but also on foreign migrants more generally. The chapter shows how the political context has shaped the way migrants are perceived and treated within the German policy framework. Only the red-green coalition government in 1998 brought positive change towards a more multicultural society. Consequently, several legal reforms were undertaken and Germany has finally embraced its immigrants and the need for a society marked by diversity. Only through this historical contextualization can an understanding of the different perceptions of the Sri Lankan communities towards their home country be gained.

Chapter 5 examines the theoretical framework underpinning some of the data collected. After a short introduction of the Yuval-Davis (2011) analytical framework on belonging, the different components are discussed in more detail. Belonging is constructed by the interrelationship of social locations, emotional attachments and identifications, as well as the political and ethical value system. It necessitates an intersectional analysis in order to give justice to the complex realities shaping the individual. This framework, however, is put in relation to the diaspora communities in Germany and, hence, the academic literature will be enriched by the narratives of the interviewees. Particularly in the diaspora, the sense of belonging is shaped by the relationship to home, the citizenship status of the migrant and the nationalist projects in which they are embedded. Identities are narratives that can be contained within and outside the nation (Edensor, 2002), which can lead to the formation of specific diaspora or transnational identities. However, identities are negotiated through multiple mediations of political and historical practices that are shaped by different social locations. In fact, diaspora identities can be local and global at once, representing networks of transnational identifications that encompass imagined

and encountered communities (Brah, 1996). This chapter therefore provides this overarching framework, which influences the political engagement of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin.

Chapter 6 analyses the transnational political practices of the diaspora communities in Berlin. The collected data provide the basis for this chapter, which is structured in economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities (Al-Ali et al., 2001b; Vertovec, 2001). These activities are either targeting directly the home country or are located within the host country. They are influenced by the reasons for migration and the political context in Sri Lanka (chapter 3), Germany's policies towards migrants and their integration policies (chapter 4), as well as the different components shaping belonging (chapter 5). In addition, each section of the chapter is specifically assessed in regards to women's involvement. This chapter is a reflective chapter, attempting to tie these different elements together and to – at least, approximatively – give justice to the different realities of the Sinhalese and Tamils living in the diaspora in Berlin. At the same time, it provides new insights into diaspora and transnational political activism.

The final chapter constitutes the concluding chapter, which transforms the collected data into new knowledge by synthesizing the findings of the previous chapters. In this way, a perspective for the future is provided and areas for further research are identified.

## **CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

Diaspora and transnational studies have now become distinct academic fields, researching all aspects of diaspora and transnational communities. Interdisciplinary research is conducted to study causes and patterns of migration worldwide and to analyse transnational practices of diaspora and transnational communities. Within this context, the Tamil diaspora and transnational communities have been subject to investigation. However, only limited attempts were undertaken so far to analyse the Sinhala diaspora and transnational communities. Therefore, this research examines the relationship of both Tamils and Sinhalese in Germany, particularly in Berlin, towards the home and host country, the ways identities are constructed among these communities in Berlin resulting in different forms of belonging. The research analyses the economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities conducted by the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Berlin and their political impact on the home and host country. As such, the research attempts to gain an understanding of and new insights into the dynamics of the Tamil and Sinhala diaspora communities in Berlin. The findings of the research should allow policy-makers in the home and host country to better comprehend the complexity of diaspora and transnational communities and adapt relevant policies accordingly.

In order to understand the analysis and the findings of this research, the epistemological and methodological framework in which this research is located is outlined in this chapter. The choice of this framework is informed by the researcher's research ethics and is based on her epistemological framework. The researcher's (i.e., my) world view and experiences, however, were not only shaped by my Austrian background, but also through my long involvement in Sri Lanka and the diaspora communities in Europe, particularly in Germany, as well as my links to the feminist and political movements in Sri Lanka. This allowed me to learn and grow through different perspectives, but still search for a

common denominator paving the way for political action. The chosen research approach, but also the research topic, reflects these experiences.

A research approach comprises two interrelated parts, which, according to Harding, are the research methodology – a “theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” – and research methods – “techniques of gathering evidences” (1987: 3). Following this definition, the research methodology adopted in this research concerns how the nexus history and migration, the concept of belonging and identity formation and the practices of the diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin have been analysed in order to understand the political engagement of the Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin. This research is based on qualitative research methodologies. The first part of the research aims to explore and contextualize the migration flows from Sri Lanka and to Germany (chapters 3 and 4), as well as the theoretical concepts of belonging, ‘home’, citizenship, nationalism, and identity construction (chapter 5). Narratives obtained through the interviews will inform these chapters but will then be used more frequently when analysing the transnational practices of the Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora communities in Germany and the resulting political activism (chapter 6).

The research methods are informed by this methodological framework and refer to the ways in which the interviews have been conducted in Berlin and how the secondary data has been obtained. The ‘dialectical’ research approach can be seen as a guiding principle of both the research methodology and the research methods because of its dynamics and the permanent shift between the different levels of analysis and between the researcher and the researched. This approach leads to transformations of existing knowledge and can create new knowledge.

## ***Epistemological framework***

The epistemological framework depends on the position of the researcher and his/her 'experiences of being' (Haraway, 1988) and will be influenced by the researcher's understanding of social worlds. This will ultimately determine also the knowledge generated through the research (Mason, 1996). I have chosen the framework of feminist epistemologies as it will allow the application of a gender lens, but also enable the perception of women and men as 'knowers' within the research process (Harding, 1987; Hughes, 2002). Harding (1987) distinguishes between feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint as two ways to theorize women's experiences. In my research, I cannot claim to have the same experiences as the researched, even if they are women. The different socialization and material realities in which we are living are shaping our realities and understanding. Therefore, it is important to recognize this difference but also undertake the effort to understand the realities of the researched and to find possible common denominators in order to be able to achieve social change and impact on a wider policy framework together (Harding, 1987). Hence, this research is located within the standpoint theory, which is situated in the life and the realities of the interviewees and their marginalized position within the host society. Not only are women's standpoints taken into account in the research, but also those of men from within the diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin. The actualities of their lives are sites through which "concepts and theories are examined for how they are activated in organising social relations" (Smith in Hughes, 2002: 153). Knowledge, however, is, according to Harding (1987), not a perspective but an achievement. A standpoint can only be achieved through forms of critical consciousness, reflexivity and political struggle (Harding, 1991; Hughes, 2002).

Along the lines of Harding's concept of 'strong objectivity' (1991), I value the perspective of my interlocutors but I do not go 'native' or merge myself with them but, rather, attempt to consider the particularity of their historical, political, social and cultural locations from a critical distance. This leads to reflexivity, which includes my own role as researcher in this process. It not only means that

I underwent a continuous process of awareness and reflection in order to posit myself in relation to the interviewees, but also that I am aware of the risks involved, for example, in terms of power relations and ethical considerations. I am, on the one hand, a 'foreigner' to their lives and struggles and, on the other hand, I am for many also a friend and a person in solidarity with their struggles. Therefore, throughout the research period, I was both an insider and an outsider to the research process (Adler, 2004; Merton, 1972). This position was determined by my interactions with the interviewees and by the social and political context within which the interview took place (Kusow, 2003). I was defined by "shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (Narayan, 1993: 671).

So reflexivity applied here also means that the way I perceive and describe the social realities of the interviewees not only describes them but also constitutes them (Miller et al., 2002). I do not claim to apply a value-free objectivity as expected in traditional research: rather, I have applied "conscious subjectivity" (Duelli Klein, 1983: 94).

Along similar lines, Haraway pleads for the inclusion of "embodied and situated knowledges" (1988: 582 - 583), including the researcher's ones. Situated knowledge also means that the women interviewed are "agents of knowledge" (Harding, 1987: 3). This has to be recognized by me as an outsider to the Sri Lankan diaspora communities. The incorporation of these situated knowledges will lead to a "fusion of horizons" (Nielsen, 1990: 29): The standpoints expressed in the different interviews, these varied 'horizons', can be connected to each other. A synthesis of the interviewee's perspectives will result from this 'fusion', which will contribute to an enlargement and broadening of my own 'horizon' and of my knowledge of the dynamics of the Sri Lankan conflict situation and of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin. In de Vries' terminology, a "performative" conception (1992: 79) can be achieved, and this synthesis is not only an enactment of cultural knowledge but, rather, its production (de Vries, 1992).

Important to the production of knowledge is also the relationship to the group being researched – in my case, the diaspora communities in Berlin. Collins (2000) has coined the term ‘dialogical approach’ within the context of Black feminist thought whereby she outlined that thinking results in changed actions, which, in turn, again stimulates a changed consciousness. So, in order to produce knowledge, an ongoing dialogue occurs in which action and thought inform one another. In applying such an approach, it is essential to recognize my relations to ‘the’ diaspora communities.

Of course, ‘the’ diaspora communities in Berlin are not one single, coherent group, rather – and this will be shown throughout the research – they are very heterogeneous among themselves: as women and men, as Sinhalese and Tamils, as first and second generation. So these broad categories are diverse at two levels: within each of the categories and between them. In addition, different power relations influence both intra- and inter-categorical relationships. So the positions and social locations of each interviewee are different and shifting. Even if similarities are found, they may still follow different value systems (Yuval-Davis, 1999c). Hence, in order to produce new knowledge, I have to recognize these dynamics, on the one hand, and find common ground, on the other.

For this to happen, it is also important to recognize that research also involves imagination of “why, whether and what we are ready to experience, perceive and know” (Stoetzler et al., 2002:325). This imagination is situated or subjective and is determined by our lives. It will also influence my own research but it does influence also the narratives of my interviewees. The acknowledgement of ‘situated imaginations’ will also allow social agency to be recognized as being driven by values, ideals and goals (Stoetzler et al., 2002). It is on this basis that a “transversal dialogue” (Stoetzler et al., 2002: 328) is possible, recognizing the differences within the diaspora communities, and yet find the common ground among differently positioned interviewees based on a shared value system.

My involvement in Sri Lanka is based on many years of solidarity work, which led to empathy (Nielsen, 1990; Scott, 1993) with the interviewed persons and

played an important role in experiencing and recognizing the members of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin as knowledgeable subjects. It also helped me to reach 'conscious subjectivity', which is linked to "partial identification" with the interviewees and a "view from below" (Mies, 1978: 47 - 48). Yet, I applied a 'multiple consciousness', as a White woman, as an outsider to the society, as a person involved in Sri Lanka and as a researcher, in order to achieve a critical distance from the interviewees. My attempt is not to speak for or on behalf of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities but to 'approximate truth'. Truth, according to Walker, comes only "when all sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one" (Walker in Collins, 2000: 38). This approximation has to be based on situated imaginations and transversal dialogue and it contributes one piece to the picture within a 'whole story'. Therefore, to approximate truth and to find common ground among the interviewees is part of the challenge of this research, but it will also be the basis for the production of new knowledge.

### ***Methodological framework***

The choice of the research methodology was influenced by my own experiences within the diaspora communities but also by the attempt to appreciate the interviewees' experiences and positions as expressed in the interviews. Therefore, I have chosen a qualitative research approach as a basic methodological framework.

There is no right or wrong approach to research; rather, I have chosen and consider qualitative research as the more appropriate way to address my research questions and to serve my research purpose. ***Qualitative research*** focuses on the socially constructed nature of realities and is characterized by situational constraints and by the close relationship of the researcher with the topic of research. It is oriented to processes and meanings, and analyses the construction of social experiences in order to give them meaning (Denzin et al., 2008). Therefore, qualitative research allows me to understand the research

dynamics and to locate the research within the epistemological framework as outlined above. Through qualitative research, I am able to address the differentiated social locations of my interviewees and I can locate them within the feminist paradigm of recognizing them as 'knowledgeable agents'. In addition, qualitative research allows me to understand the manifold social realities of the members of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin in a differentiated way.

One concern in qualitative research is the identification and the understanding of the different perspectives of the interviewees, the description of their problem and the analysis of their strategies to resolve the problem. This provides a general framework for the analysis of the collected data. (Sapsford et al., 2006). Qualitative research necessitates an interpretative and flexible approach in order to understand the meanings, interpretations and experiences of the interviewed individuals (Liamputtong, 2010).

Indeed, my research wants to reveal processes and relationships among the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin. My concern and interest in this research was to understand the dynamics and processes shaping the sense of belonging of both Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora communities and their political activism resulting from this. Not only is Germany as a context of Sri Lankan diaspora under-researched, but also the Sinhalese diaspora community has rarely been of interest to researchers worldwide. Hence, the starting point of my research was to collect data but with an open mind and without preconceived hypotheses.

My research relied on in-depth stories or narratives through which the interviewees described their worlds (Silverman, 2013). Thus, the interview situation became "micro-sites for production of narratives" (Czarniawska, 2009: 657). The answers to my interview questions transformed into narratives; in fact, my questions evoked them.

These narratives are "personal stories shaped by the knowledge, experiences, values and feelings of the persons who are telling them" (Moen, 2006: 5), but

they are also 'collective' in so far as they are influenced by the political, social, cultural and institutional settings surrounding them. Therefore, narratives are contextual and represent not only one voice of the individual, but many (Moen, 2006). They allow an analysis of the way the interviewee is presenting himself/herself and how they construct themselves. According to Hendry (2009), individuals construct meaning through complex and multiple ways that are expressed through narratives. This implies that the researcher has to dare to cross boundaries and explore new ways of thinking during the process of analysis. In-depth stories and narratives also require active listening through which the researcher is "seeing the world from the perspective of our subjects" (Glassner and Loughlin in Silverman, 2013: 125).

The use of in-depth stories and narratives goes hand in hand with the epistemological framework used in this research. The interviewees choose to tell a story and sometimes leave other stories untold. I considered different accessible materials and did not just restrict myself to the written text or the spoken word. I merged the existing literature with my interview data, especially in chapter 3, 'The Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka and its Migration Flows', chapter 4, 'From Guest Workers to a 'Multicultural Society' in Germany', and chapter 5, 'Belonging, Citizenship and Identity'. Chapter 6, 'Transnational Political Practices', is based on the in-depth stories, notes from observations and conversations, relevant visual materials, but also newspaper articles, social media and other data. The narratives were also shaped by culturally specific communication styles, facial and paralinguistic expressions. The interviewees not only shared experiences and described events, but also conveyed thoughts and feelings. In this way, narratives gave external expression to internal representations of the concepts and practices researched (Squire et al., 2013).

Qualitative research allows, among other things, for an interdisciplinary approach, for bridging theory and practice, and for enabling relations between politics and research (Squire, 2008). This makes this methodology particularly relevant for my research topic: I want to fill the existing knowledge gap in regards to a more comprehensive understanding of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin and their engagement in politics.

Qualitative research, however, also faces criticism and challenge. This is mainly linked to the reliability, validity, transferability, credibility and confirmability of the data (Silverman, 2013; Mason, 1996; Sapsford et al., 2006; Marshall et al., 2010).

*Reliability* refers to the degree of consistency in ensuring the assignment of instances to the same category (Hammersley, 1992). Reliability can be ensured in my research through the use of codes that are assigned consistently to the narratives. In addition, I was the only person to handle this data and, therefore, could apply the same logic to each narrative. Notes taken during the process helped to record the categorization and the assignment strategy.

*Validity* is the extent to which the narrative accurately represents the research questions or the research topic (Hammersley, 1992). Validity can relate to the generation of data and to the interpretation of data (Mason, 1996). I have addressed the problem of validity through different means: On the one hand, 'anecdotalism', which is used in the research, can be validated through a process of triangulation whereby the narrative will be looked at from different angles, by different persons. Often, different interviewees could provide this triangulation. On the other hand, in a few cases, I was able to undertake a validation by the respondent (Silverman, 2013); this means I could send some of my findings to the person and check their reaction to it. Finally, I have tried to apply the principle of 'refutability' (Silverman, 2013), which means that I did look out for different voices, not always to validate the original data but also to show and actually prove the diversity of data and positions.

*Transferability* refers to the generalizability of the findings. This entails the question of how far the research can be useful for other similar research questions, and to what extent the analysis has more general applicability (Mason, 1996). My research does not claim necessarily that the data is transferable as such: Sri Lanka and Germany are very specific contexts, the diaspora communities are relatively particular, hence, a simple transferability would not give justice to this complex context. However, having embedded the

research within a theoretical framework and systematically analysing the data should allow others to apply a similar analytical framework to their contexts. Hence, only under these conditions, transferability should be possible.

*Credibility* refers to the way that the interviewees have been adequately identified and described. For this purpose, I have explained in the next section in more detail the data collection and analysis process to facilitate a reasonable assessment of the credibility of my findings (Silverman, 2013). In addition, I have tried to address this concern by contextualizing my interviewees in the research.

Finally, *confirmability* refers to the concept of objectivity and how far the findings can also be confirmed by others. I have tried to address confirmability through some sort of triangulation process but also through my own integrity and engagement in the research. This also meant that I have tried to deconstruct complex meanings and narratives in its different parts. This should allow the reader to follow the deconstruction process and, in doing so, be able to confirm the findings.

### ***Considerations regarding the research methods and data analysis***

Research methods are techniques of data collection. I used primary and secondary data as sources of information. The ***primary data*** are based on the interviews conducted in Berlin over a relatively long period of time, namely between 2006 and 2008. The first set of interviews was carried out during the ceasefire period and after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The second set of interviews then followed after the government had withdrawn officially from the ceasefire agreement and the war actually restarted again. This has had a major impact on the perceptions of the interviewees and their positioning. As the political context has changed over the period of data collection, the interviews also provide unique data on perceptions and sentiments of members of the

diaspora and transnational communities towards their country of origin at times of the ceasefire and at times of war. The research period did not extend beyond 2008 because the end of the war was declared in May 2009, with the LTTE militarily defeated and their organization destroyed. This impacted on the political context and changed the dynamics in the Sri Lankan diaspora communities dramatically.

Germany as the country of investigation was chosen because it hosts a variety of different diaspora networks and individuals. In contrast to some other countries, Germany represents the heterogeneity and complexity of the Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities in all its dimensions: members of the two ethnic groups, Sinhalese and Tamils, live side-by-side; Sinhalese of different political convictions, as well as Tamils with diverse political backgrounds and ideologies have found their way to Germany; the reasons for migration to Germany were forced and voluntary, conflict- and economic-induced; Sri Lankan citizens, as well as German citizens of Sri Lankan origin, are participating in Germany's society; and finally, first and second generation Sri Lankans, that is, Sri Lankan-Germans, have been interviewed. This enormous heterogeneity allows for cross-examining and analysing the research questions from very different angles.

Berlin as a particular site of research was selected because of the high and diverse concentration of Sri Lankans with the above-mentioned profiles. Even though there may be other cities in Germany with a higher density of Sri Lankans, for example, Oberhausen or Stuttgart, they may not be as diverse as in Berlin.

The method of research was based on semi-structured, focused, in-depth interviews with open-ended questions. I felt that this approach was appropriate to "uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is known yet" (Strauss et al., 1990: 19). The questions concerned the following thematic blocks, which were entry points for a more in-depth conversation: personal background; migration history (reason/travel); arrival in Germany; stay in Germany (settlement/residence title/citizenship status/work); contacts to Sri

Lanka/Germany; activities in Sri Lanka/Germany/co-ethnics; self-identification; cultural practices and value system; future for Sri Lanka (peace/war).

The interviews were all conducted face-to-face in Berlin and I had travelled to Berlin for these occasions. The advantages in interviewing personally were the high response rate and the possibility to unobtrusively observe the interviewee and his or her setting (Singleton Jr et al., 1993). All persons contacted for the interview agreed to the interview freely, although I was aware that the cultural setting may have made saying “no” difficult. Yet, interviewees could have expressed their disagreement in other ways and in more subtle language. This, however, did not occur. My position as insider/outsider and as a known person to the community, sometimes also having been introduced through a broker, helped to access the participants (Liamputtong, 2010).

The face-to-face interviews allowed me also to observe the interviewee’s reactions to my questions, their body language, and their hesitations in responding and their silences. These were important aspects in understanding the narratives of the interviewee, and it required my own immersion into the culture to be able to interpret them adequately. These observations are woven into the analysis of data and will be highlighted in the analytic chapters where relevant. Occasionally, the body language of the interviewee helped me to understand when I had to reword or explain my question to better reflect the intended meaning. This was crucially important to ensure the reliability and validity of my research.

I did not allot a particular length of time to each interview. Interviews lasted, on average, 1.5 hours, and ranged from 45 minutes to 3.5 hours. I have been flexible in this regard in order not to disrupt the story-telling of the interviewee. The semi-structured nature of my questions, however, helped to ensure that all the thematic blocks outlined above were addressed.

In some instances, telephone and Skype interviews were also conducted to clarify or verify specific aspects of my findings. Such interviews, however,

targeted only persons whom I had interviewed earlier or other key informants whom I knew from other settings.

The research focused on Sinhala and Tamil communities only. The Sri Lankan Muslim community is relatively insignificant in Berlin and, hence, I did not include them in my sample.

The sample was otherwise determined by a snowball sampling technique: I know a limited number of renowned Sri Lankans in Berlin, both Sinhalese and Tamil, who are well anchored in their respective communities. They were able to act as a 'culture broker' (Liamputtong, 2010) and to introduce me to other Sri Lankans. Eide and Allen consider snowballing as:

“an effective method of helping the researcher to be known to others by the process of positive recommendations... Snowballing provides opportunities for the broker and participants to vouch for the cultural competency of the researcher to new contacts” (2005: 6).

The politicized context of Sri Lankan diaspora communities, indeed, requires such introductions in order to be able to access the interviewees. It helped to build trust and create a friendly interview setting. I was fully aware, however, that precisely this politicization but also the heterogeneity of the communities required an outreach beyond the usual contacts of my brokers. To balance such sample bias, I considered parameters which were important determinants to achieve my research objectives: I then purposively reached out to other persons who did not represent alternative Sri Lankan politics but were ideologically considered to reproduce a nationalist or mainstream Sinhala or Tamil discourse. The brokers, but also the different interviewees, helped to identify these persons or provided me with their contact details.

My interviews considered the following variables: women/men, Sinhala/Tamil, first/second generation, and reason of migration (political/economic migrant). In total, 30 persons were interviewed and an attempt was made to keep a certain balance between the numbers of interviewees belonging to the different

categories. The higher number of men and Tamils in the interview sample mirrors the higher presence of men and Tamils within the Sri Lankan diaspora in Berlin in contrast to women and Sinhalese.

Despite the outreach to different ideological groupings, the different shadings of Sri Lankan politics is hard to reflect in all its dimensions. Although Sinhalese nationalists have been interviewed, the far-right Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists are not appropriately reflected in the sample, partly because their concentration in Berlin is comparatively less than in other cities and countries, for example, Italy.

Finally, the sample remains a reflection of the different political circumstances: For example, in the first round of interviews, all interview partners agreed to speak out on all thematic blocks but this has gradually changed with the political context and, in the second round of interviews, i.e., during the full-out war situation, many of the interviewees restricted themselves due to fear of repercussions and personal feelings of insecurity. The application of semi-structured interviews (Miller, 1991) allowed the interviewees, to a large extent, a certain freedom to reply according to their understanding of the situation and their individual feeling of security in order to ensure a protective environment.

Table 1 below provides disaggregated data based on sex, ethnic group and generation. These three elements have been used to analyse the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees. They intersect with other social locations, such as gender, class, caste and religion.

**Table 1: Interviewees by ethnicity, generation and gender**

<b>No. 30</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> generation</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> generation</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Sinhalese</b>	<b>Tamils</b>	<b>Sinhalese</b>	<b>Tamils</b>	
<b>Men</b>	5	12	1	2	20
<b>Women</b>	2	3	1	4	10
	7	15	2	6	30

All interviews were conducted in either English or German, hence no interpreter was needed. None of the interviewees wanted to conduct the interview in their own mother tongue, Sinhala or Tamil. On two occasions, friends of the interviewees helped in translating particular thoughts if the German or English equivalent words could not be found to express themselves. The language capabilities of the interviewees, however, indicated to some extent their level of integration into German society and their social status or affiliation to specific strata of society, although this was not a common rule.

Language, in general, is an important feature of qualitative research because it permits the interviewees to convey their thoughts and feelings, and to identify meanings in their social realities (Liamputtong, 2010). The Sri Lankan society, however, also relies heavily on paralinguistic expressions, such as smiling, different ways of head movement, facial expressions, hand movements, voice and tonal expressions, and general body language. Often, hesitations and disagreements are expressed paralinguistically rather than verbally. Silence is an important feature of the Sri Lankan style of communication. The first generation particularly relies on these paralinguistic expressions, whereas the second generation is more adapted to the German 'directness' of verbal expressions.

Besides these interviews, key informants in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora from different research institutes, human rights and women's organizations were interviewed. Owing to the political context, key informants found their space for progressive politics after the war had resumed only outside their own country, and Geneva has become a hub for informal interactions between the different groups. These regular personal contacts proved useful for the research in order to receive a sense of the changing role of the diaspora as perceived by human rights activists living in Sri Lanka itself. I also met other key informants in London, Berlin and Stuttgart.

In addition, I attended different diaspora conferences in Germany that took place in October each year between 2006 and 2011, and in April between 2007 and 2009. I also participated in the activities of the International Network of Sri

Lankan Diaspora (INSD) and in the founding event of Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS), as well as in Geneva-based human rights activities on Sri Lanka (Human Rights Council sessions held between 2007 and 2012 in Geneva and NGO talks between diaspora LTTE and Sri Lankan-based activists in September 2007).

The perspectives of the key informants and these informal discussions with different diaspora groups on different occasions in Geneva and elsewhere, as well as my notes on observations made during these interviews and at these conferences, complemented the interviews conducted in Berlin. These additional data allowed me to cross-check some of the interview findings and it provided additional insights into the dynamics of diaspora politics.

I was in Sri Lanka for a period of eight months immediately after the tsunami in 2005. Unfortunately, due to the deteriorating political situation, one research visit to Sri Lanka planned for December 2008 had to be cancelled and my involvement in human rights activities in Geneva after the end of the war was not conducive to a further return to Sri Lanka. On a positive note though, these developments also provided me with the privilege of learning more about the context and to gain credibility within the Sri Lankan communities in the diaspora.

**Secondary data collection** was carried out in research institutes and libraries in Europe, especially in the UK (British Library, University of East London, School of Oriental and African Studies – all in London), in Switzerland (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva), in the Netherlands (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague) and in Germany (Humboldt Universität, Berlin). This gathering of information allowed me to obtain statistical information, historical data, but also relevant case studies of other countries, which contributed to enriching my understanding of the Sri Lankan context. In addition, the internet, with its many websites, e-journals, online newspapers, and e-books, provided useful information relevant to the topic of research. Facebook and other social media were a further source of information. Visual materials, mainly video clips of

diaspora activities and photographs, were either found on the internet or were provided by the interviewees and key informants.

In order to **analyse the data** obtained, all interviews were transcribed literally in the language of the interview, i.e., either in English or German, in order to keep the different nuances of the stories told. Paralinguistic aspects of the interview were mentioned in the transcript, too. This was a time-consuming process but it displayed also the richness and wealth of the available data. These transcripts, together with other materials, were then uploaded into a software program for qualitative research (atlas.ti).

Atlas.ti is a 'code-and-retrieve' software (Lee et al., 2004) and it was chosen because it is not only a software of considerable sophistication for qualitative analysis, allowing also visual materials to be used as data (Silverman, 2013), but also because it is run bilingually in English and German, helping me to handle the programme itself.

All uploaded information was then indexed through a list of 28 codes reflecting aspects of the conceptual framework of my research, and memos were integrated into the software as appropriate. One criticism of the use of such software is that text segments are disassociated from their original context and, thus, the interpretation of data can be distorted and the understanding of human action compromised (Lee et al., 2004). I responded to this concern by assigning large parts of the text to one code, including the interview questions, the paralinguistic aspects of the interview and other notes. This resulted in the retrieval of text segments, which were often much longer than necessary, but which captured important information for the interpretation of data. The coding and indexing of data, therefore, facilitated the management of the information and helped the write-up of the empirical data.

To address the concerns of confidentiality, all names of the interviewees were changed and new names allocated to them. The quotes reflect the voice of the interviewees displaying their ethnicity, sex and generation, but their name was newly assigned by me.

### ***Some ethical considerations***

Qualitative research implicating human beings needs particular care in order to ensure that no harm is done to the interviewee (Lee-Treweek et al., 2002). The principle of *primum non nocere* ('first do no harm') has to be kept in mind at all steps in the research process (Liamputtong, 2010; Busch-Rossnagel, 2006).

In general terms, in order to protect the interviewee and respect their feelings, I presented, at the beginning of each interview, an oral statement that included the following elements: purpose of the research, a guarantee of confidentiality, and the right to interrupt the interview at any moment. This allowed the interviewee to give their informed consent to the research or to opt out. None of the interviewees opted out. However, on some occasions, interviewees did not want to respond to one or other of the questions asked during the interview in order not to reveal their political orientation. This was accepted on my side, even if this may have meant that I could not coherently collect all data from all interviewees. Owing to the sensitivity of the situation, I did not ask for written consent for the interview but, instead, a recording is available from all interviews, which is still being stored.

In order to ensure a 'safe' environment, some other precautions have been taken to avoid any possible risk or danger: I have conducted interviews among a sample of persons with very different personal and migration histories. Sometimes, remembering life back in Sri Lanka may set free different kinds of emotions and complexities. I have tried to absorb this through my empathy and attentiveness towards the interviewee. I did not encounter any problems in my interviews but I respected the choice of the interviewee not to reply to questions or to change the topic. Through the semi-structured and flexible format of the research method, I could also react to such deviations.

Power relations always matter, including in the interview situation. Throughout the interviews, I have been aware of my own standpoint as an outsider to the

situation but also as a person who may be perceived as an ‘intruder’ into the personal life of interviewees speaking either the host country’s language or the former colonizer’s language. I could only try to have a critical consciousness about these unequal power relations. Due to my close links to the diaspora communities, but also due to my knowledge on Sri Lanka, I was often perceived as a ‘friend’ or an insider rather than as a researcher, which allowed me to build trust. Despite this perception and treatment, I remain conscious of my role and position.

The conditions under which the interview took place influenced the quality of the research. Indeed, the interview setting merits careful attention to ensure that the interviewees feel ‘safe’. I usually let the interviewee define the meeting point, assuming that their choice will also be one in which they feel emotionally safe.

Finally, political research also implies the danger of instrumentalization. I have been well aware that the interviews were conducted at a critical time – just after the EU put the LTTE on the list of terrorist organizations – and interviewees did not know yet what impact that might have. As a result, they were very careful in replying to my questions. I tried to sense their reluctance in the interview and react accordingly. In addition, I assured full confidentiality and that data would not be used other than for the purpose of this research.

### ***Scope and limitations of this research***

This research focuses on the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin. In using this terminology, I refer however only to Sinhalese and Tamils in the diaspora. Both groups are very heterogeneous in themselves, which brings in new dimensions of complexity to the analysis of data. I have tried to absorb that specificity in so far as it was relevant to the analysis. Batticaloa Tamils and Plantation Tamils were not the subject of this research, nor were Moors.

The sample size has been relatively small considering that the axis of analysis has been ethnicity, gender and generation. At times, other dimensions, such as

class, caste or religion, were included when deemed appropriate. Further analytical grids could be applied to the data and the person, even though they may or may not contribute to more insights. Despite the small sample, the objective of the research – to analyse the political activism of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Germany – can be met. The sample provides insights into the complexity and the heterogeneity of the Sinhala and Tamil communities among themselves, and it allows similarities and differences between them to be highlighted. Yet, this remains a limitation of this research.

The interviews were conducted between 2006 and 2008: hence, this research today provides a historical perspective on the dynamics of the diaspora communities at the time. The Sri Lankan context is politically challenging and rapidly changing. Hence, changes occurred during the research period and dramatically after it. Changing political contexts were recognized both in Germany and Sri Lanka in so far as they were relevant for the thematic focus of this research. Therefore, the research only provides a particular insight into a specific moment of time.

My position as an outsider posed many restrictions in terms of my understanding of the complexities of the situation and the ‘untold’ stories. An attempt was made to still comprehend and include these dimensions in the analysis but this may not have been successful throughout. In addition, my lack of knowledge of Tamil and Sinhalese imposed certain restrictions in terms of access to information – written, orally and through the internet. At times, I had to rely on translations by others in order to understand a text in the original language. Translations are, however, always prone to a ‘margin of error’. As the interviews were conducted in German and English, this margin is likely to have been small. However, it also limited some interview partners in expressing themselves eloquently as they had to speak in their second or third foreign language.

Finally, in no way do I want to claim that I speak on behalf of the Tamil and Sinhalese diaspora communities, or on behalf of women in the diaspora, but I want to thank all my interviewees and I hope I can speak ‘next to them’.

## CHAPTER 3: THE ETHNIC CONFLICT IN SRI LANKA AND ITS MIGRATION FLOWS

Sri Lanka's post-independence history on migration is closely linked to its history of ethnicity-based discrimination and, since the early 1980s, to war and conflict. Sri Lanka is a multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-religious country. The social, economic and political tensions between the three major ethnic groups – Sinhalese, Tamils and Moors<sup>2</sup> – have shaped the Sri Lanka of today. They all settled in Sri Lanka through migration processes. This chapter provides an overview of the history of Sri Lanka from 1948 to 2009. It elaborates, in particular, the emergence and development of the ethnic conflict and its related migration flows. Out-migration from Sri Lanka for economic reasons also occurs. However, it is not the main focus of this chapter as it only concerns a relatively small population. The conflict, in contrast, has had a wide-ranging economic, political, cultural and social impact on the population with its diverse composition. This historical contextualization deliberately ends with 2009, as this marks the 'end of the war', though not the end of the conflict. Nevertheless, the dynamics have changed dramatically after that date and, thus, need to be treated separately.

The historical legend of the *Mahawamsa* (Geiger, 1912) traces the origin of the Sinhalese back to the Indian Prince Vijaya Singha, who, in the 5th century BC, landed in *Tambaparni* – today's Sri Lanka. The legend still plays an important role in Sri Lankan politics as it is perceived and treated as a historical fact (Roberts, 2005). Sinhalese are considered as Indo-Aryan migrants from north India as descendants of Prince Vijaya (de Silva, 2005), even if approximately 40% originally migrated from south India (Hoole et al., 1990). The Tamils migrated from south India, according to Tamil scholars, in the 3rd century BC

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<sup>2</sup> 'Moor' is a term introduced in the early 20th century to name an ethnic group that are today narrowed down to a religious identity (Muslim) only. In contemporary usage, Moors are called Muslims and have lost their ethnic identity. I will use the terms Moors and Muslims interchangeably; both should refer to an ethnic group including, inter alia, a religious identity.

(Mahadevan, 2002) and, according to mainstream Sinhalese scholars, only after the 7th century AD (de Silva, 2005). The question of whether the Sinhalese or Tamils were the first to settle in the country is still part of a controversy in the political landscape of Sri Lanka today. Finally, the Moors, the third largest ethnic community, settled as traders in the 8th century AD from west Asia in Sri Lanka (Abeyasinghe, 1966), and a second wave of Muslim settlers arrived in the 13th century AD from south India (Dewaraja, 1994). Muslim traders, however, cultivated a close relationship with the Sinhalese kings and their settlements became more widespread, with some locations of higher concentration (David, 2009b). Moors lived quite peacefully among the Sinhalese until the early 20th century (Perera, 1998).

This shows that all three major ethnic groups in Sri Lanka were originally migrants and none of them can be seen as homogenous among themselves. Rather, they are characterized by a number of sociocultural and economic segmentations. However, despite the differences within one ethnic group, distinct ethnic identities were formed, which, in relation to other socio-political factors, gradually led to the conflict and different waves of out-migration.

Other minority groups are Burghers<sup>3</sup>, Malays and Veddhas<sup>4</sup>, who did not play a dominant role in the ethnic-based nationalist conflict and, therefore, will not further be elaborated here.

### ***Post-independence Sri Lanka and its migration flows***

Sri Lanka received its independence from Britain on 4 February 1948 (Gunawardena, 2005). The first government was mainly formed by the Sinhalese elite with a few Tamils in the cabinet, all being loyal to the former British colonizers (Kearney, 1964). The 'divide and rule' policy of the British had resulted in the first incidents of an ethnic character already back in 1833

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<sup>3</sup> 'Burgher' is a term derived from the Dutch word 'burger' and means citizen. They are considered a separate ethnic group, being descendants of the Dutch. Many of them left the country in the late 1950s. One of the well-known Burghers is the writer Michael Ondaatje.

<sup>4</sup> Veddhas are considered the indigenous population (aboriginals) of Sri Lanka.

through localized anti-Christian riots organized by Buddhist monks (Balakrishnan et al., 1981), and in 1915 through a Sinhala Buddhist-led assault on Muslims (Seneviratne, 2004). This latter was based on trading rivalries between Muslim and Sinhalese (Jayawardena, 1970) and took place in the whole of southern Sri Lanka<sup>5</sup> (Nuhman, 2004). It also marked the rise of a militant Buddhist Sinhala ideology based on the 'superior chosen people', propagated by Anagarika Dharmapala (Weiss, 2011; Grant, 2009; Seneviratne, 2004).

In 1931, universal franchise empowered the Sinhala Buddhist majority, further allowing them to enter into a nationalist discourse and, in 1935, the Board of Ministers under the Donoughmore Constitution became all Sinhalese, which, in addition, aggravated ethnic feeling among Tamils (de Silva, 2005).

Ethnic tensions were then reinforced by the newly independent government as it continued the British 'divide and rule' policy and deprived the Plantation Tamils<sup>6</sup> of their citizenship and voting rights within a year of independence<sup>7</sup> (Schrijvers, 1999; Rotberg, 1999; Wilson, 2001). As a result, the Plantation Tamils dramatically lost seats in parliament at the elections in 1952 (Vije, 1987; Wilson, 1975) and, in the following two decades, nearly 60% of the Plantation Tamil population was repatriated to India or became citizens of Sri Lanka (Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001; Wilson, 1975). In 1964 and 1974, bilateral agreements were signed between India and Sri Lanka, which allowed a total of 600,000 Plantation Tamils to be repatriated to India and 375,000 to apply for Sri

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<sup>5</sup> Najimudeen (in Nuhman 2004: 1) quotes a statement by Governor Robert Chalmers reporting, in November 1915, that 25 Muslims were killed, 189 wounded, 4 women were raped, 4,075 shops were looted, 350 shops were burnt to the ground and 103 mosques were destroyed or damaged.

<sup>6</sup> Plantation Tamils are a Tamil-speaking population group, originally brought to Sri Lanka to work in the tea plantations in the upcountry of Sri Lanka. Therefore, they are also often referred to as 'Upcountry Tamils'. Although ethnically Tamils, they have a different migration history from Jaffna Tamils. In Sri Lanka, a differentiation is often made between Plantation Tamils, Jaffna Tamils and Batticaloa Tamils.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the Plantation Tamils had received voting rights in 1931 during British colonialism through the Donoughmore Constitutional reform. With independence, the new government introduced amendments of the Ceylon Citizenship Act (1948), the Immigrant Act (1948), the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act (1949), as well as the Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act (1949) leading to the disenfranchising of Plantation Tamils. In particular, the Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act required three or more generations of paternal ancestry in Sri Lanka and made 975,000 Plantation Tamils stateless. (See also Rajasingham-Senanayake, 2001.)

Lankan citizenship.<sup>8</sup> (de Silva, 2005; UNHCR, 2001). These measures reinforced ethnic politics and Plantation Tamils are still considered as the most impoverished community in Sri Lanka.

With independence, the *Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act* and the *Immigration and Emigration Act* entered into force, both to some extent regulating migration flows. The *Indian and Pakistani Residents (Citizenship) Act* (1949) gave Indians and Pakistanis who had resided for a certain period of time in Sri Lanka the right to Sri Lankan citizenship. Some 134,300 people received their citizenship based on this act (Department of Immigration and Emigration, 2009). The *Immigration and Emigration Act No. 20* (1948), in contrast, regulated immigration to and emigration from Sri Lanka, specifying, among other things, in which circumstances people were allowed to leave the country (Wouters, July 2006). It also controlled the entry of non-Sri Lankans, regulated their exit and removal from Sri Lanka (Department of Immigration and Emigration, 2009) and concerned mainly unskilled labourers working in agriculture, which effectively meant the Plantation Tamils.

Sri Lanka's migration history is characterized by a constant mix of internal displacement and out-migration to other countries. Resettlement policies, however, have always played an important role in conflict creation. Already, the British had started to establish Sinhalese resettlements in the predominantly Tamil-populated North and East<sup>9</sup>. These policies were continued on a large scale only after independence, mainly to the Gal Oya valley in the East, where a large irrigation project was planned that provoked major ethnic tensions as it created 120,000 acres of irrigated land for Sinhalese in the East within a period of four years (Fuglerud, 2003; Thangarajah, 2003). The establishment of such Sinhalese agricultural settlements through so-called colonization schemes was originally a socio-political strategy by the government and changed the

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<sup>8</sup> The Sirima-Shastri Pact (Indo-Ceylon Agreement) of 1964 ruled that 525,000 Plantation Tamils could be repatriated to India and that 300,000 could become citizens of Sri Lanka. The fate of the remaining 150,000 Plantation Tamils would be decided later and, only in 1974 with the Sirimavo-Indira Gandhi Pact, they were to be absorbed in equal parts in both countries (de Silva, 2005). Effectively, only 506,000 out of the 600,000 Plantation Tamils applied for Indian citizenship (UNHCR, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Already, in 1944, the Tamil Congress complained to the Soulboury Commission about the Sinhalese settlements in the predominantly Tamil-populated areas in the Eastern Province (Wickramasinghe 2006).

demographic structure in the East dramatically (Moore, 2007; Muggah, 2008). During the three decades of the war, these state-sponsored Sinhalese settlements in the North and East transformed into a political-military strategy (Muggah, 2008). They were used to unleash violence against Tamils (Hoole et al., 1990) and to make Tamils a minority in their considered 'homeland', resulting in the construction of ethnic identities using land as a means (Thangarajah, 2003). Even after the war period, in 2009, such strategies are used by the government to destabilize the region.

In contrast, the Tamil and Muslim population in the North and East increased naturally until the late 1970s. This also meant that the population could migrate without much hindrance within the country. However, once the anti-Tamil riots started in 1977, the Sinhalese government started to send thousands of Tamils from the South to the North and East under the pretext of safety concerns. This was the beginning of the forced internal displacement of the Tamils by the government, contributing to the armed struggle and out-migration (Manorajan, 1995). One person interviewed described his family's experience:

*“Two of my uncles lived in the South, running small businesses but, during the 1983 riots, both of them were sent to camps in Colombo before they brought them in buses to Vavuniya and released them there. They then lived with relatives there and, once the area in which they lived was militarized by the government, they left for India.”* (Krishna, Tamil, male, first generation)

This experience was quite common for the Tamils in the South, who were gathered together and were brought in buses or ships either to Vavuniya or to Jaffna respectively. Large-scale out-migration of Tamils started only at this point.

## ***Language as identity marker and the first anti-Tamil riots***

However, the first significant out-migration of Sri Lanka occurred among the English-speaking, Colombo-based Burgher community. With independence, the first Sri Lankan government shifted Sri Lanka's working language from English to Sinhala and, in the 1950s, Sinhala communalism and anti-Christian attitudes increased, resulting in the migration of Burghers – mainly to Australia and other English-speaking Commonwealth countries (Colin-Thorny et al., 2005). This tendency was reinforced when the *Official Language Act* (“*Sinhala Only*”) was adopted in 1956 (Ramerini, n.a.) by the S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike regime: Sinhala was then introduced as a sole language, resulting in further out-migration by Burghers, whose mother tongue had been English for more than 150 years (Colin-Thorny et al., 2005). The ‘Sinhala Only’ Language Act, however, impacted on all minorities and became a turning point in the history of ethnic disharmony and conflict, as it abolished both English and Tamil as official languages. Consequently, it provoked peaceful protests among the Tamil population, and Tamil nationalism started to emerge as a counter-reaction to the beginning of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism (Wilson, 1994). However, it did not yet trigger a larger Tamil-based population movement, but formed the basis for the Tamil struggle in later years (Weiss, 2011; David, 2009b).

The *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact* of 1957 had recognized the need to give rights to the Tamil population. In its original version, it had a provision for the “reasonable use of the Tamil language” (Wilson, 1994: 8). However, Sinhala Buddhist nationalists protested against this clause and the prime minister then abandoned its inclusion. At the same time, Tamil political leaders and their supporters demonstrated against this at the site of the parliament and were physically assaulted (Wilson, 1994). Anti-Tamil riots spread within Colombo and 150 people died on this occasion (Wickramasinghe, 2006). Even though S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who later became Prime Minister, was one of the first to advocate a federal political organization in Sri Lanka, even as early as 1927,

he never included minorities in his political campaigns<sup>10</sup> (Hennayake, 2006; Wilson, 1994; de Silva, 2005). After the ratification of the ‘Sinhala Only’ Act, he nevertheless negotiated and signed a power-sharing plan with the Tamil Nationalist Federal Party, known as the *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact* of 1957. This pact recognized Tamil as an administrative language in the North and East, in addition to a minimal devolution set-up (Wilson, 1994). As an official language, however, Tamil was only reintroduced 20 years later (Government of Sri Lanka, 1978).

The opposition United National Party (UNP) organized a mass campaign against the *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact*, arguing that it would divide the country. This was the beginning of the opposition political parties contesting any proposal to devolve power to the Tamil-dominated North and East by the ruling party. Indeed, both major political parties in the country, the Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) and the United National Party (UNP) behaved in this same way and made alliances with the Sinhala Buddhist nationalist forces to oppose any potential political settlement negotiated by the ruling party. This led Loganathan (1996) to call Sri Lanka a country with a history of “Lost Opportunities”.

In view of this, not only the opposition party but also sections of the Sinhala Buddhists demanded that the pact be annulled and, before it was fully abrogated, the so-called 1958 riots broke out. The trigger was when the Transport Ministry at the time sent state-owned buses to the North and East with number plates bearing the letters ‘*Sri*’ in the Sinhala language before the numerical digits. This provoked protests by Tamils in a context of already existing tension, and they overwrote the Sinhala letters with tar (Wickramasinghe, 2006). As a result, the number plates were removed, provoking, in turn, a mass sit-down protest staged by Sinhala Buddhist monks in Colombo in May 1958. The Buddhist monks demanded the abrogation of the *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact* in front of the prime minister’s private

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<sup>10</sup> S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike used, in his 1956 election campaign, the slogan “Sangha, Weda, Guru, Govi and Kamkaru” (Buddhist monks, indigenous physicians, teachers, farmers, and workers) to mobilize people. This did provide a platform for Buddhist monks, but left out Tamils and other minorities of the country (Hennayake, 2006: 64).

residence (Wilson, 1994). These protests happened shortly before the Tamil-led Federal Party (FP), the opposition party, was due to hold its convention in the North provincial town of Vavuniya on 22 and 23 May 1958. Rumours spread that this convention was to be the preparation for an invasion by Tamils of the sacred cities of the Buddhists in the neighbouring districts. Consequently, these rumours triggered widespread mob violence against Tamils in three waves: from 22 to 25 May 1958, riots were limited to adjoining districts; from 25 to 29 May 1958, Tamils in Sinhala-dominated areas were attacked (Wickramasinghe, 2006); and on 27 May 1958 a state of emergency was declared and Tamil political leaders were placed under house arrest. As a result of these events, 12,000 people were displaced within the country and some Tamils started to leave the country (Tambiah, 1991). The state of emergency was eventually lifted in March 1959.

One Tamil interviewee left Sri Lanka at that time and explained:

*“I left Sri Lanka back in 1963. I fell victim to the 1958 riots. All my friends were Sinhalese; but they were not Sinhalese friends, they were friends who happened to be Sinhalese. In May 1958, I was at the village of a friend who had failed his exams to help him resit them, and then the 1958 riots broke out. I was shocked. There was pain about these events but, more than that, there was shock because I have always seen myself as a Sinhalese and my Sinhalese was fluent without an accent. Then, suddenly, I was very rudely reminded that I was Tamil. So, I just finished my studies, graduated with honours in 1961, and as soon as I collected enough money I left the country. I was just going away without any plans or ambitions.”* (Pillay, Tamil, male, first generation)

The humiliation that Tamils faced during the 1958 riots was also reproduced by journalist Varindra Tarzie Vittachi:

*“In Colombo, on that occasion, the police looked on or looked the other way when Tamils were beaten up on the street hardly a hundred yards away from the Houses of Parliament. They did not move a finger when*

*hoodlums stripped the Federalist politician and chased him all the way across the Galle Face Green to the hotel. Police explained that they had been ordered not to interfere.” (Vittachi, 1958: 104)*

During this period of time, language became an important marker of identity and remained so for the years to come. Indeed, the 1958 riots had far-reaching consequences:

The *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact* failed. In its place, the leading Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) introduced, in August 1958, the *Tamil Language Act*, which allowed for the ‘reasonable’ use of the Tamil language. (Wilson, 1988). This was an identical provision that was part of the original proposal of the Official Language Act in 1956 and of the *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact* in 1957. However, the prime minister, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, was assassinated by a Buddhist monk in September 1959 for not keeping his promises towards the Buddhists and Sinhalese (Hewitt, 1997). After his death, the ruling coalition failed and parliament was dissolved. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike’s widow took over the party leadership and reopened, once again, negotiations with the Tamil nationalist Federal Party under its leader S.V.J. Chelvanayakam (Wilson, 1994) in order to secure a parliamentary majority. At the time, she agreed to implement some provisions of the *Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact*.

The new SLFP government was elected in July 1960, then headed by Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Once in power, she then declared that she would implement the ‘Sinhala Only’ policies in a more rigid way (Ross et al., 1988a) and bypassed the Tamil Language Act of 1958 (Pinto-Jayawardena, 2010). Contrary to her political party’s undertakings to address Tamil grievances articulated by the Federal Party, the government, under her leadership, enacted a number of discriminatory policies against the Tamil minority, among others the introduction of Sinhala as the parliamentary language in 1960 and as the language of the courts in 1961 (de Silva, 2005).

Under these circumstances, ethnic tensions not only did not cease, but also *satyagraha*<sup>11</sup>, peaceful protests for justice and equality, were called on a regular basis in the North and East. Tens of thousands of Tamils followed these *satyagraha* campaigns led by the Tamil political leadership (Sashi Sri Kantha, 2011; Ponniah, 2011). The government, however, reacted by declaring in the North and East a state of emergency under the Public Security Ordinance (PSO) of 1947<sup>12</sup>. The state of emergency remained in force until the beginning of 1962 (Pinto-Jayawardena, 2010).

Probably because the Tamil nationalist movement was still able to campaign peacefully, migration flows were kept to a limit. Nevertheless, language politics have played an important part in the emerging conflict and in identity politics until today.

In view of the aggravating economic situation, the left political parties joined together in 1963 to launch mass protests, including a general strike. Consequently, Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike negotiated with the leaders of the left to enter the government and a coalition government with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP)<sup>13</sup> was formed in 1964. Before the coalition lost its majority in parliament, the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government prepared a blueprint for devolution based on districts. As with the *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact*, the *District Council Bill* was abandoned due to opposition from Sinhala Buddhist monks (Wilson, 1994). The coalition lost the elections in March 1965 to the UNP led by Dudley Senanayake and, for the first time, the Federal Party, a political party representing the Tamils, joined the government and became a part of the UNP-led coalition government (Ponnambalam, 1983).

This happened on the basis of pre-election political negotiations, when the UNP invited the Federal Party to join their campaign on the basis of a power-sharing

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<sup>11</sup> The term was coined by Mahatma Gandhi to name the movement he founded at the time.

<sup>12</sup> The Public Security Ordinance (PSO) of 1947 was enacted by the State Council and was aimed at suppressing working class agitation for better working conditions (Pinto-Jayawardena, 2010). The PSO played an important role in suppressing not only peoples' campaigns for social justice, but also the Tamil nationalist movement.

<sup>13</sup> The LSSP was the oldest Marxist party of Sri Lanka and followed the Trotskyite stream. Throughout the years, the LSSP was split along ideological lines into different leftist parties.

agreement, which later came to be known as the *Dudley–Chelvanayakam Pact*. Unlike the earlier *Bandaranaike–Chelvanayakam Pact*, this pact had provisions for language and land rights for the Tamils (Wilson, 1994; Samaranayake, 2008). The opposition started campaigning against the *Dudley–Chelvanayakam Pact*, resulting in police shooting at protestors and the death of a Buddhist monk on 8 January 1966. In 1968, all efforts to enact the *District Council Bill* had to be abandoned due to internal and external political opposition (Samaranayake, 2008). The UNP-led government was only able to pass the *Indo-Ceylon Immigration Act*, allowing any Plantation Tamil to apply for Sri Lankan citizenship, and abolishing, at the same time, the *Sirima–Shastri Act* of 1963 (Wilson, 1994).

### ***The rise of the Sinhalese and Tamil youth movements***

Nevertheless, the UNP government, which came into power in 1965, could not resolve the pressing economic, social and political problems in the country, which brought the SLFP – in coalition with the LSSP and the Communist Party (CP) as the ‘United Front’ government – back to power in 1970. At the time, the unemployment rate was around 14%, while 83% of the unemployed total was in the 18–24 age group, with around 65% of people living in poverty (Colin Cooke, 2011). This provided the context in which the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP, People’s Liberation Front) emerged as a Sinhalese militant youth movement with a socialist ideology (Uyangoda, 2003a).

The United Front government could not halt the economic crisis but, instead, disillusioned the newly formed Sinhala leftist rural youth movement. Therefore, in April 1971, the JVP launched its first insurrection against the United Front government with the aim of capturing state power and establishing a socialist country based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine. The insurrection failed, between 10,000 and 20,000 people were killed and more than 20,000 young people were detained (Uyangoda, 2003a).

Despite its scope, the situation did not result in large-scale migration, probably because its membership came from the Sinhala Buddhist lower middle classes (Samaranayake, 2008), who did not encounter ethnic discrimination in the country and whose political discourse was based on the protection and development of the motherland (Fernando, 1981). The JVP mind-set, therefore, was not geared towards out-migration and, hence, only a very limited number of young people left the country right after the insurrection or their release from detention. Nevertheless, one Sinhalese interviewee recalled:

*“I was one of the leading figures in the JVP in 1971 and then I was seven years in prison. When I was released, I continued to be politically active for the JVP and I went to Jaffna with them, also to be with the Tamil minority. But due to the later developments within the JVP and in the North, the situation became dangerous for me, I had to be in the underground, and I was searched for in the country. So, I then left for Germany in 1980 and, still today, I cannot go back to Sri Lanka.”*

(Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Since the 1970s, under the rule of Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the rights of the Tamil minority were continuously eroded, while access to education became politicized and ethnicized. The Tamil community valued education highly and, thanks to funding by missionaries, the northern provinces had relatively good English language facilities, as well as pre-university education (David, 2009b). This allowed the Tamils to find better employment opportunities in the English-speaking administration during colonial times. However, in order to restrict Tamils in the bureaucratic structures, a ‘*standardization policy*’ was introduced in 1972 that regulated university admission proportionately to the number of students sitting for the entry exams (Wickramasinghe, 2006). This effectively meant that Tamils had to achieve higher scores in order to enter the universities and it increased Sinhalese representation in universities dramatically (World Bank, 2003). Through these policies, education became a political tool and fostered further tensions.

Shortly after the introduction of this policy, in 1972, the '*New Republican Constitution*' was adopted which, among other things, accepted Buddhism as the state religion; recognized Sinhala as the official language by constitution, replaced the country's name from 'Ceylon' to 'Sri Lanka', and formally established Sri Lanka as a unitary country (David, 2009b). In addition, the 1972 constitution discarded section 29 of the Soulbury Constitution of 1947, which provided protection for minorities (Weiss, 2011). Political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda argued that "[t]he 1972 Constitution brought the public service as well as the judiciary within the sphere of control of the legislature and the cabinet, and merely listed 'fundamental rights' in the Constitution making them explicitly unjusticiable. In retrospect, all these were negative innovations." (Uyangoda, 2003b: 8)

Indeed, the constitutional changes in 1972 were once again geared towards strengthening the majoritarian Sinhala community, neglecting the rights and culture of the other minority groups in the country, and towards treating the Tamils as second-class citizens (Weiss, 2011). Even though these policies of the 1970s did not urge Tamil youth to leave the country, they were discriminatory in essence and provided the basis for the radicalized Tamil student movement to emerge and to consider separation as a solution among the Tamil youth (de Silva, 2005).

In 1976, shortly before the first national convention of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF)<sup>14</sup> was held in Jaffna, demanding the establishment of a sovereign Tamil Eelam state (Wilson, 2001), and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)<sup>15</sup> under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabhakaran were formed, ethnic tension between Sinhalese and Tamils increased and, in the 1977 general elections, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) won all 18 parliamentary seats in the North (Sultana, 2010). This victory was considered as an approval of TULF's separatist ambitions (de Silva, 2005; Wilson, 2001)

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<sup>14</sup> On this occasion, the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) adopted the Vaddukkoddei Resolution, which called for self-determination and independent sovereign statehood and, therefore, wanted to safeguard the existence of the Tamil nation (Wilson, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were previously called the Tamil New Tigers (TNT) and were renamed and reorganized in 1976.

and provided the political space for militant youth to replace parliamentarianism by the gun (Wilson, 2001; de Silva, 2005).

### ***Anti-Tamil riots and the emergence of the LTTE***

At the general election, however, the UNP under J.R. Jayawardena came to power through its promises to remedy the grievances of the Tamils in fields such as education, colonization, the use of the Tamil language, and employment in the public sector and in semi-public services (Ponnambalam, 1983). The UNP formed the government and J.R. Jayawardena changed the constitution, introducing the executive presidency. The UNP government then negotiated with TULF yet another power-sharing plan, considering the establishment of district development councils (DDCs) (Wilson, 2001). During the subsequent district development council election campaign in 1981, Tamil militants shot dead two policemen in Jaffna, which provoked anti-Tamil riots that lasted one month and resulted in at least 100 deaths, 25,000 displaced persons and hundreds of shops burnt. In addition, the public library in Jaffna, the second largest library on the island with over 90,000 volumes, was burnt to ashes. Even though the DDC elections were held and TULF won all six DDCs in the North, no real power was given to them and, therefore, they lost their importance (Ponnambalam, 1983). At the same time, TULF lost its strength as an opposition party and became marginalized within parliament.

With the anti-Tamil riots of 1977 and 1981, coupled with the increasing militancy of Tamil youth, the cycle of violence spiralled in Sri Lanka and attacks on police stations and public institutions by Tamil militant groups increased. In July 1979, the *Prevention of Terrorism Act* (PTA) was introduced in reaction to the attacks by the Tamil militant groups, notably the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as a temporary measure, but was turned into a permanent law in 1982 and has since then been in full force<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> During the 2002–2006 ceasefire period, the law was not applied, but, in 2006, the government again fully enacted it.

The conflict was aggravated and, on 23 July 1983, 13 soldiers were ambushed by the LTTE. One day later, on 24 July, riots started against Tamils in Colombo, which then spread island-wide and lasted one week. In total, the death toll among the Tamil community reached at least 387<sup>17</sup>, while 116,000 businesses, 18,000 homes and 5,000 shops belonging to Tamils were destroyed (Colin Cooke, 2011). Large numbers of Tamils who had been living in the southern areas of Sri Lanka abandoned their properties and returned to the North and East in the belief they would be safe in those areas (Thangarajah, 2003). More than 100,000 Tamils fled to India due to these events and, as pointed out earlier, this was now the starting point for large-scale out-migration (Wilson, 2001). Fuglerud (1999) mentioned that “[t]he events of 1983 mark the start of the widespread conflict-related flows of Tamils seeking asylum overseas and later through family reunion programmes. It is this third group that has contributed the most numbers to the Tamil diaspora as well as attracted the most attention.”

The date 23 July 1983 itself is remembered as ‘Black July’, being still commemorated among Tamils in the country and in the diaspora today. The *Emergency Regulations* were imposed thereafter.

*“Well, we left because of political reasons. My husband was arrested by the army and he was in prison. Within three days, we were able to take him out. He was not really politically involved but, you know, all of us supported the cause. So they thought all Tamils are the supporters of ‘that’. So we then just packed, left the place and came within 24 hours.”*  
(Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

Although the armed Tamil militancy could be traced back to the early 1970s, it was only with the 1983 anti-Tamil riots that human and material sources were found and armed training in India started. Tamil youth organized themselves into many different groupings, their differences lying mainly in their political versus military approach, their ideological base and, at times, their caste

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<sup>17</sup> Figures of deaths vary. The official figure is 387, but estimates go up to 3,000.

composition. By the mid-1980s, more than 30 armed groups existed, but only five were prominent: namely, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the Tamil Eelam Liberation Movement (TELO), the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Eelam Revolutionary Organisation of Students (EROS).

Over the years, other smaller groups have been absorbed within the structures of the LTTE as they did not allow the existence of other militant representatives alongside them (Ross et al., 1988b). The LTTE not only destroyed the other militant organizations, but also kept 4,000 Tamil prisoners who had dissenting views (UTHR(J), 1992). So, being under threat from the LTTE and the government, many politically active people of some of these militant groups, as well as civil activists, left the country:

*"I had been a member of Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation, TELO, and we were active in Jaffna. TELO was a militant group with some success but, at some point, there was the fall-out with the LTTE. In the mid-80s, TELO cadres got shot and eliminated by the LTTE. In this situation, I left for Colombo to leave for India to receive training in the camps. From there, I left then for Germany. Today, TELO is part of the TNA coalition."* (Sivalingam, Tamil, male, first generation)

In the mid-1980s, the first attacks on Sinhalese civilians were carried out by Tamil militants, especially the LTTE. Over the years, the attacks on Sinhalese and Muslim civilians turned into a political-military strategy of the LTTE (Fagerlund, 2011).

The first attempts at peace talks, the 'Thimpu Talks', initiated by the Indian government, were held in June 1985 between the then United National Party (UNP)-led government and various Tamil groups, albeit without success. During this period, India played an open role in mediating the conflict and the *Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord*, which provided limited autonomy to Tamil areas, was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and J.R. Jayawardene on 29 July 1987 (Sørbø et al., 2011). Soon after the accord entered into force, an estimated 60,000 to

100,000-strong Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) was dispatched to Sri Lanka's northern and eastern provinces, resulting in a fully fledged armed conflict between the LTTE and the IPKF, which erupted without bringing peace to the country. This triggered new migration streams of Tamils leaving Sri Lanka in the late 1980s. Only in 1990, the IPKF withdrew from Sri Lanka and a ceasefire was negotiated between the UNP government and the LTTE – again without success (Sørbø et al., 2011).

In the same period, the JVP started its second insurgency in 1988 against both the UNP government in the South and the IPKF in the North. Ad hoc work stoppages were imposed on the population in the South, terrorizing opponents and designed to destabilize the state apparatus. In the end, around 40,000 youth were killed and, two years later, in November 1989, the government captured and killed the JVP leader, Wijeweera, and the entire JVP leadership. In addition, an estimated 7,000 JVP members were detained (Uyangoda, 2003a). With the suppression of the JVP, hundreds of Sinhala youth left the country and migrated mainly to Italy, Japan and the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, large-scale out-migration did not occur: even though both JVP insurrections, of 1971 and 1987–1989, created conditions conducive to migration, such as arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings, Sinhala youth did not leave in large numbers. One interviewee in Berlin commented:

*"It is probably because the Sinhalese feel ownership of the country that the Sinhalese youth didn't leave the country in waves when they faced political repression in the early 1970s or late 1980s. Leaving the country would not be part of their ideology. So, here, in Berlin, you see only a small number of JVPers. Most migrated for economic reasons. I am one of the few here who left and, in fact, I am the only one of my family outside Sri Lanka – not like my Tamil friends." (Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)*

## ***The militarization of society in the 1990s***

In the 1990s, the militarization of society and conflict-related violence continued on both sides: the LTTE and the government of Sri Lanka. On 22 October 1990, the LTTE ordered between 70,000 and 100,000 Muslims from the Northern Province to leave the North within 24 hours. They were not allowed to take any belongings with them. Some 65,000 of them found temporary shelter in the Muslim-dominated Puttalam districts (Shanmugaratnam, 2001). Even though this can be considered as one of the major displacements in the country, it did not implicate large-scale out-migration. Muslims in Sri Lanka had faced discrimination and communal violence at the hands of LTTE as well as Sinhala nationalist non-state actors throughout the country's post-independence history.

Seventeen years of UNP rule was broken by the victory of the People's Alliance in parliamentary elections in August 1994, and of the SLFP under Chandrika Kumaratunga, daughter of S.W.R.D. and Sirimavo Bandaranaike, in the presidential elections in November 1994. Her election campaign was built on the slogans of 'Democracy, Peace and Prosperity' (Clarance, 2007) and was considered as pro-peace, which, in turn made Tamils vote for her (n.a., 2010). Negotiations between the People's Alliance government and the LTTE had already started in October 1994 and were suspended one month later due the killing of the presidential candidate Gamini Dissanayake and 50 others by female LTTE suicide bombers (Jayaram, 1995). Negotiations resumed in January 1995, with Norway playing an important role as mediator. These negotiations, however, did not succeed due to mistrust and different priorities between the two parties, and the fighting continued (Sørbø et al., 2011).

Despite the hope for change, the war and violence continued. Suicide attacks by the LTTE targeted, among others, the Central Bank building in Colombo (1996), the Tooth temple in Kandy (1998), and the international airport in Katunayake (2001) (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2013). These attacks were usually countered by major military operations by the government. Some attempts at negotiation took place during these years; however, none of them

was ever successful for long (Sørbø et al., 2011). On 18 May 1995, the 'War for Peace' was announced by the Sri Lankan government, resulting in the arming of Sinhalese and Muslims civilians in the East and in border areas in the North, as well as in a number of further military operations in the North. An estimated 900,000 people were internally displaced in 1995 and 1996. Around 55,000 refugees from Sri Lanka lived in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu and another 40,000 throughout the rest of India by the end of 1996 (United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 1997).

### ***The ceasefire agreement and the end of the war***

Only in February 2002, the government of Sri Lanka led by Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe signed a permanent ceasefire with the LTTE through the facilitation of Norway. In the following four years, several rounds of peace talks were held, inter alia, in Thailand (September 2002), Berlin (February 2003), Japan (March 2003) and Geneva (October 2006). Each of these rounds focused on different issues, but all of them failed (Sørbø et al., 2011).

In 2004, the United People's Freedom Party (UPFA), a Sinhala-dominated coalition government under the lead of the SLFP, together with JVP and other parties, won the parliamentary elections. In the same year, the tsunami hit the island and more than 35,000 people died and at least 440,000 were displaced. In the following months, the *Post-Tsunami Operational Management Structure (PTOMS) Agreement* was negotiated, giving the LTTE a responsibility to administer the rehabilitation and reconstruction in the North and East, only to be later scrapped by the supreme court (Sørbø et al., 2011).

In the following presidential elections in 2005, Mahinda Rajapakse from the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA) won the elections and has since been in power. The LTTE allegedly asked the Tamil population to boycott these elections and much of the current defeat of the LTTE is the result of those elections (Sørbø et al., 2011).

The ceasefire agreement was continuously broken by both sides and, in 2006, the EU, followed by the US and Canada, listed the LTTE as a terrorist organization in their countries (Worldwatch Institute, 2006). This meant that providing funds – directly or indirectly – to the LTTE was prohibited, and a travel ban on LTTE officials was announced. For the Tamil diaspora communities sympathizing with the LTTE – approximately 300,000 people in Europe (International Crisis Group, 2010) – this had a major impact on their political activities.

In the meantime, fierce fighting resumed and violence in Sri Lanka continued to escalate. Within a single week, in March 2007, 40,000 people were displaced and, over a few months, between 120,000 and 150,000 people were on the move (News Stories, 2007). In mid-2007, the Eastern Province was brought under government control for the first time in 13 years and, in January 2008, the government formally declared the end of the 2002 ceasefire agreement (Bajoria, 2009). According to the Defence Ministry, over 2,500 LTTE cadres were killed within the first three months of 2008. Within a year, the government of Sri Lanka took control of the remaining LTTE territories, particularly Killinochchi, the Elephant Pass and Mullaitivu.

On 18 May 2009, the government announced the complete victory against the LTTE and the death of the LTTE leadership, including its leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, its intelligence chief Pottu Amman and the head of the Tigers' naval wing. With the defeat of the LTTE, many Tigers left the country and, within a relatively short period of time, elections were held in the newly captured territories. In Batticaloa, the *Thamil Makkal Vidudal Puligal* (TMVP), contesting with the UPFA government, won the elections in March 2008. In Jaffna municipality, the UPFA-led coalition secured a majority in August 2009, although only approximately 20% of the registered electorate cast their vote. In Vavuniya, the *Tamil National Alliance* (TNA), a coalition of Tamil parties close to the LTTE, won the election with a participation of 50% of the registered voters (Fernando, 2011).

In June 2009, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka mentioned a total of 391,849 people as internally displaced and living in so-called 'welfare centres'. More than 60,000 people had been displaced due to the creation of high-security zones in the newly captured areas in the North, and LTTE cadres were held in separate camps in the North. The sanitary and living conditions in these 'welfare centres' and camps were much criticized for being inappropriate, yet only few measures have been taken so far to resettle the civilian population (IRIN - humanitarian news and analysis., 2009).

Communication with people living in the camps is restricted and controlled. This practice is a continuation of the heavy attacks by the government of Sri Lanka, restricting media freedom in the country. Several news websites have been blocked in the country, for example *TamilNet*, a Tamil-run multilingual website close to the LTTE hosted in Norway, as well as *LankaNewsWeb*, a Sinhala-run bilingual website hosted in the UK. In addition, between March 2004 and April 2009, 34 journalists were killed and more than 50 journalists have fled abroad during the same period of time. In July 2009, journalists remain the one professional group being targeted since the end of the war, and many still try to leave the country.

## CHAPTER 4: FROM GUEST WORKERS TO A 'MULTICULTURAL' SOCIETY IN GERMANY

Germany has a long history of emigration, which dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries. The country was also used by large numbers of eastern Europeans and Russians as a springboard to emigrate to the Americas in the 19th and early 20th centuries. German ports, such as Hamburg and Bremerhaven, had regular shipping services to North and South American ports. Immigration, in contrast, only started to play a role after the Second World War and gained its relevance in the 1960s and 1970s when 'guest-workers' – and, after the mid-80s, also their families – came to Germany. The reasons for migration, however, changed over the decades. In the 1960s and 1970s, 'guest workers' filled the gaps in the labour market, in the 1980s, the majority of the migrants were asylum seekers and, in the 1990s, mainly ethnic Germans from the former Soviet Union and its successor states resettled in the country (Statistisches Bundesamt, 18.12.2012). Most legal reforms concerning immigration took place during this decade.

These different 'waves' of migration were accompanied by changing policies. Sri Lankans entered Germany at different times for different reasons: few economic migrants arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, while Tamils entered mostly as asylum seekers in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the political situation in Sri Lanka itself. A brief historical overview will highlight the most important policy changes, which enable an understanding and contextualization of both the construction of identities of Sri Lankans in Berlin and their political engagement towards their home country.

Despite its 10.7 million international migrants from 194 countries in 2010, and despite ranking third behind the US and the Russian Federation<sup>18</sup> in world statistics on migration stock, Germany has for long not been considered an

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<sup>18</sup> Germany has a total migration stock of 9.3% of the total population, the Russian Federation a migration stock of 10.6%, and the USA of 37.1% (based on World Bank 2013 data).

'immigration' country (World Bank, 2013). Only in 1998, the then newly formed government recognized Germany for the first time as an 'immigration country' and, consequently, the policy debate turned into one with a positive flavour (Mehrländer et al., 2001). In 2012, one in eight residents in Germany was foreign born and either themselves, or their (grand)parents, had moved to Germany in the past 60 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 18.12.2012).

### ***Economic migration into Germany after World War II***

The principle of descent, *jus sanguinis*,<sup>19</sup> has characterized Germany's migration policies since the citizenship laws in 1913. Even though industrial capacity increased during World War II (WW II), production facilities were completely paralysed due to the destroyed transportation routes after the war. With the currency reform in 1948, economic development resumed and could gain a certain momentum. The impact of the Marshall Plan and the availability of human resources allowed the three 'Western Zones'<sup>20</sup> to grow dramatically. Migration flows after WW II were mainly characterized by a movement of ethnically German refugees and displaced persons from the 'Eastern Zone' to the 'Western Zones'. They formed about 23.9% of the total population of the then Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in 1960 and constituted 68% of the total population growth. At the same time, the unemployment rate decreased between 1950 and 1960 from 11% to 1.3% (Herbert, 2001). Indeed, Germany<sup>21</sup> needed these refugees and displaced persons from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in order to fill the labour market and enable the 'economic miracle' to happen.

In parallel, the first bilateral *Anwerbeabkommen* ('recruitment agreement') between the government of Konrad Adenauer and the Italian government was

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<sup>19</sup> Citizenship depended on the nationality of the father, and since 1974 also on the mother.

<sup>20</sup> After WW II, Germany was divided into four Allied Zones of occupation. Between 1945 and 1949, the 'Western Zones' referred to areas held by France, the United Kingdom and the United States and these formed, in 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany. The fourth zone, held by the Soviet Union and referred to as the 'Eastern Zone', formed the German Democratic Republic in 1949 until the reunification in 1990.

<sup>21</sup> In order to facilitate the reading, Germany will be used in this section to refer to either the Federal Republic of Germany or later to the reunified Germany.

signed on 22 December 1955. This agreement allowed the Nürnberg Federal Office for Labour and the Italian labour administration to recruit workers according to the needs of the German economy and specified not only the contractual terms according to the standards of German trade unions, but also the assurance of appropriate accommodation, the possibility to apply for family reunification – which was then to be considered favourably if the living conditions would so allow – and the right to transfer workers' salaries back home. Publicly, it was stressed that these were temporary measures to fill existing gaps in the labour market. This was also based on the premise that regional mobility among German workers was limited, technological rationalization would face financial limitations, women's participation in the labour market was desired but secondary to family politics, and an increase in working hours would have been refused by trade unions (Herbert, 2001).

Even though the integration of the Eastern German refugees and displaced persons was considered relatively unproblematic, partly because the immigrants spoke German and were of German origin, a growing tension between the Western German population and the new population groups started to emerge. Despite being a socially heterogeneous group, the migrants of non-German background were perceived as 'lower' or 'second class', and this perception was reinforced, among other things, by being accommodated in 'camps' or 'ghettos', and by not enjoying the same government privileges as the rest of the German population – although the Eastern German population had the right to vote. In addition, they were considered more and more as a threat in the labour market (Herbert, 2001).

This changing dynamic in the population, and the fact that in 1960, for the first time, the number of open vacancies on the labour market was higher than unemployment, led to the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, which abruptly halted the influx of East Germans from the GDR to West Germany. As a result, further recruitment agreements were signed and so-called *Gastarbeiter* ('guest workers') were invited to Germany from Southern Europe, mainly Greece and Spain (1960), Turkey (1961), Morocco (1963), Portugal (1964), Tunisia (1965), Yugoslavia (1968) and South Korea (1970) (Andersen et al., 2003).

The guest workers continued to be considered as temporary visitors and were expected by the autochthon population to return after a period of time. Longer-term settlement only started in 1965 when the *Ausländergesetz* ('foreigners' law') was adopted (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1965). However, a coherent system to naturalize migrants who wished to permanently reside in the country had not yet been established by the German government. In 1964, anti-guest worker sentiments increased, and trade unions and the media campaigned against the influx of guest workers. The brief economic recession in 1966–1967 also contributed to further exacerbate these sentiments and, consequently, Federal Chancellor Erhard temporarily halted the recruitment of guest workers (Thränhardt, 2001).

However, already by 1968, the situation changed politically and economically. The major coalition between the *Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union* (CDU/CSU, the Christian Democratic Union/the Christian Social Union<sup>22</sup>) and the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD, the Social Democratic Party of Germany) from 1966 to 1969 was able to find a consensus between the different interest groups (Thränhardt, 2001). In addition, the economic growth rate reached 7.3% in 1968 and 8.2% in 1969, which also reflected positively on the labour market: guest worker recruitment resumed and, between 1968 and 1973, the number of foreign workers increased from 1.014 million to 2.595 million. In particular, the number of Turkish guest workers increased rapidly from 130,000 in 1967 to more than 600,000 in 1973. Since 1972, Turks have constituted the biggest minority ethnic group<sup>23</sup> within Germany (Herbert, 2001).

These newly emerging migration patterns required close and regular contacts among family members and, as a result, in subsequent years, resulted in family reunification. Guest workers also started to constitute themselves as ethnic

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<sup>22</sup> The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) is a federal conservative party in Germany. The Christian Social Union is the CDU branch in Bavaria and is based on the constitutional rights of the Free State of Bavaria represented in the federal government.

<sup>23</sup> The term 'ethnic group' is used here to mean the population from Turkey. Turks are ethnically diverse and comprise, among others, Turks, Laz, Kurds, Armenians and Roma.

minorities in various associations. They developed their own infrastructure and colonies, and the first political, cultural and religious associations were founded in the 1960s (Pagenstecher, 1994). These networks among the migrants were also kept alive independently from economic factors (Motte et al., 1999). In 1971, two-thirds of foreign labourers and employees still sent financial remittances to their country of origin. This only changed as of 1980, when real incomes fell considerably (Pagenstecher, 1994).

In November 1973, as a consequence of the first oil crisis and the worldwide economic recession, the government announced an *Anwerbestop* ('recruitment stop'), which was accompanied by tightened entry restrictions. Consequently, foreign employment decreased but the overall proportion of foreigners in the population remained at the same level due to family reunification, which had taken place on a larger scale since 1970 (Herbert, 2001), especially among the Turkish population (Andersen et al., 2003). This also proved that the originally envisaged 'circulatory model', i.e., the temporary movement of foreigners to Germany and their return to their home countries, was not realistic (Thränhardt, 2001). Even more so, 'voluntary circulation' (i.e., voluntary return), which was actively promoted by the government, did not work: financial incentives to return, the so-called *Rückkehrhilfe* ('assistance to return') (2004) offered by the German authorities until June 1984, did not lead to increased return, with guest workers opting to stay in Germany rather than risking a failed readmission after spending some time in their country of origin (Pagenstecher, 1994).

Owing to contractual conditions in the recruitment agreements and with the modification of the foreigners' law allowing guest workers to bring their spouse and children into Germany in 1971, family reunification and the chain migration of women and children, following their husbands and fathers, started. Female guest workers were originally not considered (Motte et al., 1999). Hence, in 1961, women constituted less than 50% of the total number of the male guest worker population<sup>24</sup> (Pagenstecher, 1994; Herbert, 2001), although this figure

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<sup>24</sup> According to Herbert (2001), in 1961, the ratio of male guest workers to female guest workers was 1,000:451. In 1981, the ratio was 1,000 male:704 female guest workers, and this only balanced out in 1987.

varied according to nationality and migration conditions (Motte et al., 1999), and the male–female guest worker ratio changed gradually over the years towards a more balanced situation in 1987 (Pagenstecher, 1994).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the concept of ‘guest workers’ remained a flexible instrument that could be used according to the needs of the economy. The advantage of hiring female guest workers was mainly due their particularly cheap labour, while, at the same time, reproductive activities were not transferred to Germany but remained in the country of origin. Women worked mainly in the textile, garment and food industry, and with the expansion of the public sector, they also found employment as unskilled labourers in the service industry, mainly in canteens, hospitals, cleaning companies and hotels (Motte et al., 1999). In contrast, male guest workers were employed in the production lines of the car industry (Andersen et al., 2003). This labour pattern reproduced the traditional gender structures where women, on the one hand, remained on the lowest and most precarious level of employment and, on the other hand, continued to work in the informal, unprotected sectors and in the service industry close to the ‘traditional’ household tasks of women (Motte et al., 1999).

Indeed, this is also reflected to some extent in one of the interviews with a Sinhalese woman:

*“I came to Germany in the late 1970s. I wanted to study and establish a family. So actually, I did not start my studies but started to work as a day nanny. I am still doing this. I also brought my husband from Sri Lanka later. He has found work with the German Red Cross and we have two daughters.”* (Priya, Sinhalese, female, first generation)

This interview is striking because it is the only female interviewee who came from Sri Lanka to Germany as an economic migrant during this period, who entered before the husband and whose husband worked also in the ‘caring’ sector. Sinhalese women usually opted to move to the Middle East, especially Saudi Arabia, as domestic helpers rather than in Europe, and men usually crossed foreign borders first, to later bring their families. Gaining entry through a

temporary student visa and then entering the job market, however, seemed a more common practice among young Sinhalese – even in later years. All interviewees who considered themselves as economic migrants or entered with a temporary student visa were Sinhalese, but not all interviewed Sinhalese were economic migrants. The Tamil interviewees all gained official entry through an asylum application, even if some could have possibly been considered as ‘economic migrants’.

In parallel, in the 1970s, with the increasing perception of foreigners as minorities in the country, ‘integration’<sup>25</sup> became fashionable, even though it neither considered minorities’ needs *per se* but was rather geared towards securing the labour market and social peace, and hence aligned itself first and foremost with the assimilation of guest workers and immigrants. A good example was the ‘needs-oriented integration model’ developed by the Berlin Senate in 1972, which only fulfilled the needs of the economy and the labour market, rather than those of the minorities living in Berlin. Policies concerning ‘integration’ were temporary measures and, therefore, again, complementary to the policies applied towards guest workers (Pagenstecher, 1994). Both have been shaped by the selective perception that Germany was not an immigration country and, therefore, permanent measures would not be needed. In 1977, the immigration directives stated:

“The Federal Republic of Germany is not an immigration country; it does not strive to increase the number of German citizens in a targeted way through naturalisations” (in Pagenstecher, 1994: 54).

As a result, ‘integration’ was not considered a task of the government and society at large, but an ‘adjustment process’ carried out by the migrants as there was a general realization that guest workers may not return any time soon. In addition, guest workers increasingly brought their families to Germany and their children attended school in Germany. In principle, however, the

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<sup>25</sup> Note that in Germany at that time, ‘integration’ was not the terminology used; rather, there was the expectation that foreigners would just behave as Germans do. The term ‘assimilation’ was not used either in public discourse, even though the expectations in society were much closer to this concept than to integration. For ease of reading and due to a lack of correct terminology, ‘integration’ is used here.

general expectation was for migrants to adopt German habits and culture. The role of the government was only to select the foreigners who were temporarily allowed to reside in country. Through such measures, migrants were not able to gain social status and acquire professional skills; rather, the consequence was a stratification of the labour market and the failed integration of minorities into society. In fact, return was always kept open as an option for the German government; the original mother tongue was promoted through various means such as native language radio programmes, counselling services and language classes for migrant children, but not in order to ensure bilingual and intercultural education, but rather to facilitate return (Pagenstecher, 1994).

As early as 1979, the so-called Kühn Report recommended that Germany had to accept its immigration character and, even though in the same year, a specific bill asked for unlimited residence permits to be issued to long-term migrants, conditionality and the possibility of deportation continued to exist.

### ***Asylum seekers and refugees in the 1980s***

During the early period after the war, asylum seekers and political refugees were low in number, even though Germany applied a liberal asylum law due to its experience in WW II. Between 1953 and 1978, only 178,000 asylum applications, i.e., 7,000 applications per year, were submitted, and peaks were linked to specific political events, such as the Hungarian revolution (1956) and the Prague Spring (1968–1969) (Münz et al., 1999). Despite these moderate numbers, Germany was until 1980 the main destination country in which to seek asylum in Western Europe, with applicants coming largely from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka and Turkey (Bosswick, 1993).

This situation changed radically in 1980–1981 due to the following events: economically, the second oil crisis resulted in more rigid migration policies and asylum laws and, politically, the Turkish military putsch in 1980 and the introduction of martial law in Poland in 1981 resulted in an additional 200,000 asylum applications. Consequent to these events, the government introduced

an obligatory visa for asylum seekers from Turkey and Poland, and asylum seekers were prohibited from working. These measures reduced asylum applications from these two countries by nearly 90%, back to the levels of the mid-1970s (Münz et al., 1999; Pagenstecher, 1994). In addition, the family reunification rule had been tightened and now required not only an entry visa into Germany, but also evidence of a particular area of living space and an extended marriage period before permission to move to Germany was granted (Pagenstecher, 1994).

In 1982, the new coalition government of the *Christlich Demokratische Union* (CDU, Christian Democratic Union), the *Christlich Sozialistische Union* (CSU, Christian Socialist Union) and the *Freie Demokratische Partei* (FDP, Free Democratic Party) under Chancellor Kohl came to power. Helmut Kohl was elected in the spirit of a 'politics of renewal', focusing on decreasing the unemployment rate and explicitly reconfirming Germany as a 'non-immigration country', especially during the election campaigns, although this was not further pursued during his early tenure. Together with French President François Mitterand, Kohl initiated the first Schengen agreement of 1985, aimed at abolishing border controls within the then European Community (EC), although the issue of asylum seekers and refugees was not addressed at that time (Lavenex, 2001).

*"I came here in 1981, but my father came first. He wanted to go originally to London, but then the German politics was such that between 1980 and 1984 the CDU said, you can stay here and you can get easy access to asylum. So then we did not go to London but came to Berlin."* (Anadan, Tamil, male, second generation)

Even though this interviewee came slightly before Chancellor Kohl took power, obviously the pre-election momentum allowed for these early displacements. The account of this second generation interviewee is also reflected in the statistics: in 1984–1985, the number of asylum seekers rose rapidly again and, at that time, 23.5% of applicants were from Sri Lanka. Indeed, whereas in 1983 only 2,465 Sri Lankans filed asylum applications, in 1984 applications rose to

8,063 and, in 1985, to 17,380 (Bosswick, 1993). These drastic changes mirrored not only German politics at the time but, more importantly, they were rooted in the political situation in Sri Lanka and reflected the mass exodus from Sri Lanka after the 1983 riots.

These developments have to be considered also within the context of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in order to be fully understood: the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany), as the sole political party, defined all policies, including those of immigration between 1949 and 1989. Their influence on migration history was significant because they allowed young students from other socialist countries to enter the GDR to be trained in one of their technical institutes for a period of three years. At the same time, they also applied an open refugee policy, which became GDR's symbol for their commitment towards human rights.

(Pagenstecher, 1994). One interviewee remembered:

*"In 1984, my husband was arrested by the army and he was in prison. Then, within three days, we were able to take him out but then we just had to pack and come in 24 hours. Just leave the place and come. But, luckily, I had two German friends who came to visit me in Sri Lanka earlier and they told me that whenever I have to travel I can come because at that time, you did not need a visa to come to East Germany. So it was a country where you could land at any time."* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

Until 1987, the GDR airline, Interflug, carried political refugees for a fee from Iran, Nigeria, Libya, Sri Lanka and other countries to East Berlin. These refugees, arriving at the airport of Berlin Schönefeld, were allowed to cross the border to West Germany at the Friedrichstrasse station. Indeed, many of the interview partners who left Sri Lanka in the 1980s confirmed that they arrived at Schönefeld Airport in the GDR as no visa restrictions were imposed on Sri Lankan citizens. Within a few hours of arrival, they then crossed over to Germany at Friedrichstrasse station (n.a., 1986).

*“We landed in East Germany and we did not need a visa. That means for 24 hours you got the visa for free. It was a free zone. In that time, you could cross the border to West Germany. That’s all... I did not know why this was possible but I thought at the time – and I do not know whether this is right or wrong – I thought that was a general income for the East Germans. So they did not mind; 24 hours you stay, we will give you but you have to pay some money for that.”* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

This interview puts the GDR policies into perspective. So, obviously, the open refugee policy was indeed an important factor as to why Tamils migrated to Germany and not to other countries, such as the UK, France, Canada or Switzerland, but the perception why this was possible obviously differed starkly from the GDR’s intentions to emerge as a country with a human rights track record.

Another interviewee recalled the travel itself:

*“A young German lady has been very helpful at Schönefeld Airport. She gave me 20 Deutschmarks and she explained to me how I could enter West Germany. I took a taxi to Friedrichstrasse station, which was the border those days. As soon as I arrived on the other side, I claimed asylum.”* (Rajesh, Tamil, male, first generation)

This large influx of asylum seekers and refugees through East Germany also contributed to the tightening of migration policies in later years.

### ***The fall of the Iron Curtain and the Berlin Wall***

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification in 1989, migration patterns changed considerably: next to asylum seekers and refugees, especially from the Yugoslavian civil wars (Reisslandt, 2006), the number of East Germans entering the Western part exploded to 395,000 people in 1990

alone. By 1993, this number fell again to 180,000 and was later balanced out by the movement of West Germans settling in the East German parts of the then united Germany (Büchel et al., 1994). Within this decade, several million ethnic Germans, the so-called *Spätaussiedler*, from East European countries and the former Soviet Union, could get immediate and unrestricted access not only to Germany, but also to German citizenship due to the continued reliance on the principle of descent (Göktürk et al., 2007).

At the same time, with the reunification of Germany, people from countries outside the European Union who previously channelled their entry into Germany through the Friedrichstrasse station were cut off. The number of asylum seekers from non-European countries fell to below one-quarter of that of the previous year. Even earlier, Germany had signed an agreement with the GDR to close the entry point via East Berlin (Bosswick, 1993).

These events had a major impact on Sri Lankan Tamils who suddenly faced entry restrictions. One Tamil told his story of how he finally entered Germany:

*“I am from Jaffna, but then I left in 1992 because my family sent me away from the war; they wanted me to go abroad. But I had to come first to Colombo to organize everything because I could not come through Schönefeld any more. Colombo has a lot of people smugglers and agencies. It took some time to organize; then a friend made contact with one of them. They bring people to Europe, so they brought me to Italy. I did not stay. I did not like it. Then I crossed the border to Germany illegally. I did not have family here but friends. In Germany, I claimed asylum.”* (Nayan, Tamil, male, first generation)

So the travel and the entry into Germany has become much more difficult. The changes in the political context had a major impact on the legal framework, which changed in the early 1990s: a new foreigner law entered into force on 1 January 1991 which facilitated naturalization and family reunification, on the one hand, and allowed for a more rigid execution of deportations and more interpretative space for authorities, on the other hand (Reisslandt, 2006). In

addition, on 6 December 1992, the so-called 'asylum compromise' was signed between the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the SPD, which introduced major revisions in the *Grundgesetz* ('Basic Law') and the *Asylverfahrensgesetz* ('Asylum Procedural Law') as of 1 July 1993.

Article 16 of the 'Basic Law', which previously allowed temporary residence and the "right to a comprehensive examination of his or her application for asylum even if [it had] no prospect of a successful outcome" (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 1994) was amended. These provisions were now replaced by the right to asylum for persons persecuted on political grounds only if the person did not arrive through a "safe third state" (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 1994; Bosswick, 1993; Achermann et al., 1995).

Article 30 of the 'Asylum Procedural Law' – after its amendment – for example, stated that an asylum application is obviously unfounded when individual conditions indicate that the alien only files an application for asylum because of economic reasons, general hardship or to avoid an armed conflict. Furthermore, asylum applications that were considered as 'obviously ill-founded' would be examined through a short-track procedure and rejected. Finally, a so-called 'airport regulation' was introduced allowing that asylum seekers without legal documents or from safe third countries entering through an airport can be accommodated at the airport and, in the event that the application was rejected, entry into Germany could be refused (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004). As a result, asylum applications fell by 30% in the period following the amendment (Bosswick, 1993) and illegal immigration increased considerably (Göktürk et al., 2007).

The previously existing liberal asylum laws had now radically changed and existed no more. Only 3.7% of the asylum seekers received refugee status according to the Geneva Conventions (Münz et al., 1999). The laws were interpreted strictly and Germany did not accept the threat to life or torture as well-founded reasons for obtaining refugee status; rather, persecution by the state had to be proved, even if the principle of *non-refoulement* remained applicable. As a consequence, different levels of residence titles were

introduced for asylum seekers, which were limited and unlimited in nature. These were: the *Aufenthaltsgenehmigung* ('limited right to stay'), an *Aufenthaltsberechtigung* ('right to unlimited residence'), an *Aufenthaltsbewilligung* ('permission to reside'), an *Aufenthaltsbefugnis* ('residence title for exceptional purposes'), and a *Duldung* ('exceptional leave to remain in the country') (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004).

Many of the asylum seekers from Sri Lanka now received an 'exceptional leave to remain in the country' (*Duldung*) even though, in 1998, Sri Lanka ranked seventh among the countries of origin of asylum seekers<sup>26</sup> (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004).

The tendency towards increasingly temporary residence titles is also reflected in the following statistics: in 1990, 138 persons from Sri Lanka had a *Duldung*, in 1995, 875 received a *Duldung* and, in 1998, 1,930 received an exceptional leave to remain in the country, constituting 1.3% of the total number of persons with the same status (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004).

At the same time, in overall figures, the peak in the number of asylum seekers was reached in 1992 and 1993 when 28.1% and 24.1% respectively of the total foreign population entering Germany were asylum seekers. With the introduction of the above-mentioned laws in 1993, this percentage fell dramatically within a year to 11.7% in 1994 (Münz et al., 1999).

The most radical change, however, happened in 1998 with the change of government. Unemployment rates had risen from 2.8% in 1980 to 7.9% after reunification in 1989, and increased in 1995 to 10.4% (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2008). Despite the efforts of European integration, economic difficulties remained.

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<sup>26</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> rank: Yugoslavia (34,979 asylum seekers), 2<sup>nd</sup> rank: Turkey (11,754), 3<sup>rd</sup> rank: Iraq (3,768 asylum seekers), 7<sup>th</sup> rank: Sri Lanka (1,979 asylum seekers). (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004)

## ***Racist sentiments against immigrants***

Within this context of the early 1980s, racism and xenophobia started to grow. The media and political parties in the West have focused on migrants and foreigners as an issue for their election campaigns. Between 1990 and 1993, asylum homes were the targets of arson attacks (Prantl, 2012) and the private homes of people of foreign-born backgrounds were set on fire (Kuhrt et al., 2013). For the first time, foreigners were associated with issues of 'inner security' and criminal activities (Pagenstecher, 1994). Anti-Turkish campaigns also resulted in an increasing dichotomization of 'Europeans'<sup>27</sup> versus 'Non-Europeans', as well as 'Christians versus 'Muslims' (Andersen et al., 2003). This led also to the politicization of migrant networks, especially of the Turkish population (Pagenstecher, 1994).

As a result, after 16 years of tenure, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his CDU/CSU/FDP government lost the elections in October 1998 and a 'red-green' government of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD, Social Democratic Party of Germany) and the *Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* (Alliance 90/Greens) led by Gerhard Schröder came into power (süddeutsche.de/dpa, 2010). The red-green government provided a new perspective and, for the first time in Germany's history, recognized that Germany was indeed an 'immigration country' (Mehrländer et al., 2001; Reisslandt, 2006).

At the same time, after 10 years of reunification, East and West Germany faced two distinct developments: in Eastern Germany, the dreams of 'capitalism' did not materialize, industry crumbled and employment for both women and men became insecure; Western Germany had to absorb the high costs of reunification, which now fully hit the economy and, consequently, unemployment rates exploded, while prejudice and even violent racism directed at foreigners and asylum seekers became a daily phenomenon.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Europeans' refers to Central Europeans who were at the centre of some election campaigns asking even for the repatriation of non-Central Europeans (Andersen and Wichard, 2003).

## ***Migration-related initiatives from the EU***

The above-mentioned policy changes were also influenced by the gradually accelerating European integration. In 1992, the 'Treaty on the European Union' ('Maastricht Treaty') was signed that set clear rules not only in regards to a single currency market, but also in foreign and security policy, bringing migration much closer to the Justice and Home Affairs departments (EUR-Lex et al., 2010). Even though the Maastricht Treaty was a milestone towards the harmonization of migration policies among European Union member states, it did not have an immediate direct effect at national level. On 26 March 1995, the Schengen Agreement entered into force in seven countries, among them also Germany. It allowed the free movement of people without passport controls within this Schengen area (Göktürk et al., 2007; Communication department of the European Commission, 1995 - 2013). The last important step in this decade was the signing of the 'Amsterdam Treaty' (1997) in 1997, building on the 'Maastricht Treaty' and creating an 'area for freedom, security and justice' within the European Union. The European harmonization of immigration and asylum also meant to establish more rigid border controls when entering the Schengen area, stronger cooperation amongst the EU countries in asylum and immigration policies and on judicial matters, even though member states maintained their responsibility for ensuring law and order and safeguarding national security (EUR-Lex et al., 1995 - 2013; Reisslandt, 2006; Achermann et al., 1995).

## ***The development of a new legal framework***

Since 1993 with the revision of the Aliens Act, foreigners living in Germany for 15 years are allowed to become German citizens if they have no criminal record and have renounced their original citizenship (Sieveking, 1992). The same applies also to ethnic Germans having returned to Germany (*Aussiedler*). Until that time, even second and third generation migrants, who grew up in a country that they perceived as 'theirs' had no automatic right to citizenship (Green, 2004). They had to prove their lasting commitment to Germany (Göktürk et al., 2007). Dual citizenship was only granted under the circumstances that people

could not withdraw from their original citizenship. Therefore, the validity of the principle of descent had far-reaching consequences in characterizing 'Germanness' and in effectively controlling access to German citizenship (Göktürk et al., 2007).

The *SPD–Bündnis 90/Die Grünen* coalition government introduced a change in perspective from 1998 onwards, and in accepting Germany as an immigration country it also introduced a number of important policy changes in a move towards more positive migration policies. One initiative of the red–green government was the reform of the citizenship and immigration law.

After 67 years of applying the principle of descent, a new citizenship law came into effect in 2000, which then allowed children born to non-German parents to obtain automatic German citizenship under the following conditions: one parent had been legally residing in Germany for at least eight years (*jus soli*) (Reisslandt, 2006; Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2005; Göktürk et al., 2007); they had attended a German school for six years; and applied for citizenship between 16 and 23 years of age. For young people with a migrant background, dual citizenship is then accepted if the original country also allows for it. However, at the age of 18, the so-called *Optionszwang* ('enforcement to opt for one citizenship') imposes upon them to choose one citizenship only – either German or the citizenship of their original country. For first generation immigrants, language and civic knowledge is required to obtain citizenship (König, 2013).

This amendment was accompanied by a public debate that had started back in 1998 and culminated in the publication of the report of the so-called Süßmuth Commission in 2001 (Süßmuth, 2001). This comprehensive proposal was developed in cooperation with trade unions, civil society and business representatives, and suggested options for designing a modern immigration law embedded in the EU setting. The government subsequently adopted the *Einwanderungsgesetz* ('Immigration Act') in 2004.

On 1 January 2005, the Immigration Act entered into force, harmonizing Germany's immigration-related residence titles with the other European Union countries. The law also newly incorporated the recruitment of high-tech professionals (Göktürk et al., 2007) as companies called on politicians to allow immigrants to enter into the high-skilled labour market. The act also includes standards for family unification, requirements for language skills of the spouse and for obtaining German citizenship for children of non-German descent born in Germany. For the first time, integration measures such as language and citizenship courses were offered (2004).

During the same period, the *Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz* (AGG, 'General Equal Treatment Act'), which is based on several EU equal opportunities directives, was discussed and finally adopted in 2006. Up until then, only Article 3 of the 'Basic Law' provided for a guarantee of equal treatment and only the labour law provided some legal provisions to take action in case of concrete discrimination. The new AGG covers six grounds of discrimination, including ethnicity, direct and indirect forms of discrimination, and it applies to employment, education, social benefits and access to goods and services (Nickel, 2006). The *Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes* (ADS, 'federal anti-discrimination office') was established by the AGG as a specialized body that offers advice to victims of discrimination, publishes reports and provides information concerning discrimination to the wider public. Currently, 25% of all requests for advice concern ethnic discrimination (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2013).

### ***Sri Lankans in Germany: Their citizenship and multicultural Germany***

In 2000, 4,597 people from Sri Lanka sought German citizenship, which represented a rise of more than 40% within one year. The number of applicants for citizenship from Sri Lanka remained high in 2001 and 2002, and only in 2003 did it fall back to the level of 1999 (Thränhardt, 2008). It is worth noting that at

that time, in 2002, the total migration stock of Sri Lankans in Germany was 43,634 persons, being ranked 15th within the overall number of foreigners in Germany (Bundesbeauftragte für Migration Flüchtlinge und Integration, 2003). Some 33% of them were only in possession of a limited stay permit, 17% with either a residence title for exceptional purposes or with an exceptional leave to remain, and approximately 19% without a decision (Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, 2004). This also meant that Sri Lankans throughout the years did not have a stable residence permit, even after 20 years of residence in the country. This may also be one explanation for the decision to quickly apply for German citizenship under the new citizenship law.

Most of the interviewees – if they considered a change of citizenship – have applied and received their new citizenship under the new red–green coalition government. This applies to both Sinhalese and Tamils, as well as to the first and second generations alike. Some of their voices are reproduced here:

*“I have come here to work at an embassy, but I was paying every year £6,000 for my daughter’s education. If you are European, you do not have to pay, but I also thought it will be difficult to get the papers [i.e., official documents/passport]. I got a visa every year, then for two years, then later for five years, so I thought, I do not have to go for the passport as you have to wait for a long time for it. But visa applications also take a long time and sometimes you do not know what will happen, whether they [German authorities] will kick you out. So then, in 2003, after so many years, I decided it was better to get the papers [passport]. Now I am German.”* (Kumarage, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

*“I applied in 2004. I could have done it earlier but the policies were not easy then... I travelled a lot in Europe and went to almost all the places, crossing borders illegally because we had travel restrictions with our permit... Then I applied in 2004 after the new laws came and now I am a German.”* (Rajesh, Tamil, male, first generation)

*“Since October 2005, I am officially German. If you want to become a citizen you have to argue for it. That was not so easy, so I did not apply. Now my German friends helped me and I did it independently of my parents. I am a Tamil, but it [the German citizenship] makes it all easier now. I do not pay fees for my studies, for example.”* (Anbarasani, Tamil, female, second generation)

Regardless of their background, Sri Lankans applied for their citizenship only between 2000 and 2005, even though they entered Germany largely in the early or mid-80s. Even if two people here did not refer directly to the change in the law, they obviously knew about the difference in the procedures as they all referred to earlier difficulties and the easier access now. Among the interviewees, there was a slight tendency for women to apply more willingly for German citizenship than men. Finally, despite being born in Germany, before 2000, second generation Sri Lankans had to apply for German citizenship. Those born after the new citizenship act came into force automatically received German citizenship at birth.

Based on the above-mentioned historic developments, Germany has turned into a country that acknowledges its diverse population. In 2011, some 26,218 Sri Lankans were residing in Germany, not including those who had obtained German citizenship (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2011). Despite this acknowledgement, the majority population still expects people of foreign-born backgrounds to integrate into German society, speak the language and adapt to German habits. With or without such efforts to integrate, people of colour experience discrimination in many fields of life.

In response, Berlin has, among other places, opened several counselling services to assist victims of racism (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes, 2013). Furthermore, the city also adopted the *Berliner Partizipations- und Integrationsgesetz* (‘participation and integration law of Berlin’) in 2010 to ensure the appropriate inclusion of people with a migration background in public administration and political positions. (Kölling, 2013). In addition, *Ausländerbeiräte* (‘local integration councils’) have been set up and many

foreign-born Germans and non-German citizens, including Sri Lankans as one interviewee witnessed, participate in and contribute to these councils in order to foster the development of local multicultural strategies and to channel their individual political engagement.

## **CHAPTER 5: BELONGING, CITIZENSHIP AND IDENTITY**

The previous chapter focused on the contextualization of migration flows from Sri Lanka to Germany. As such, it provided an understanding of the political and economic factors influencing collective politics in the diaspora. These circumstances provide the framework within which belonging and the politics of belonging emerges. The reasons for migration and migrants' settlement options in the host country are embedded in the political and economic, social and cultural realities of the migrant and, ultimately, impact on the relationships between the home and the host country. This chapter builds on these circumstances and analyses the different factors contributing to the sense of belonging of Sri Lankan migrants in Berlin in particular. It explores the emotional links of Sinhalese and Tamils in the diaspora to home and the 'homeland', to citizenship, and to nationalism, as well as the construction of identity. These are some of the constituent factors shaping the sense of belonging and of the politics of belonging in the diaspora.

### ***Framing belonging***

Belonging is an emotional attachment and a feeling of connectedness. Belonging is multi-layered, dynamic, relational and situational (Wood et al., 2011: 900; Yuval-Davis, 2011). It is anchored in the self, the relationship to people and places, and the different economic, political, social and cultural realities and experiences of the individual. Probyn (1996) refers to belonging as 'being' and 'yearning'. This implies that belonging not only influences and shapes today, but also includes a perspective for tomorrow. Yuval-Davis (2011: 12) constructs belonging along three axes: (1) social locations; (2) identifications and emotional attachments to different collectivities; and (3) ethical and political value systems. This framework, summarized below, is a useful tool that can also be applied in diaspora settings and, hence, will be referred to throughout this chapter.

**Social locations** are determinants that shape the individual's being along different power lines. They express his or her position in society but their determining character shifts according to different moments in history (Harding, 1991). They overlap and complement each other and one location never stands on its own but is coupled with other determinants. Their importance can vary and can be expressed through 'different embodied signifiers' (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 13). Certain locations can transcend boundaries and be absorbed or assimilated in other determinants. Social locations intersect with each other and allow an understanding of stratifications in society. They interrelate but are different from emotional attachments (see Yuval-Davis, 2011).

**Emotional attachments** refer to identity narratives that are a way of representing and perceiving oneself, either imagined or experienced (Christou, 2011). These narratives set boundaries, expand boundaries, shift boundaries, define and redefine them. Emotional attachments and identifications relate to a collectivity and are characterized by reflexivity and subjectivity. In fact, through emotional attachments and identifications, 'belonging' can be expressed and collective identities constructed. The different social locations and power relations shape these narratives (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005; see Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Yuval-Davis's third analytical dimension, **ethical and political value systems**, complements social locations and emotional attachments in so far as it involves a judgement and an assessment that positively or negatively influence the sense of belonging. Values are linked to ideologies, which often are drivers for action. Hence, value systems also closely interrelate to the politics of belonging and identity politics, which will be discussed and further elaborated in the next chapter.

### ***Diasporic belonging***

The question of 'to whom to belong to' and 'in which ways to belong' is multi-faceted and critical to migrants. A migration process is disruptive by nature and

an inherently emotional experience. Indeed, emotions are of fundamental importance for the construction of 'belonging', which articulates itself at the interface of power and emotions and the interface of identification and participation (Yuval-Davis et al., 2005). The temporary or permanent settlement in a foreign country and the identity formation process linked to it often carries with it a "heightened emotional need to belong to a community" (Brown, 2011: 230 ). Belongingness in the diaspora then can be defined as a "process of identification and contestation generated by migrants' struggles to understand their sense of self through place-based emotional attachments" (Christou, 2011: 249).

One interviewee commented:

*"I can hear the news about Somalia or any other country, and the situation in other countries can be also very bad, but at the end of the day, I can only relate to the situation in Sri Lanka. I know what war means and I can understand it also in a different context, but emotionally I can only grasp it for Sri Lanka."* (Kumarage, Sinhala, male, first generation)

Kumarage expresses his emotional attachment to a place, in this case Sri Lanka. He also shows that indeed belonging is relational and, to some extent, his relationship is based on a struggle – the struggle to understand versus the struggle to feel. The latter, however, remains the determinant factor for his belonging. Kumarage's account brings features of belonging and features of the diaspora together.

The notion of 'being' and 'becoming' is essential for belonging and Christou (2011) precisely makes the same point in referring to the diaspora. Soysal (2000), on the other hand, claims the "[d]iaspora is a past invented for the present" (Soysal, 2000: 2), though not only the present is at stake but also the future, the becoming, the longing.

This entails a process in which agency is essential. Anthias relates positionalities to the “intersection of structure and agency” (2001: 635) and they are “complexly tied to situation, meaning and the interplay of our social locations” (2006:29). Hence, migrants in the diaspora can shape and are shaped by their present and future, depending on their positionalities and social locations, just as belonging is shaped, intentionally and unintentionally, formally and informally, and is both real and virtual. Korac (2009a), in her research, highlights the agency of forced migrants, even though this agency should also be extended to economic migrants.

### ***Relating to ‘home’ and ‘homeland’***

Central to the concept of ‘belonging’ and to the understanding of diasporas is the relationship to ‘home’ and the ‘homeland’. Soysal (2000) points out that the “[d]iaspora is the extension of the place left behind, the ‘home’” (Soysal, 2000: 3). Brubaker (2005) characterizes diaspora according to three criteria: dispersal, homeland orientation, and boundary-maintenance. So, in diaspora studies, the point of departure for the analysis is the notion of **dispersal** (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Brubaker, 2005). This dispersal may be forced – either linked to a traumatic event or to the search for work. Van Hear (1998) elaborates on these reasons for dispersal and differentiates between voluntary and involuntary migration, as outlined in the previous chapter, but he still argues within the conceptual framework of Cohen, focusing on the ‘dispersal’ as the key to migration. This, however, leads to the critique of the notion that the forced dispersal of a group, the experience of exile, loss and dis-location, as well as the approach towards social, political and economic relationships, are only linked to the home country. Cohen, nevertheless, recognizes that the host country plays an important role in the life of the diaspora communities but he describes it as a “troubled relationship with host societies” (1997:26), which he links to the lack of acceptance from the majority population in the host country. It is this relationship that influences the sense of belonging. Belonging also necessitates being understood and being recognized in the host society (Ignatieff, 1994).

In this context, now, the differentiation between diaspora and transnational communities is essential: Introducing the notion of transnationalism becomes useful in so far as it involves, as a main feature, social formation crossing borders rather than sustaining them (Vertovec et al., 1999; Vertovec, 1999b). Transnationalism is associated with **multiple relationships in both the host and home country** characterized by a movement forth and back or, in the words of Basch et al. (1994:7), transnationalism allows migrants to “sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together societies of origin and settlement”, crossing geographic, cultural and political borders. In this way, transnationalism creates a space for belonging that is embedded in both societies and is characterized by mobility. Van Hear (1998) also recognizes these frequent movements between country of residence and country of origin, but he does not elaborate on the multiple facets of the circularity of migrant populations. Circular migration can involve either physical visits to the home country or it can, as Sanders (2002) points out, entail a ‘figurative dimension’, i.e., virtual visits home through regular communication. Indeed, technology allows for new forms of transnationalism and it also allows for new forms of belonging.

The internet creates a new form of place-based emotional attachment where geographical location is replaced by virtual sociality (Blanchard et al., 2002; Appiah, 1998). Social media becomes a meeting point where identity can be negotiated, leading to a sense of belonging (Christensen, 2012). Even though the internet allows interactions to take place without necessarily becoming a member of a group, they enable “enactments of phantasmic belonging” (Christensen, 2012: 900).

Most interviewees have indeed mentioned the new forms of technology; Skype, VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol) technologies, and other social media have dramatically changed their way of interacting and keeping the relationship with ‘home’ alive. Age and gender, however, matter. Among the older first generation, occasionally, traditional telephone lines are used to communicate but most have mentioned that they used Skype to call home – although this is

often initiated and facilitated by their children. The second generation, both Tamils and Sinhalese, indifferently use the wide range of social media, online platforms, Skype and other VOIP-based technologies. Women and men are both active, but one Sinhalese interviewee whose father was assassinated and who left later to join a father's friend in Berlin shared the following:

*"I use Facebook a lot. I can write there what I really think and I log in also in some other platforms and I post my poems. I do not use my real name but I always think about my father and I write about him. I post photos of him, I connect to him like this because I have no family any more elsewhere: I can express myself freely like this and have no social pressures."* (Jayani, Sinhalese, female, 35 years, unmarried, first generation)

Jayani takes advantage of the protective space of the internet, where she escapes her social realities and creates for herself a space of 'phantasmic belonging'. The anonymity of the internet gives her comfort and she can break away from the pressures of society, which she otherwise faces as an unmarried woman at that age.

Another interviewee, however, uses the internet quite differently:

*"I am a Facebook journalist. I use it for my political convictions. I share news on Sri Lanka with my friends and I tell the world about the situation in Sri Lanka."* (Sivalingam, Tamil, male, 54 years, divorced, first generation)

Between these two interview partners, the gender difference appears obvious: Jayani appreciates the invisibility of the internet whereas Sivalingam uses the internet precisely because of its public outreach. He logs in with his real name and he shares political statements, he connects to friends and others to do politics. It also allows him to meet new friends and create a community he otherwise would not have. So even though Jayani and Sivalingam have a very

different approach to online platforms, they both create a sense of belonging and they both connect to the homeland.

In addition to these individual accounts, in Berlin itself a number of transnational networks have been established in recent years, such as the International Network of Sri Lankan Diaspora (INSD)<sup>28</sup> and Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka (JDS)<sup>29</sup>. Both networks work and exert influence through the internet and, in doing so, they become part of a larger transnational community. This, in turn, also creates confidence and brings about emotional attachment and identification.

Even though transnationalism becomes a useful additional concept, it does not yet fully acknowledge the complexity of the relationship to the home and host country as it fails to reflect the ideological dimension of a 'homeland'. In Sri Lanka, 'homeland' has become a loaded concept and is mainly linked to the claim by the Tamil nationalist movement for an independent state in the North and East, which they consider as their traditional 'homeland'. Therefore, the Sinhalese community does not apply this term, especially nationalist Sinhalese, who refer rather to the 'motherland' or 'Mother Lanka'. The association to the 'motherland' and 'Mother Lanka' is rooted in the Sinhalese epic 'Mahavamsa', which served – especially during the war – as an important instrument to mobilize Sinhalese nationalists for war, and defines the relationship to the home country. The mother was glorified not only to protect the family, but also to hail the nation and create a sense of belonging to a collectivity (Told, 1997). So the relationship to the home country becomes gendered.

The differentiation between 'homeland' and 'motherland' becomes important in so far as it expresses a very different emotional and ideological relationship, associated with particular meanings. Therefore, the classical notion of a diaspora community being only linked to the home country without further qualifications is too reductionist. According to many Sri Lankans in Germany, the relationships between Sri Lanka and Germany are far more complex and

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<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.srilankandiaspora.com/blog/>

<sup>29</sup> See <http://www.jdslanka.org/>

multiple: depending on the political situation, the individual and collective migration history, and on the social location of the individual, the relationship to Sri Lanka can either be ideological or real, or it can limit itself to relationships in Germany either with fellow Sri Lankans only, to both Germans and Sri Lankans, or it can transcend into virtual space. Transnationalism indeed absorbs some of this complexity and provides a base to understand multi-layered, multi-territorial and multidimensional belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

Another aspect shaping the relationship to the home country was the ceasefire period of 2002–2005:

*“After 20 years, I have been back to Sri Lanka in 2002 at the beginning of the ceasefire for three weeks. Of course, I was a bit excited to go and there are no words to describe how I felt.”* (Subu, Tamil, male, first generation)

For many Tamils, like for Subu, this period was indeed a window of opportunity to move back and forth to Sri Lanka, especially to the North, which is their considered ‘homeland’. Only at this point, circular migration has become important to them. During the war periods, their status in Germany and their political affiliations back home usually did not allow them to move. So although they may have kept communication to the home country alive, often this was interrupted or very much limited. Their engagement then focused on relationships in the host society, even if their motivation to do so was based on their ‘failed’ or ‘interrupted’ relationship to the home country, as will also be shown in the next chapter. This especially applies to older first generation Tamils, who indeed kept a diaspora identity alive.

In contrast, the Sinhalese interviewees, especially if they had come to Germany for work or studies, could keep their contacts alive throughout the years. Only those Sinhalese who were politically involved had to often restrict themselves in their movements and contacts, mostly focusing their contacts on family members or those sharing the same political ideology. Circular migration, therefore, was always a feature of the relationship of Sinhalese to Sri Lanka.

Only those politically involved encountered restrictions, which then led to a similar 'interrupted' relationship to the homeland as for Tamils.

The circulation of migrant populations does not correspond necessarily with Safran's (1991) and Cohen's (1997) description regarding the **aspiration to return home** of diaspora communities. Transnational or circular communities, in contrast, practise this return regularly. Indeed, one could argue that this aspiration is geared towards the **permanent** return 'home', which indeed remains a challenge for Tamils, given the political context in Sri Lanka and their new lives built in Germany. At the same time, this aspiration is a necessity in order to maintain a sense of belonging, especially in a host society that does not value diversity, particularly in regards to the first generation.

*"After one year here in Germany, I said 'I want to go back'. After two years, I said 'I want to go back' and, if you ask me today, I will say 'I want to go back'. It is just like that. I do not want to stay here. We will just bridge some time here and then I will go back... but, well, who knows?"*  
(Amilan, Tamil, male, first generation, migrated in 1983)

Some authors (Marienstrass, 1989; Van Hear, 1998) emphasize the length of stay abroad as a determining feature of diaspora and transnational communities and as a factor influencing the sense of belonging. Many of the Sri Lankan interviewees, when perceiving themselves as transnational communities, challenged the notion of permanent residence or return as they felt they were not bound to one country alone – both in geographical and ideological terms.

For many interview partners, especially for the first generation forced migrants, return remains a 'myth' that may not become reality as such. Indeed, these experiences corroborate Al-Rasheed's findings (1994) on Iraqi Arab and Assyrian refugees in London, whose desire to return is determined by past experiences and the relationship with the country of origin, and who justify their marginality in their country of residence through the imagined return.

Along these lines, Tavarajah and Sivapalan shared the following:

*“Why we do not learn German? Because we are staying only temporarily in Germany. We did not come for work; we came because we had to flee. We want to go back. Even after so many years, we still want to go back.”* (Tavarajah, Tamil, male, first generation, migrated in 1981)

*“My plan was to return after a few months when things calmed down. That’s the hope always, no?”* (Sivapalan, Tamil, male, first generation, migrated in 1985)

Amilan, Tavarajah and Sivapalan: all three are Tamils with a migration history dating back to the 1980s during the anti-Tamil riots. They all still keep the option of ‘return’ alive. Kajani, in contrast, shares a different perspective:

*“When I think of going home to Jaffna, so what do I do there? Now we lost all our friends and relatives, so I’ll be a stranger in that country. I mean, I don’t have an affinity to go there only because I feel for it... I am not going to return there and I am not going to live there. I have my children here now. I will stay with them.”* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation, migrated in 1983)

All four interviewees are Tamil, share a similar migration history, and have children raised in Germany. Kajani, in contrast to Amilan, Tavarajah and Sivapalan, however, is a woman coming from a middle class background, English educated and performing a profession of her choice. Against this background, the difference is class based and gendered: Kajani, despite her feeling for Sri Lanka, does not want to go back because she accepts the changed realities ‘back home’ and, as a woman, she clearly acknowledges her affinity to her children who indeed influence her decision to stay or return. So the ‘public/political’ considerations become secondary, and the ‘private’ prevails. Amilan, Tavarajah and Sivapalan keep the ‘myth’ of return alive, even though they themselves know that it is indeed an unlikely option given their family ties in Germany, but, for them, the ‘political’ prevails. So women and men acknowledge their realities differently and integrate these into their sense of

belonging differently. Their reflective process is different, even though they have a shared understanding of their belonging *per se*. To some extent, one could argue here that the 'reflexivity' is gendered and class based.

Returning home remains a desire, even if the political reality does not allow for it. Nevertheless, it helps to keep the emotional attachment to the home country alive despite the fact that "*return is a self-deception which we create to live in a myth*" (Madura, Sinhalese, male, first generation, migrated for political reasons in 2004).

These voices show in addition that the circumstances of departure and the level of integration in Germany shape this desire to return, rather than ethnicity *per se*, even though sheer pragmatism also comes into play when thinking about migrants' preferred place of residence.

Those who left for political reasons and who have become dissenters of the dominant political ideology keep the myth of a permanent return alive, even though they know that Sri Lanka has changed considerably during their absence and Sri Lanka is not a 'real' option any more; but the idea of return is, in Amilan's words, "*in our heads always*". This dynamic allows migrants to bear the hardships and marginalization faced in Germany and to justify their political engagement. In Berlin, some Tamils and Sinhalese share these experiences and together create an identity that distinguishes them from the majority population within both ethnic groups. They define themselves through the political context of Germany and Europe at large, and consider democracy and human rights as cornerstones of their political engagement towards the home and host country<sup>30</sup>. As one of the interviewees explained:

*"We need to learn from Europe how democracy works... We enjoy democracy here, so how can we support a militarized rule there?"*  
(Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation, migrated in 1980)

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<sup>30</sup> See also the history of the International Network of Sri Lankan Diaspora (INSD), <http://www.srilankandiaspora.com/blog/>

Sri Lankans who left for economic reasons are, in many ways, similarly torn between Sri Lanka and Germany, even though they have a real option of return. They very often consider a financial investment, for example, the purchase of land in Sri Lanka, which would be their home in old age. Nevertheless, life has changed in both worlds: children and grandchildren have settled in Germany, and an actual return may or may not happen. For many, the compromise is to live in Sri Lanka and Germany and stay a few months in each country:

*“We are planning to go back to Sri Lanka and settle down there. We invested in Sri Lanka, built many houses and we are getting enough income [from these] to live. We are planning to go back, even though I am still here.”* (Kumarage, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

This, of course, is not a possibility for many Tamils who left for political reasons and express their sadness at the impossibility of return:

*“The tragedy is that a lot of Sinhalese people who went out to work, have made their money, bought their little land, and have gone back to end their days in what is home for them. But this option is not available for Tamils.”* (Pillay, Tamil, male, first generation, migrated in 1958)

The issue of return is, of course, dominant in the minds of the first generation, both Sinhalese and Tamils. They have grown up and lived in Sri Lanka for a substantial part of their lives and so they still have positive memories associated with it. For the second generation – having grown up in Germany already – this desire to return may not apply. And yet, recognizing the difficulties their parents experience in living abroad, and despite feeling ‘German’, they, too, are split between Sri Lanka and Germany. *“I am not quite sure what I want to do; whether I will stay or go back”* (Kamani, Sinhalese, female, second generation). A number of interview partners expressed the sense that they are ‘German’ but they do want to go to Sri Lanka, live and contribute to the development of the country. To some extent, they created a new notion of home for themselves that had not existed before in this way:

*“I’d like to go back to Sri Lanka, maybe in ten years, once the situation is normal. I cannot say when exactly. But, definitely, I want to go back and bring knowledge to my people. I can work anywhere, in the East, in the North or in Colombo, although I want to primarily help Jaffna and the Tamil people.”* (Bala, Tamil, male, first generation, migrated in 1984)

### ***Creating an ‘imagined home’***

Regardless of ethnicity, the reason for migrating and the length of stay, the desire to return home is closely linked to the collective memory and myths around the country ‘back home’. So in analogy to Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’ (1983), an ‘**imagined homeland**’ is created that may or may not reflect the actual social, political, cultural or economic context of today’s Sri Lanka. This collective memory is inevitably linked to the idealization of ‘home’ and the desire to maintain, restore or even create the ‘homeland’ or ‘motherland’ abroad. Both Sinhalese and Tamil interviewees do reproduce their respective culture abroad at different levels<sup>31</sup>: language, food habits, dress codes, songs and dances, traditions and rituals, caste and class are all reproduced abroad, even though the diaspora communities have different intensity levels in terms of their cultural reproduction. The Canadian Tamil community, for example, has the reputation for being strongly bound to the traditions of Jaffna. The German Tamil community is, in this regard, considered much more ‘open’, yet, not only a ‘home’ is created abroad, but also a ‘nation’ and identity imagined, both on an individual and on a collective level. Indeed, the separatist Tamil national movement fostered this dual reproduction of a nation and an imagined national identity abroad as it enabled the creation of an efficient support network. The notion of ‘home’ is not static within one person but, rather, can shift and change.

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<sup>31</sup> See also F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis (1989) on women’s reproductive roles in ethnic and nationalist processes.

Joisten (2003) has differentiated between *Heimat* (the space) and *Heim* (place) of living. *Heimat*, however, also includes the feeling of home and being sheltered, which is also linked to the German term of *Geborgenheit* (feeling of security).

Indeed, both *Heimat* and *Geborgenheit* are important in so far as they do not link to a geographical place but to emotional and political space and, in this way, *Heimat* and *Geborgenheit* are, indeed, vital determinants of belonging. Being rooted in the German language, these terms are, indeed, also differentiated and intuitively used in the interviews:

*“I am OK here in Europe, especially in Germany, even though I am not accepted here because of the colour of my skin. Here, I am getting looks which can kill, but in Sri Lanka I would be really killed... Where do I want to be? I do not know. I think I can be anywhere where I feel free... I need Heimat. Heimat is where you have Geborgenheit. Of course, I am Sri Lankan and want to be there, but I can be anywhere where I can speak freely and express my thoughts. I need political Geborgenheit more than an emotional home. Then only can I have a Heimat.”* (Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

For Jayalath, a political migrant and an active political activist, *Heimat* is found in the political space, in which the feeling of freedom and security is important. Much more frequently, however, *Heimat* is associated with an emotional space and clearly it is differentiated simply as a geographical space. Schweineköper (2005) has referred to three components of *Heimat*, emotional, social and spatial, while Greverus (1979) embeds *Heimat* in the trinity of community, space and tradition. Important to all is the social construction of the concept and the mostly positive feeling associated with it<sup>32</sup>, among others, to *Geborgenheit*, impacting on many aspects of the social, emotional and political life of a person and helping to shape his or her sense of belonging. It may or may not be linked

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<sup>32</sup> Mitzscherlich (1997) also points out that *Heimat* can also bring along feelings of discomfort and restrictions.

to (early) socialization experiences and to geographical locations (Ratter et al., 2012).

In this context, some interviewees also consider themselves as *heimatlos* (without *Heimat*), both among the first and second generation alike, but mainly within the Tamil community and, consequently, they do not know where 'home' or *Heimat* is any more, just as Anbarasani recounted:

*"There were moments where I thought this is all very unfair because my friends can spontaneously say 'Germany is my Heimat' and, if I ask my parents, they also can spontaneously say 'Sri Lanka is my Heimat' because they lived half of their lives there. But I can neither say this nor that."* (Anbarasani, Tamil, female, second generation)

If rooted in Sri Lanka, memories of home are often linked to the landscape or the people who were once encountered, and these memories are compared to life in Germany. It is this comparison that creates a dynamism enabling the interviewees to select the 'best' of each country for their notion of *Heimat*. The friendliness of the people and the smell of the sea have often been identified as associations connected to home in Sri Lanka; a free society and democracy were positive features associated with Germany. Gaps in one country are filled through the other country, contributing to 'imagining' a home and, indeed, creating a new notion of home and *Heimat* based on a value system, combining those of Germany and Sri Lanka – a home that is located between both worlds and actually does not exist in real terms. As memories are created and recreated, identities are formed and reformed, the relationship to the home country shaped and reshaped, and *Heimat* constructed and reconstructed. These are multi-layered processes reflecting individual histories, and yet, influenced by a collective, especially in a politicized context like Sri Lanka.

Second generation Sinhalese and Tamils often perceive their home – along with their identity – as being rooted in Germany, but clearly with links to Sri Lanka. However, discriminatory practices and racist attacks on foreigners or visible minorities reinforce the attachment to an imagined home and disrupt the feeling

of belonging in the host society. Yeoh et al. (2003) have argued similarly that the nostalgic memory of a 'lost' or 'imagined' homeland is often accompanied by the refusal of the host country's society to recognize the cultural distinctiveness of community members.

*"If there is a Tamil state I can imagine living there. That is why I have married a Tamil woman from Sri Lanka... I can imagine living there and considering it as Heimat, and Germany I consider as a second Heimat, actually a 'Berliner Heimat'. Heimat is for me an area where there is an independent Tamil Eelam and where there are equal rights and conditions: the same conditions to attend university and to work. Heimat is a place where you are not considered second class."* (Ganesh, Tamil, male, second generation)

Ganesh's perspective is quite outstanding for several reasons: Ganesh is a second generation Tamil who has been raised in Germany by Tamil parents. He speaks Tamil and German fluently (with a Berlin accent) and is a German citizen. He is politically engaged and this activism shapes his understanding of *Heimat* as he imagines *Heimat* in Tamil Eelam. Usually, such a feeling of belonging is only observed among first generation Tamils who have spent a number of years in Sri Lanka and, therefore, can directly associate themselves with this imagined place. But Ganesh's *Heimat* of the imagination is also borne out of his status in German society, where he is considered 'second class' – despite the fact that he is perfectly integrated according to German policy standards. Although he accepts that Germany can be a second *Heimat*, he seems to create his own 'mini-homeland' at home domestically: he married a wife from the Jaffna homeland, carefully selected back home, and brought her to Germany to ensure that his "*children are raised in the Jaffna tradition*", as he further explains in the interview. Ganesh consciously has chosen his wife to ensure the cultural reproduction of his imagined 'homeland' and, in this way, he instrumentalizes her for his own construction of belonging, his disassociation from German society and his nationalism. The gendered process described here is not unusual as such, but it is so for a second generation Tamil German.

Ganesh also shows that there is a link between the construction of the homeland and the treatment faced in the host country. These two processes – linking strongly to the home country and weakly to the host country – can be mutually reinforcing and this dynamic then influences the sense of belonging. In fact, belonging is not only geared to the ‘homeland’ and the creation of a new, imagined home, but it is even more so embedded in the host country and the ability to participate in that society.

### ***Relating to citizenship***

For Yuval-Davis “[t]he notion of citizenship can be seen as the participatory dimension of belonging to a political community” (2011: 46). Citizenship can be defined as the “set of practices (juridical, political, economic and cultural) which define a person as a competent member of society, and which as a consequence shape the flow of resources to persons and social groups” (Turner, 2000: 2). Citizenship, in its traditional understanding, expresses a legal status and implies rights and obligations of a person in regards to a given state. Marshall (1992) has differentiated three categories of citizenship rights: civil, political and social rights. National citizenship can be considered as a framework that structures modern democracies and legitimates collective action, the allocation of resources and the use of power. In this conception, the nation state sets the boundaries for participatory citizenship (Tambini, 2001) and constitutes the basis for defining national belonging.

*“I only realized how difficult everything was, once my father had to leave. He had a problem with the [medical] insurance. They did not want to pay the hospital for him. Then only I realized how difficult everything was. If you do not know the correct answer, then you are lost... He went back after some time but I stayed here. Then I had visa problems but I did not tell him. I started to work as a babysitter and I got married, so I got the visa again. ... I do not want to become a German citizen. I am not from here. I am not German, and I want to go back to Sri Lanka.” (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation, Sri Lankan citizen)*

Chahila's father came as an economic migrant to Germany and kept his Sri Lankan citizenship. As he could not access social support in Germany, he returned to Sri Lanka but Chahila stayed. As her legal status in Germany was bound to the father's income, she also faced problems with regards to her stay permit. So, obviously, access to social rights but also civil rights were bound to her formal citizenship status, but, unlike many of the Tamil interviewees, she did not consider changing her citizenship status. Rather, she found alternative – quite gendered – ways to stay: she started to work in the 'caring' sector and she married a Sinhalese man<sup>33</sup>. Her Sri Lankan citizenship remained important to her as she neither felt that she belonged to German society, nor that she wanted to stay there. Eventually, she became a 'denizen' of Germany, i.e., a long-term resident of Germany but with formal external citizenship (Bauböck, 2007). She can now enjoy social and civil rights but has no access to political rights in Germany. She defines herself as 'Sinhalese' but, more than that, she also has a nation state where she can return to and where she can exercise her formal citizenship rights fully. This kept her sense of belonging as 'not German' alive and, therefore, did not prompt her to any action to change her citizenship status. Many other Sinhalese also did not change their citizenship status because "*I do not need it. I can do all I want here*" (Sarath, Sinhalese, male, first generation).

In fact, most Sri Lankans in Germany are 'denizens' and 'denizenship' can, indeed, be considered as a form of post-national citizenship (Bauböck, 2007). In Germany, the Turkish population, as 'denizens', have been instrumental in shaping the understanding of post-national citizenship (Kaya, 2012; Koopmans et al., 2001). With the emergence of human and personhood rights, the de-linking of rights and identities and increased mobilization around citizenship, citizenship participation and practices are no longer bound to the nation state alone and to national collectivities (Soysal, 1994; Soysal, 2000; Waters, 1990).

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<sup>33</sup> Two other interview partners (Jayalath and Sivalingam) also referred to marriage as a means of obtaining permanent residency in Germany. It is important to note, however, that they were both Tamil, male and married German women.

However, very often, the debates on forms of citizenship and modes of participation are influenced by the exclusivist citizenship policies against minorities (Pettman, 1999). Along similar lines, Bauböck (2002) has highlighted the fact that the extent to which migrants are able to change citizenship depends on the perception of states and their citizens towards migrants, and how they construct the meaning of citizenship. This obviously impacts on the migrant's own definition of identity and belonging and, consequently, on their participation in the political community of the host state. One interviewee referred to the differentiation between guest workers and asylum seekers and how it influenced his own relationship to citizenship:

*“Those days they [the government/political parties] said we were asylum seekers and underdogs and the others were guest workers. They made this differentiation. Later, they put a stop on asylum seekers entering. They closed the doors... I worked as a cook at the time and, suddenly, people looked at me and told me that I take away the jobs of Germans. So much changed then... I realized then that, for me, also things had changed. I did not like all these developments because I had always worked in this country and I could not go back to my own country. So suddenly, I realized that Germany has gradually become my home... They did not allow me to have dual citizenship, so then I wanted to become a German citizen.”* (Tavarajah, Tamil, male, first generation, German citizen)

Tavarajah defines himself as a Tamil but his sense of belonging was influenced by the migration policies at the time and his experiences within German society. As these policies impacted directly on his life and his ability to participate in German society, and as he had no option of returning to his home country, he sought German citizenship. Among the male Tamil interviewees, his explanation for changing his citizenship status remained quite exceptional. Most Tamils would argue that they changed their citizenship status for reasons of convenience:

*“Practical reasons made me change my citizenship status. If you travel it is easier with a German passport.”* (Ganesh, Tamil, male, second generation)

Ganesh did not perceive citizenship as a site of either claim-making or civic participation. The second generation interviewees seemed more willing to change their citizenship status than the older generation. Important, however, is the fact that Ganesh and others who changed their citizenship status still defined themselves as Tamils. Anbarasani (Tamil, female, second generation, German citizen) mentioned that *“the passport does not change my identity. I am still Tamil”*. Anbarasani, like many other Tamil interviewees, de-coupled rights and identity and defined herself in relation to Germany and Sri Lanka but at different levels: the relationship to Germany is one defined by citizenship and to Sri Lanka by ‘identity’.

In a few instances, the decision to keep the Sri Lankan citizenship has been a conscious, **political** choice which could be observed mainly among the first generation Sinhalese and Tamils, but mainly among those who link themselves also to the nationalist project. This applies even to nationalist Tamils who can only carry a Sri Lankan passport, which ties them to a Sinhala nationalist state structure, but they still perceive this as less of a problem than taking up German citizenship. Culturally, however, their citizenship claims are bound to the nationalist project of ‘Tamil Eelam’. The wife of one Tamil nationalist, who kept her Sri Lankan citizenship until he died, explained:

*“My husband told me: ‘Please allow me to die as a Sri Lankan’. So he never changed his citizenship and I did not change mine either.”* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

Kajani followed the decision of her husband, whereas her children had already become German citizens at an earlier point. She only took up citizenship once her husband died. This quote highlights gender hierarchies within Sri Lankan society. Both Sinhalese and Tamil women always followed their husbands in their decision to keep or change their citizenship. This reflects the traditional

decision-making power structure within Sri Lankan society, which extends also to abroad. Among the female interviewees of the second generation, some deviation in this pattern could be observed (even if not in all instances): being in Germany, they could break away from these traditional structures and take German citizenship, although always with the consent of the male head of family.

Diaspora and transnational communities, in particular, expand their set of rights and normative expectations as well as their obligations beyond one nation state (Soysal, 2000; Waters, 1990). They are characterized by their link to the notion of multiple citizenship (Pettman, 1999; Werbner, 2002) – if legally possible. In this regard, Yuval-Davis refers to citizenship as a “multi-layered construct” which applies to people’s membership in a variety of collectivities – local, ethnic, national and transnational (Yuval-Davis, 1997b; Yuval-Davis, 1999b). Claims for a multiple citizenship in the diaspora are, therefore, directed towards the host and home country (Pettman, 1999; Werbner, 2002). Transnational citizenship can be considered as an expression of multiple citizenship; belonging is then redefined within this new space of citizenship and determined by the civil, social, cultural and political practices of the migrant, which are closely linked to their own identities.

The redefinition of the space of citizenship as participative action by transnational communities refers not only to the national boundaries of the home and host country, but also to ‘virtual neighbourhoods’ (Appadurai, 1996). Transnational citizens engage at different levels in different spaces simultaneously. Dual citizenship may be a formal expression of this. In Germany, dual citizenship was introduced only by the relatively ‘foreigner-friendly’ red–green coalition government, after 1998. Sri Lanka, in contrast, allowed for dual citizenship until 2009, and then introduced very restricted access to citizenship. This also mirrors the political situation in the country when

a Sinhala nationalist government came into power and implemented a number of 'anti-Western' policies.<sup>34</sup>

More importantly, however, the creation of such new citizenship spaces can also concern the creation of nations that have not yet been formally recognized as states or even, more concretely, the call for self-determination of a particular territory. In order for this to succeed, citizenship as a sense of belonging must be created that relates to this political and/or social collectivity. This necessitates the creation of identities that differentiate between 'us' and 'them', the social and cultural connection within a collective and the construction of a common national project (Schnapper et al., 2000). Indeed, it necessitates the feeling of belonging to one real or perceived nation.

### ***Relating to nationalism***

Nationalism is a much-disputed concept, closely linked to the creation of the modern nation state. Not only are nation states constructed and constantly changing (Connell, 1990), but also nationalisms are embedded and shaped by history, the political context and their membership. Nationalism can be seen as an instrument of state power (Stavenhagen, 1990), while Norbu (1992) points out that post-colonial nationalism often developed as an awareness of the elite based on national symbols and sectorial interests and, therefore, nationalism may be used by the ruling elite to continue the politics of stratification, which started under colonialism, as shown in chapter 3.

In the process of nation-building, however, "prior and partial identities" (Stavenhagen, 1990: 6) are subsumed in order to ensure the cohesion of the society or of a particular group. Often then, internal diversity is neglected and 'unity' within a state or group is achieved by mobilizing against external forces. Indeed, the case of Sri Lanka illustrates that the middle class failed in attempting to achieve 'unity in diversity' because it was not capable of

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<sup>34</sup> Note that the interviews were conducted when Germany and Sri Lanka both allowed for dual citizenship. However, the arrival of the interviewees in Germany was mostly before dual citizenship was introduced in Germany. Hence, for most interviewees, dual citizenship was not a feasible option.

accommodating the nationalism promoted by the Sinhalese Buddhist monks (Told, 1997).

Yet, nationalism is not only confined to a specific class or social group, but can be seen as a trans-class phenomenon occurring when a specific population is mobilized in relation to uneven development and stratification, which then often results in situations of conflict and violence, as the history of Sri Lanka has proven.

In this regard, Norbu's (1992) definition of nationalism is useful as it focuses on the importance of the nation state and of national identity. Nationalism refers, in his understanding, to a:

“politicised social consciousness centred upon a common national identity rooted in a shared tradition, and the ideological belief in the structure of the modern nation state as the most efficacious instrument of national unity, national independence and national interest” (1992: 26).

Central to this understanding of nationalism is the notion of national identity, which is a function of tradition, ideology and interests of a particular group or people. A sense of belonging is created as “a way of imagining a relative sense of ‘us’ as the ‘same together’” (Pickering, 2001). Consequently, nationalism arises as national sentiment and ideology, and it then enters the political arena as a political consciousness of a common identity based on collective solidarity within specific ‘**geographical and cultural boundaries**’ (Miles, 1996: 254). Nationalism then becomes historically significant because a particular group uses it for political ends to intervene in the state's affairs, i.e., to control and possess the power of the state (Stavenhagen, 1990; Norbu, 1992) in order to reproduce new ‘**territorial boundaries**’ (Miles, 1996: 254). This complex of ideas and sentiments are responding flexibly to new situations (Minogue, 1996) and are linked to political movements of diverse orientations (Miles, 1996).

As outlined in chapter 3, the LTTE started as a resistance movement and its mobilizing power was based on claims for an independent ‘Tamil Eelam’ as a

sovereign state. The dynamics that can be observed here are, in many ways, similar to the post-colonial nation-building project as described above: the LTTE was able to create a sense of belonging to a Tamil 'nation' – a nation that was not only based on the fragmentation of the current Sri Lankan nation state but which, even more importantly, crossed the territorial boundaries of Sri Lanka abroad. The formation of a common 'Tamil' identity by the LTTE was equally important to this end, as was the suppression of any dissenting voices within the Tamil population. As a result, the LTTE was able to create, before its defeat in 2009, a de facto state in the North and East: it had set-up a state administration within its defined territory – even if not internationally accepted – and published textbooks for schools, run the police, judiciary and public service administration, including tax collection, as well as organizing welfare and economic initiatives (Stokke, 2006). The North and East therefore functioned on the basis of a dual state structure where the Sri Lankan government in Colombo officially administered these territories while, in reality however, the LTTE dominated and controlled them and no decisions were made without their consent. This nation-building project had relied, to a large extent, also on the support received from the Tamil diaspora.

Kastoryano (2002) differentiates between diaspora and transnational nationalism: the first leads to a movement towards a 're-territorialization' and statehood and the latter occurs only after nation state formation and results in exclusionary discourses and 'de-territorialization'. Diaspora nationalism can then be understood as a more static concept and is focused only towards the lost or imaged homeland (Faist, 2000). Transnational nationalism remains flexible and newly adjusts itself to different contexts, connecting the 'local' with the 'global'. Smith (2001) argued that the nation state and transnational practices are mutually reinforcing, and the binary opposition of 'local' and 'global' should be abandoned. This involves the possibility to "think and act simultaneously at multiple scales" (Smith, 2001: 164), which creates "de-territorialised nation-states" (Basch et al., 1994) and implies translocality/multi-locality and multiple belongings (Appadurai, 1995; Smith et al., 1998; Vertovec, 1999a).

This conceptualization is important in order to understand diasporic belonging as a multi-layered and multi-territorial concept that is influenced not only by the citizenship status of individuals and the associated rights or obligations but also by the occurrence of diaspora and transnational nationalism. Both citizenship status and nationalism in turn also shape the construction of identities, which will be explored in more detail in the following section, and transnational politics, as further elaborated in the next chapter.

### ***Constructing identities***

It is essential to understand the construction of identity if one is to comprehend the construction of belonging. Identity construction among the diaspora itself is a condition and a process continuously reconstructed and shaped by an internal–external dialectic, merging internal self-definition and the social identity ascribed by others (Edensor, 2002). This latter process involves a ‘triadic’ relationship (Safran, 1991; Cohen, 1997; Sheffer, 1986) between the diaspora community in the host country, the state in the home country, and the state in the host country: Identity construction is located within the dynamics of these actors but is also shaped by the relationship to the co-ethnics in the country of origin and by other ethnic group members in other countries (Anthias, 1998; Brah, 1996; Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1993). Identities are formed reflexively (Lindgren et al., 2001) and are influenced by historical and institutional sites within discursive practices and modalities of power (Hall, 1996). They are products of different critical situations in life (Lindgren et al., 2001) and their experiences of difference and exclusion (Hall, 1996). Bhatia and Ram (2009) have researched South Asian identification in the US and argued that migrant identities specifically have to be understood as fluid and politicized, formed from different political positions and based on negotiation, dislocation and conflict. The construction of identity is influenced by negative experiences but is coined just as much through positive relationships both in the home and host country. These positive and negative experiences can vary considerably and may change over time.

These characteristics can be observed in the case of Sri Lanka: the relationship between Tamils in Germany, Tamils at home and Sinhalese at home, but also the relationship between Sinhalese in Germany, Sinhalese at home and Tamils at home has a major impact on how the identities of each of these group members are constructed. As Pillay (Tamil, male, first generation) asked rhetorically in the interview: *“Can you form a sense of identity irrespective of and indifferent of the other identity that people around you force on you?”* Identity construction therefore results from the interaction of state politics, Tamil separatist ideology and practices, and the activities of one’s own ethnic group in the host country. This applies to both Sinhalese and Tamils. Nevertheless, Tamil identity formation is more responsive to these dynamics, given that they are a minority group within their home country, facing discrimination and exclusion and, therefore, being determined by their struggle for their rights and for independence, expressed through a separate homeland, both as a response to the Sinhalese-dominated state structures. At the same time, the position of power that Sinhalese have in their home country, being the majority, impacts on their behaviour and attitude towards Tamils abroad and, thereby, influences the triadic relationship of Tamils and Sinhalese. Yet, some of the Sinhalese interviewees have been ‘dissenting voices’ and hence, they – even though also influenced by the triadic relationship – have constructed a very different identity from their co-ethnics. They have been attributed an identity as traitors to the nation, being referred to as ‘Sinhala Koti’ (Sinhalese Tigers). Although small in number, their influence in the diaspora is significant, which stems from their pro-minority rights position among the majority population.

This is just to confirm that the triadic relationship is influenced by various other factors and identity construction is not a monolithic process but fluid, and shaped by the specific experiences of group members – be it as a Tamil LTTE supporter, a Sinhalese government supporter, a Sinhalese dissenter or a Tamil opposition leader. The experiences are diverse, and even though a specific group identity as ‘Tamil’ or ‘Sinhalese’ exists, they have to be differentiated within. The many social categories to which one person feels affiliated not only

reflect his or her way of life, but also the social and political complexities of Sri Lanka. This generates multiple identities, as one interviewee deliberated:

*“Am I a Sinhalese or a Sri Lankan first? In Sri Lanka, I always called myself a Sri Lankan and sometimes with a political colour, but here in Germany I am confused. I feel more a Sinhalese than Tamil rights’ advocate, and only then a Sri Lankan.”* (Madura, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Hence, the dynamics of diaspora life bring a particular facet of one’s ethnic identity to the fore.

Since independence, Tamils have frequently experienced reprisals, violence, discrimination and economic marginalization in Sri Lanka, contributing to their decision to leave Sri Lanka, which is considered by many of the interviewees as part of their collective mind-set. These experiences have been substantively different for Sinhalese as members of the majority ethnic group – even for those members who oppose the government structures. As one interviewee expressed it, *“Life and daily life experiences are different. From these stems your identity”* (Pillay, Tamil, male, first generation). So even though group experiences impact on identity formation processes, individual experiences play a pivotal role in shaping one’s own identity. The reasons for leaving, even the travel experiences as well as the arrival in Germany, influence this triadic relationship. The encounters in Germany with ‘other ethnic groups’ not only refer to Sinhalese or Tamils as ‘others’, but also to Germans themselves. This complicates the matter. For Tamils, their experiences of repression and discrimination continue even though now, predominantly, exercised by the local ‘White’ population and by the authorities in the host country. Not all interviewees perceive the discrimination faced in Germany in the same way, due to the fact that they live abroad and perpetrators are not from Sri Lanka, even though they reject and some even resist the outcome as will be shown in chapter 6. For Sinhalese, however, the experiences of reprisal, violence, discrimination, racism and economic marginalization based on ethnicity are new and yet the same as for Tamils in Germany. But, as a group, they have not experienced all this in Sri

Lanka, even if some individuals may have encountered violence due to their political orientation. This means that repression based on ethnicity and political orientation is not part of the Sinhalese collective mind-set. Hence, these new experiences will influence the process of identity construction for both Tamils and Sinhalese.

### ***Multiple identities***

Fearon (1999) has elaborated on the relationship between personal and social identities in highlighting that a personal identity is defined by the one social identity that is most relevant to the person. Reflexive identities constitute a bridge between the concept of self-identity and social identity allowing for continued redefinitions (Lindgren et al., 2001). This also implies that different identities exist in parallel and that group membership may often be a determinant factor, even if personal identities can also be formed without this affiliation.

In a politicized context such as Sri Lanka, membership in a specific social category remains important. Tamils, due their minority position and their distinct language and culture, more often define themselves primarily as Tamils. Sinhalese, however, identify either with their co-ethnics or, if members of opposing state structures, define themselves more likely as members of a political group, for example as JVP supporters, rather than Sinhalese *per se*.

*“Due to the political context I feel an alienation from Sinhalese society despite being Sinhalese. My identity is a political identity shaped by my memories and what we went through in 1987–1989 as JVP.”*

(Priyadarshana, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

The interviewee also refers here to his memories, which are indeed an important aspect of identity construction to any individual or ethnic group. Kinzel pointed out that “[t]ranslocations are never simply changes of place, but

changes of memory, re-creations of memories in which the constructed meanings of identity narratives become encoded” (2010: 118).

So even though the process of identity construction and its influencing factors are similar between Tamils and Sinhalese, the outcome of this process is fundamentally different. Tamils, as a marginalized group, are mainly committed to their **ethnic identity** to reaffirm their difference from the majority ethnic group. Sinhalese, in contrast, may insist on their ethnic identity as Sinhalese if they are supporters of the state ideology, or identify themselves with their **political or ideological identity** rather than their ethnic identity if they oppose the state.

At the same time, the Sinhalese interviewees have often defined themselves also as Sri Lankans, hence referring to their **national identity**. National identity itself is a function of tradition, ideology and interest of a particular group of people (Told, 1997). One interviewee confirmed that:

*“after living years in Europe, I still have the urge to be at home in Sri Lanka although I call my residence in Berlin ‘home’; for instance, I say ‘I am at home’ when calling my friends back home [in Sri Lanka].”* (Madura, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Edensor (2002) has emphasized that identities are shaped by multiple national identifications that can be contained within and outside the nation itself. This would apply for both first and second generation Sinhalese. In contrast, none of the first generation Tamil interviewees have confirmed a Sri Lankan national identity in relation to their home country, despite considering it as an option. Their ethnic identity remained dominant among them, even though the ethnic identity itself can become a national ‘imagined’ identity, using Anderson’s notion of an ‘imagined’ community (1983). The rejection of the Sri Lankan national identity by the Tamil interviewees is grounded in their ideological and political orientation in relation to their home country, their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness, and their feeling that the Sri Lankan state made no efforts for the protection of their rights and equal treatment. In addition, the recognition of

one unified identity could possibly imply symbolically the recognition of one unified Sri Lankan state. Therefore, first generation Tamils rejected this identification throughout. Yet, many of them use the Sri Lankan identity in relation to Germany, linking it mainly also to the citizenship question as outlined earlier in this chapter.

This illustrates that, on the one hand, national identity is associated with a sense of belonging (Triandafyllidou, 1998) and that it is only meaningful in contrast to an 'other', which is, for migrant populations, often grounded in the experience of exclusion (Delanty, 1996). Therefore, national identity is linked to the society at large (Phinney et al., 2001) and often grounded in the experience of exclusion. Often, this experience of exclusion brings to the fore the politics of identity and hinders the creation of a shared understanding of citizenship (Delanty, 1996).

Second generation Tamils, on the other hand, identify themselves predominantly with their ethnic identity, but also express a German national identity as they were socialized and grew up in Germany. Their primary reference point is their relationship to Germany, rather than to Sri Lanka. So in the cases where they recognize a German affiliation, they call themselves either "*Tamil Germans*" or "*German Tamils*" putting an emphasis either on their ethnic or their national identity. Hyphenated identities are therefore an expression of their multiple belongings.

The difference between perceptions and feelings among the first and second generation can also be observed in their expression of a **diaspora** and/or **transnational identity**: "Diaspora identities are... constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference" (Hall, 1990: 235) and Tölölyan describes them as "an occasion for celebration of multiplicity and mobility – and a figure of our discontent without being in a world apparently still dominated by nation-states" (1996:28). Hence, they are local and global at the same time (Brah, 1996), which characterizes the Sri Lankan diaspora as well. Bhatia (2002) has pointed out that the '**diasporic self**' is shaped by political and historical practices linked to voices of race, gender,

culture, power, colonial and postcolonial history. Therefore, none of the ethnic communities in Sri Lanka are homogeneous, even though a certain level of empathy and solidarity among co-ethnics does exist (Cohen, 1997). Byfield emphasizes that “the creation of diaspora is in large measure contingent on a diasporic identity that links the constituent parts of the diaspora to a homeland” (2000:2). The assertion of a specific diasporic identity is often based on mythical symbols and distinctive cultural practices with the aim of creating a separate space in a hostile society (Castles et al., 2000). The spatial segregation, however, may not only be a reaction to negative experiences in the host country, but may also serve as a marker of difference.

Transnational identities are as fluid and flexible as diaspora identities, but a transnational community lives and connects different places at the same time. The identities, values and behaviour of members of such a community are not limited to one location, rather they utilize and construct different personal and national identities: they build on national identities and contest them as well, and a sense of placelessness may result from the discrepancy between citizenship and locality (Yeoh et al., 2003). This also means that the identities of the transnational migrant are de-territorialized and dis-embedded from their national contexts and re-embedded within the structures of a host society within a globalized world. They are located within the transnational and global, rather than the local and national context alone (Adamson, 2002).

The interviews confirmed that the first generation, of both Sinhalese and Tamils, consider themselves rather as members of a ‘diaspora’ even though many do not necessarily identify themselves with the term itself. The first generation has close ties to their homeland, despite living abroad and being dislocated from their original home. They primarily identify themselves through their links to Sri Lanka back home, which brings their diaspora identity to the fore.

Second generation Sinhalese and Tamils, however, do recognize their dislocation not only in geographical terms but also in regards to culture, language and ideology. They have grown up within Germany and affiliate both to the country they have never or hardly seen, Sri Lanka, and to the country

they live in, Germany. They differentiate their identity even further and consider having a 'city identity' or, even more specific within Germany, call themselves '*Berliner*' or '*Berlinerin*'. The second generation does not recognize geographical boundaries and is located between places: its members feel both Tamil or Sinhalese, and German. Very often, they actually hesitate in defining their identity within one country only as they face 'multiple loyalties' (Delanty, 1996). Rather, they shift in their identification between the different social and cultural worlds. In fact, some of them perceive it as "*a kind of double life*" (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation) or living in a "*parallel society*" (Priyadarshana, Sinhalese, male, first generation) – neither here nor there or here and there at the same time. For the second generation, a transnational identity is prevalent.

### ***Ethical and political value systems***

The third dimension of Yuval-Davis's analytical framework is the ethical and political value systems influencing the sense of belonging. Values are closely linked to personal convictions, which can influence emotional attachment as well as the construction of identities. They touch upon the personal self but are embedded in the social, political and cultural context and, therefore, are influenced by it. Values can be a motivational factor and a driving force for action. Therefore, in a migrant setting, the ethical and political value system determines the activities the diaspora communities carry out, both in the home and host country. In this regard, the values link to the transnational political practices of both Sinhalese and Tamils will be further explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6: TRANSNATIONAL POLITICAL PRACTICES

The previous chapter highlighted the ways in which belonging is constructed: the relationship to 'home' and the 'homeland' influences the sense of belonging, just as much as the migrant's citizenship status in the home and host country and their relationship to the 'nation'. Nationalism is an 'ideology of mobilization' which often results in political action and has been an influential element in Sri Lanka's history. Social locations, identification and emotional attachments, as well as ethical and political value systems, are analytical axes allowing an analysis of belonging. This chapter builds on the conceptual framework as presented earlier and will discuss different transnational political practices. Economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities have been studied in different contexts (Bhatt, 2000; Ehrkamp, 2005; Horst, 2004; Itzigsohn et al., 1999; Salih, 2001; Viruell-Fuentes, 2006; Wahlbeck, 1998) . These constitute a useful categorization and will be used here as a basic structure of the chapter. However, the focus of the investigation will remain on the political engagement of the Sri Lankan diaspora and, therefore, will only refer to these categories in so far as they are relevant in shaping the political practices of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities in Berlin.

Brah (1996) has referred to the 'diaspora space' as the "intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes", and she further defines it as a "point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them', are contested" (Brah, 1996: 181). This space is 'inhabited' with persons living abroad and those staying behind in the home country. So the local and global link together and cannot be disconnected. Along these lines, political engagement precisely takes place in this space and links the local with the global, but also the home and host country.

This space provides the potential for "transversal politics" (Yuval-Davis, 1997a; Anthias, 1998; Yuval-Davis, 1999a), which takes into account the different

positionings of people, their identities and different value systems, political agendas and power relations while mobilizing around a common interest (Yuval-Davis, 1999b). In order to understand this positioning of diaspora identities, Brah (1996) explicitly recognizes the centrality of power relations. Only by analysing the manifestations and configurations of power relations between minority and majority groups and among the different ethnic minorities can one understand the dynamics within the diaspora space. To some extent, however, 'diaspora space' may not always be an accurate terminology, rather – by analogy – it would be the 'transnational space' in which all the fluidity, dynamism, heterogeneity and intersectionality of class, gender and age, as well as other social locations between the home and host country, take place.

The 'diaspora' or 'transnational' space is also where the politics of belonging and identity politics happen. Yuval-Davis defines the politics of belonging as "specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed in these projects in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries" (Yuval-Davis, 2011: 10). The politics of belonging requires agency to maintain, shift and change boundaries in order to 'belong to'. Connolly (1996) links the politics of belonging to the 'politics of becoming' as it sets the boundaries of belonging and of not belonging.

The construction of belonging is also influenced by the politics of identity/identities. For Hetherington (1998), the politics of identity is not only a social movement against marginalization but more so a 'source of empowerment and resistance' for marginal identities to differentiate themselves from the 'other'. Identity politics plays a role in the Sri Lankan context, but it is used rather as a tool not only for marginal groups, but for the state and de facto state structures to mobilize against the 'other' and to manifest boundaries of belonging. It is this interplay that also provokes political engagement – both of alignment and resistance. The critique by Yuval-Davis (1999b) mainly concerns the tendency of identity politics to essentialize social categories and to deny the differences within the same social category. Differentiation 'within', however,

does not hinder political engagement and mobilization on issues of common concern.

Transnational political practices take place within the politics of belonging and the politics of identity, one contributing to the other. Equally important is also the consideration of the political context of the home and host country in order to understand the dynamics of these practices. The motivation for migration does play an important role but is not the sole determinant factor to engage politically; rather, there are a number of reasons why people get involved and become 'agents of transnationalism' (Al-Ali et al., 2002). These transnational practices are directed towards different localities – either towards the home or the host country or towards the home and host country (Vertovec, 2001). Levitt and Glick-Schiller refer to "multi-layered, multi-sited transnational social fields" (2004: 1002) and Tsuda (2012) has argued that transnational practices are characterized by simultaneity, building on earlier writings of Levitt and Glick-Schiller. The engagement of the migrant in one or the other country simultaneously impacts on the other country and, in fact, is part of one coherent social process. Simultaneity therefore will be further considered when analysing the different practices of the diaspora communities in Berlin.

Furthermore, Adamson (Adamson, 2002) has pinpointed three different levels of diaspora community mobilization in order to effect political change in the home country: first, through the mobilization of identities, discourses and narratives; second, through networking with state- and non-state actors; and third, through the transfer of resources. Other authors (Vertovec, 2001; Al-Ali et al., 2001b; Tsuda, 2012; Wight, 2000) categorize transnational practices by their impact or areas of involvement, i.e., economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities. The following sections will highlight some selected practices of the diaspora communities in Berlin, and analyse them through a political lens and how they shape their sense of belonging.

## ***Economic activities***

Economic activities refer to all remittances and money transfers from the host to the home country. Sri Lanka has always relied heavily for its economic development on remittances from abroad. In 2009, Sri Lanka received more than 8% of its GDP in remittances<sup>35</sup>, approximately 2,8 billion US dollars, and is among the top 30 receiving countries worldwide<sup>36</sup> (Ratha et al., 2011a: 14; International Crisis Group, 2010). Germany is, at the same time, also among the top five remittance-sending countries worldwide with a contribution of 15.9 billion US dollars (in absolute figures in 2010). Bilateral remittances from Germany to Sri Lanka amounted to 158 million US dollars in 2010 (Ratha et al., 2011b). The available figures concern only officially recorded data received through formal networks. The data is not disaggregated by gender, ethnicity or status (i.e., economic migrant, asylum seeker, refugee). Therefore, they do not include the remittances sent by the Tamil population through informal money transfer systems (known in Tamil as *undiyals*), especially to the North and East where only limited banking facilities exist. Cheran and Aiken (2005) have studied the functioning of these *undiyals* and found that they are not only mono-ethnic in their functioning, but were also important agents in the post-tsunami period, facilitating relief and reconstruction efforts in the North and East.

Even though the interview partners have not systematically referred to money transfers to the home country, in one Tamil food shop where interviews were conducted, money transfer services were also offered. Clearly, these services were used by Tamils for Tamils and, hence, were just as mono-ethnic as in Canada. The transfers were mainly to family members but patterns changed with the political situation and the tsunami in December 2004 when large flows of donations from the diaspora occurred, often channelled through the Tamil

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<sup>35</sup> The definition used by the World Bank refers to all workers' remittances, compensation of employees and migrants' transfers (Ratha et al., 2011b).

<sup>36</sup> The majority of remittances stem from female housemaids or other domestic helpers working in the Middle East. The government of Sri Lanka reacted to this out-migration by establishing a Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare. (see [www.asiaecon.org](http://www.asiaecon.org) and <http://www.foreignemploymin.gov.lk/>).

Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO) or other charity organizations. One Interviewee said:

*“I like to help my people indirectly. I help money-wise. I send money through my parents and here there are also some organizations that help internally displaced people. Somehow, I help there. The TRO [Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation] is the main organization here.”* (Nayan, Tamil, male, first generation)

The Tamil Rehabilitation Organisation (TRO), founded in 1985, had an office established in Germany and was considered as one of the main outlets for LTTE fundraising (Keller, 2001). It described itself as a charitable organization independent of the government. It was involved in large-scale development projects in the North and East after the tsunami. With the LTTE being put on the list of ‘terrorist organizations’ in the US, the UK and other European Union countries in 2006, and with the general tendency in European Union countries to act against the funding channels of these organizations, the TRO ceased to exist as such. Nevertheless, at the time of the interviews it still played a major role and Nayan had chosen a Tamil organization to express his support and contribute to his co-ethnics at home, in Sri Lanka. In Canada, an estimated 10,000 US dollars were collected per month by the TRO (Cheran, 2003). The TRO may have represented, at the time, just one way of expressing solidarity, but the main issue was the urge to help ‘*my own people*’, which was quite strong among many of the Tamils, and often they added in the interviews that their desire was to help reduce the suffering of their co-ethnics. So, clearly, there is an affinity, a feeling of belonging to the same ‘family’, which prompted the decision to help. Kajani, a female Tamil, expressed this even more strongly, linking this ‘urge’ to the perception of ‘helping family members’:

*“There is this orphanage which I support. I have founded an association together with my daughters and we are sending money for the children affected by the war and by the tsunami. They are from Jaffna and we do not know them directly, but they are like family for us.”* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

Even though the informal money transfer system is used frequently among the first generation, the tsunami has changed this practice considerably and many displaced Tamils now contribute to development projects for rehabilitation and reconstruction or, alternatively, because they had experienced poverty and were touched by this:

*“When I was in Jaffna in 2006, I got to know a teacher and I asked her if I can support them financially. The parents of the children are so poor; they do not have good food and not enough food also, so when I heard this, I wanted to help if I could. And here in Germany, I belong to a Tamil community, so now each year for Christmas we collect money and send it there. This is what I can do.”* (Muthu, Tamil, female, second generation)

These contributions – irrespective of the form they take or the channels used – were made ‘privately’ to family and friends or to welfare and social organisations and they are rooted in the strong tradition to help ‘my people’, an ideology which was fostered by the LTTE throughout the years. Guribye quotes a Tamil leader in Norway who mentioned “Here, Prabhakaran is merely a unifying symbol. Here, sacrifice does not mean a cyanide capsule, but social engagement” (2011: 385).

What is important here is that the contributions were paid in the host country but the above quotes relate to the ‘homeland’ - the ideological and imagined ‘homeland’ as described in the previous chapter - and all financial contributions benefited the home country in one or another way. These contributions are based on a strong Tamil identity and are based on different motivations as the existing literature confirms:

Fuglerud (2001) perceives the support by the Tamil diaspora as a contribution to an unfolding history in the country. Indeed, many interviewees have also confirmed that their support changed according to the situation in the country: the more violence and aggression was exercised by the Sri Lankan state

against the Tamil population, the more support they gave. Sivapalan has expressed this as follows:

*“Previously, we could only give money, but now it is different. We need to propagate also. They [LTTE] need to buy arms, so they need now bigger amounts. We do need to help them and we need to intensify our support for the war, both financially and morally.”* (Sivapalan, Tamil, male, first generation).

Sivapalan’s interview took place in 2008 when fierce fighting in the country occurred. Guribye (2011) links the support by the diaspora to a psychoanalytic argument: co-ethnics experience traumatizing events in Sri Lanka, resulting in a feeling of guilt among diasporean Tamils who live comfortably abroad. Even though Guribye’s argument concerns the Norwegian diaspora, Varadan, who lives in Berlin, explained:

*“I have left Sri Lanka for political reasons, but, of course, I also hoped for new opportunities. Now I feel a bit guilty when I speak to my friends and family back home or when I read the news. The situation is so bad there and I have left them alone. I feel I have to compensate for that, so I give them [the LTTE] money. Many of us do, actually, for this reason.”*  
(Varadan, Tamil, male, first generation)

Sivapalan and Varadan both chose to voluntarily support the de facto state structures of the LTTE, be it to declared LTTE cadres or to its front organizations, such as the World Tamil Movement. To some extent, this coincides with Vimalarajah and Cheran’s (2010) argument who suggest that direct financial assistance, knowledge transfer and economic remittances are based on ‘rational choice’. They argue, however, that this choice is directed towards the state-building process. Sivapalan, Varadan and other interviewees mentioned that they “want to give” – so they rationally chose to financially contribute -, but they linked their support to the suffering of ‘their’ people and to the need to respond to the aggression of the Sinhalese state towards their co-ethnics. Their contributions were motivated by their ethnic identity, their

solidarity with other co-ethnics, and thus, their sense of belonging to the same ethnic group. In contrast to Vimalarajah and Cheran's argument, they did not refer to the larger nationalist project of an independent state of Tamil Eelam or their political identity; even if, ultimately, their contributions helped that purpose.

Despite similar transfer channels, the nature of the support to the LTTE varies greatly within the Tamil diaspora population in the different countries<sup>37</sup>. Brun and Van Hear (2012) have pointed out that the support to the LTTE were more monolithic in Canada and Norway, whereas in the UK more dissenting voices emerged. In Germany, the support to the LTTE varies across cities: Oberhausen is considered a stronghold of the LTTE and Berlin has a more diverse Tamil population. Regardless the motivation for and the extent of the contribution of the Tamil population, the LTTE was an important actor in so far as they have exploited the suffering of the Tamil population for their political ends and mobilised the diaspora on these grounds. This mobilisation was linked to the LTTE's fundraising campaigns and resulted to various extent in intimidation, coercion and violence against Tamils living abroad.

The LTTE fundraised an estimated 80 million USD per year worldwide (Wayland, 2004). Another study mentions a monthly fundraised amount of about 2 million US dollars, a quarter of this coming from Canada (Hafeez, 2009). Initially, the funds were used to sustain the Tamil population in the LTTE-controlled areas (International Crisis Group, 2010) but as the war continued throughout the 1990s, 80-90% of the military budget of the LTTE were financed through the diaspora (Human Rights Watch, 2006). The LTTE consolidated its approach towards fundraising over the years and employed fundraisers overseas to solicit 'tax payments' and donations. McDowell (1996) estimates that about 5% of the diaspora in Switzerland worked for the LTTE, mostly as fundraisers. Their task was to ensure a weekly or monthly income depending on the individual's earnings. In Switzerland, the monthly tax payment amounted from 50 to 100 US dollars, in London monthly rates ranged from 10 to 30 GB pounds (Human Rights Watch, 2006), and in Canada a minimum of 30 US

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<sup>37</sup> For example, transfers via the informal banking system or village and old students' organisations (Cheran, 2003) but also via charitable organisations or LTTE structures.

dollars per month and per person or family was collected (International Crisis Group, 2010). Human Rights Watch (2006) also mentioned daily 'assessed rates' of 1 Canadian dollar, 1 Euro or 1 GB pound per day for the length of stay abroad which resulted in considerable amounts over time. The LTTE also fundraised larger amounts for special projects – between 350 to 430 US dollars -, and demanded payments up to 3,500 US dollars from the Tamil business community (Human Rights Watch, 2006).

In Germany, a number of interview partners confirmed their monthly contributions to the LTTE, even though they did not mention specific amounts. During the periods of intensified war, other means of fundraising occurred in addition, such as the sale of calendars with Tamil holidays or videos on the Tamil struggle (Wayland, 2004). Varadan mentioned that, for example, pictures of Prabhakaran were sold in Berlin for an amount of 200 Euro. In addition, a voucher system was introduced whereby gold and cash up to 5,000 Euro was collected and a voucher issued, guaranteeing a reimbursement once the war was successfully won. Tamil schools, Hindu temples, cultural and sports organisations were other venues to collect funds (Brun et al., 2012).<sup>38</sup>

Human Rights Watch (2006) reported that intense pressure, direct threats, intimidation, coercion, and even extortion were used to collect these funds (see also Fair, 2005; George, 2011). For example, members of the diaspora were threatened that they would not be able to visit their family members back home, or they would harm them, or they were constantly harassed and visited by the LTTE fundraisers, or they were told that they would simply encounter 'trouble', if they refuse to pay. Incidents of physical assault were reported as well. Generally, the LTTE and its front organisations, such as the World Tamil Movement, were able to create a 'culture of fear' that ensured financial flows. This also meant that payments were hardly refused.

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<sup>38</sup> After the defeat of the LTTE, the fundraising efforts by the LTTE stopped. The vouchers, which were issued during the war period, were either reimbursed (in few cases) or were simply cancelled. Conflicts among the Tamil diaspora in Germany are currently ongoing in regards to the collected LTTE funds that are still hold in Germany.

Among the Tamil interviewees in Berlin, only Rajesh and Rajkumar had the courage to openly refuse their payments to the LTTE. Their political orientation, as opponents of the LTTE, was well-known in Berlin, and thus, their dissent was accepted by the LTTE. Others mentioned that they did not pay their 'tax' at the beginning but supported the LTTE later, or vice-versa. For example, Tavarajah mentioned:

*“The Tigers collect money. They come when they want. You do not have to give money, but then you have to ask yourself: Who is protecting my country? In fact, nobody does, only the LTTE. So you give voluntarily. ... At the beginning, I supported the Tigers but then my family situation changed and I could not give money anymore. So I told them. They still came several times after that, but then, gradually, they stopped.”*

(Tavarajah, Tamil, male, first generation)

Tavarajah points at the overlapping nature of voluntary contribution and coercive action: some might consider themselves voluntarily contributing to the LTTE, whereas others would define the same situation as forced. How one defines such a situation is neither a question of 'choice' nor a question of LTTE coercion solely, but also a question of identity. Rajesh and Rajkumar as opponents of the LTTE always defined themselves politically, not ethnically, Tavarajah, in contrast, defines himself ethnically. So their sense of belonging determines how they perceive the situation and how they will tell their story. This, however, should not disguise the aggressive and at times violent means of fundraising by the LTTE. Rather, it should stress the complex nature of these practices and the importance of identity and belonging in this context.

These practices contrast with the financial practices of the Sinhalese community, which prefers to invest in the home country for a future in the country:

*“Every year in summer, we go to Sri Lanka and we can build houses there. With a sum of 50,000 euros you can build a very beautiful house in*

*Sri Lanka. You cannot do this here.*" (Ananda, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

*"I have three houses there. I live here like this [in a small flat] and build houses there. If I want, I can sell them there and buy one here also. But now I am building one in my home town, in Negombo, for my old age when I cannot work any more."* (Kumarage, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Among the Sinhalese diaspora, financial contributions are oriented very differently and are focused on the accumulation of wealth and the construction of houses in the home country. This practice is also mirrored in the village of Wennappuwa ('Little Italy') on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, where economic activity is flourishing thanks to financial flows from the Sinhalese diaspora in Italy<sup>39</sup>; even Qatar Airways has set up a branch office there as they operate direct flights from Colombo to Rome and Milan (Perera, 2004). The context of the Sinhalese diaspora community is, of course, very different from the Tamil diaspora community. They often remain Sri Lankan citizens because, for them, return to the home country is not just imagined but is, for many, a feasible option in the future. So they prepare for this future. The significant difference compared to Tamils, though, is the fact that a return is possible.

Many of the Tamils lost all their belongings in the war, have family displaced in Sri Lanka and scattered throughout the world, and can often not return for political reasons. Sinhalese do not share this same fate; only for those who are politically involved in Sri Lanka may a return also not be possible. But when they cannot return for political reasons, they then shift the focus of their financial investment to Germany and invest in the purchase of land or a house there: hence, the focus of investment remains for themselves and not for the community. At times, Sinhalese also support cultural organizations in Germany but to a much lesser extent, while 'tax' payments to Sri Lankan political parties are not carried out by Sinhalese.

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<sup>39</sup> Italy has the largest Sinhalese community in Europe.

Even though Tamils may also build their own home in Germany – if they can afford it financially – first and foremost they contribute financially to the 'homeland'. So Sinhalese and Tamils have developed a very different sense of belonging and, as a result, pursue different patterns of financial contribution.

### **Does gender matter?**

The gendered nature of these economic practices cannot be clearly filtered according to male and female interview partners. Migration to the Middle East as domestic helpers is clearly feminized and, hence, women have not only been the main financial contributors but also gained other freedoms outside traditional family structures. This will not be further touched upon here as it does not apply to the German migration patterns in the same way: women often follow their husband to Germany with the husband remaining the head of household and primary household earner, even if women also penetrate the job market in Germany. The transfer of remittances takes place by both women and men alike, and Sinhalese and Tamils alike. The difference that can be observed here is, first, that the Tamil women interviewed – both first and second generation – rather 'invest' in social and care projects, and the husband in technical or purely political projects, and second, that the male head of household the primary target of the LTTE fundraisers was. Their motivation to do so, however, is the same. The remittances by Sinhalese women interviewed are either absorbed in the husband's house-building project or are geared towards helping the family. So overall, the gender difference lies in the 'investment target' but not in the motivation.

## ***Political activities***

Political activities can take many different forms, for example, participation in elections, demonstrations, advocacy, or awareness raising (Al-Ali et al., 2001a), or they may be rejected altogether. These activities often relate to the citizenship status of the migrant and link to their perception of the 'nation' and the 'homeland' which provide the foundation for the political activities and political engagement (Vertovec, 2001). Political activities, however, do not remain the same, but do change over time. They not only depend on the social locations of the person but also on the political context. Indeed, any political event in Sri Lanka has an immediate impact among the diaspora population and may change their political behaviour. The geographical distance from home allows space for particular political opinions: Rajesh (Tamil, male, first generation) mentioned in the interview that "*because we are not suffering much here, it is much easier and safer to support the war*". Indeed, nationalism in the diaspora is often much stronger than in the home country.

Political engagement also varies according to the host country's political context. As asylum procedures and laws have been either amended or applied more rigidly throughout Europe, some members of diaspora communities adjusted their political engagement accordingly. Indeed, several interviewees referred to their fear of acting due to the policies regarding deportation and repatriation in cases of committing a criminal act. Although these policies were already enacted in Germany since the *Asylkompromiss* ('asylum compromise') in the early 1990s, they assumed a new importance for the Tamil population once the LTTE was listed as a 'terrorist organization' by the European Union in 2006, and Germany, although reluctantly, had to agree to this as well. As a direct result, interviewees pointed out that:

*"People are frightened to do something here... There is this fear [of repatriation or deportation], therefore people do not engage."* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

Finally, political engagement – unlike other forms of activity – depends on the individual's perception of change and their ability to influence the political situation:

*"I don't think individually I can do anything. Collectively, yes. But not individually; nobody is going to take notice of it."* (Kajani, Tamil, female, first generation)

*"If we would be somehow organized, we could achieve something. But we are unfortunately not organized. Alone you cannot do so much."* (Rajasingham, Tamil, male, first generation)

*"Politically, I am not so active. There are two parties, two sides, and they always fight. I do not like this so much... But it is good that there are groups which are active who show that they do not close their eyes. I do not know whether they will succeed to change something. It is good to try. I am not involved personally though."* (Kamani, Sinhalese, female, first generation)

*"I do not think we can do much. We can protest, we can write but other than that I don't think we can change anything. We cannot do much and so I am not politically active."* (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation)

These quotes reflect the perception that diasporic political engagement will not bring about change, hence all the respondents refrain from involving themselves. It is interesting to note here that Kajani and Rajasingham, both Tamils of the first generation, explicitly refer to the collective as an agent of change, but not the individual. This also fits with the identity they have, a collective identity based on their ethnicity as Tamils. This identity construction is also influenced, among others, by the discourse of the LTTE at the time, which relied on the collective for their nationalist project. Kamani and Chahila, both Sinhalese women, simply do not believe that their involvement would change anything; they do not believe in their agency in this regard, neither individually

nor collectively. Their personal histories and their social locations play a role in shaping these perceptions. The emotional attachment to their home country is not the main determinant of this scepticism as they all had expressed an explicit identification with their ethnicity in the interview. It seems as if the pragmatism prevails and influences their decision to participate or not to participate.

Of course, the effects of the political engagement can be viewed very differently. For example, one interviewee expressed doubts about the impact the diaspora can have despite the fact that he is politically very active:

*"I think it is very limited what the diaspora community can do. But it may also be different from one [diaspora] to the other, depending from which community you are coming from."* (Priyadarshana, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Priyadarshana raises not only doubts about the effectiveness of diaspora activism but also puts this in perspective. Being a Sinhalese, working closely with the Tamil community, he does acknowledge that this perception varies across the different communities. Political activism has different facets across the same ethnic group, gender, age and political orientation. Most of the interviewees expressed not only an affinity to a certain political group, which may or may not have resulted in political involvement, but could also express this in a different way of involvement, be it financially, socially, culturally or virtually.

The following provides an account of the variety of political activities across the different social locations.

Rajesh (Tamil, male, first generation) was a trade unionist in Sri Lanka and he had to leave the country with the anti-Tamil riots in 1983. As he arrived in Germany, he immediately linked up with the trade unions there. This facilitated his integration in Germany. His political engagement in the early years was with German trade unions and their international solidarity work. He also became a member of the Group of International Marxists, and later of the *Kommunistische*

*Partei Deutschlands* (KPD, the Communist Party of Germany) and the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (PDS, the Party of Democratic Socialism in Germany)<sup>40</sup>. After having established his political contacts in Germany, Rajesh was able to direct his activism again towards Sri Lanka. He was involved at various levels and with different groups, but he found his political ‘home’ with the Sri Lanka Democratic Forum (SLDF)<sup>41</sup>. So he shared, among other things, the story about his political engagement with SLDF in recent years:

*“Our protest was not only against the suppression by the state, but was also against the LTTE, against human rights violations of all groups. The most important thing is to minimize human rights violations and to work for a political solution. We established SLDF in 2002 and we had to continue to do substantial work in the last two years [2004–2006]. I am very much satisfied with the work I do with SLDF. We have a very good network in Vavuniya; we also kept persons in hiding in some places... Some people criticize us for criticizing the LTTE but, during the ceasefire agreement, the LTTE committed more human rights violations than the government. We issue critical statements but we coded them to be anonymous. Amnesty International did not issue statements because they said they did not have enough evidence to prove LTTE’s involvement. But we continued to issue statements. We used our influence, we pressurized. Human Rights Watch was also the first to condemn LTTE, then only Amnesty International, then others followed, even TamilNet. So we realized that it works. Then we started to collaborate with the Human Rights Council, even for the latest report [in 2006] we gave lots of information... So the government started to attack us but then the EU gave us a chance to meet, and we met the team of the European Commission.”* (Rajesh, Tamil, male, first generation)

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<sup>40</sup> In 2007, the Party of Democratic Socialism was renamed ‘The Left’.

<sup>41</sup> The website of SLDF is [www.srilankademocracy.org](http://www.srilankademocracy.org) still pops up on Google but does not show a functioning link. Its last statement was released in 2010. SLDF worked across the world, mainly with a membership in Canada, Germany, Norway, the UK and the USA, defining itself as a “global network of human rights and democracy activists committed to promote democratisation and inter-ethnic relations.” (See [www.srilankademocracy.org](http://www.srilankademocracy.org).)

Rajesh is a committed political person and, therefore, he continued his politics in Germany. He has always kept direct links to Sri Lanka, even though he did not return there physically until after 2004, when he got German citizenship. This allowed him for the first time to go back again. But his citizenship status did not influence his relation to 'home', which he still considers to be in Colombo and Jaffna. Germany only gives him *"some feeling because I am used to it after so many years"*. He defines himself as a *"cosmopolitan because my family members are married to so many different people. But I am a party member; this is my real home. I never fitted into society because I am a party member."* He referred to his ethnicity only in language terms as he speaks Tamil. His identity was formed in relation to his emotional attachment to politics and it was reinforced through his marginalization by others. His experience of marginalization shaped his identity and this is comparable to others – as referred to in the previous chapter – even though the basis of the marginalization differs, being political membership and not ethnicity. His political identity and his political engagement mutually reinforced each other. In fact, Rajesh's home was Sri Lankan politics and he indeed was perceived like this both in Sri Lanka and abroad.<sup>42</sup>

Rajesh is definitely unique with his story, his engagement and his reflections, yet, he is not the only one who defined himself politically and got engaged on this basis. Even though the political orientation differs from person to person, the triad interrelationship of feeling at home in the political space, identifying with politics and acting politically can be observed in other instances too. Jayalath, a male Sinhalese of the first generation, who also defines himself politically, said:

*"I am a lot involved with the diaspora here and also in Europe more generally. At the moment, this is my goal, to find a solution for Sri Lanka together with the diaspora. The LTTE is dependent on the diaspora and the government of Sri Lanka is also dependent on foreign donors. So we are here in Europe, we can put pressure on both of them. That is what*

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<sup>42</sup> Rajesh died two years after the interview was conducted and he was then honoured in Germany and in Sri Lanka by different political groupings.

*we have to do now and I am sure it will have an impact as well. I work with INSD [International Network of Sri Lankan Diaspora] on this... The annual Bad Boll conferences also help to put pressure.”* (Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Jayalath has a very different political history to Rajesh. Jayalath was a leading member of the JVP in Sri Lanka, was in prison in Sri Lanka and then later fled to Germany. In Germany, he did not join a political party but engaged in his early years in third-world solidarity work and set up a meeting place for foreigners and Germans to discuss politics. He was a founding member of the Sri Lankan Friendship Circle, a small registered NGO, and of the International Network of Sri Lankan Diaspora (INSD)<sup>43</sup>. Jayalath also became a German citizen but this did not allow him to return home to Sri Lanka. So Jayalath and Rajesh have very different social locations shaping them: Jayalath is Sinhalese, Rajesh is Tamil; Jayalath is about 20 years younger than Rajesh; Jayalath’s personal history in Sri Lanka is shaped by his membership in a political party, Rajesh’s by his membership in a trade union; Jayalath’s political activism in Germany was directed towards NGOs, Rajesh’s towards political parties. All these elements shape their respective identities but the result is similar: an identification with politics. This political identity drives their political engagement. It shapes their feeling of ‘belonging’ – the ‘home’ which is for both in the political space.

Political identification necessitates a strong anchoring in politics back home, before migrating and after. Rajkumar (Tamil, male, first generation) defines himself clearly as ‘Tamil’, even though he was adopted as a young adult by German parents, which enabled him to stay in the country. The foster parents looked after him and helped him to integrate. He was active in politics in Sri Lanka but his political orientation in Germany was mainly directed towards the host society: he got involved in anti-racism work and only much later shifted again to political activities targeting Sri Lanka itself. Rajkumar’s political engagement surely was influenced by his integration into German society where

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<sup>43</sup> See [www.srilankandiaspora.com](http://www.srilankandiaspora.com)

he – through his foster parents – was closely in touch with Germans but still remained an ‘outsider’, a member of a visible minority. His German citizenship status, which he gained quite early after his arrival in Germany, may have influenced his political targeting as well. So his German activism had a slightly different basis than Jayalath’s or Rajesh’s. His identity, however, always remained Tamil and he considers ‘home’ both Germany and Sri Lanka. In Rajkumar’s case, his proximity to German society alongside his Tamil identity as an ‘other’ has made him engage politically in Germany. The experiences of marginalization and discrimination in a society that is ‘close to his heart’ have also made him engage in order to uphold his Tamil identity in an environment hostile to foreigners.

Even though certain commonalities can be filtered throughout these histories, diversity prevails. Another interviewee who knows Rajesh and Rajkumar highlights their differences:

*“I have met sometimes with [Rajesh] and [Rajkumar]. They had this Tamil association here. I also worked with them for some time... But you know, I do not like fixed structures, I just wanted to work for human beings. You know, those living in exile are a different kind of people. They are a different class. They can do their political things – that is also good but I have more an interest in the ‘common’ people. So I stopped engaging politically. If I am in Sri Lanka it would be different.”*

(Rajasingham, Tamil, male, first generation)

Rajasingham also had a history of political involvement in Sri Lanka with one of the splinter groups of the LTTE. He is a political person with a clearly defined Tamil identity, but he points to another dimension that influences the political engagement in the diaspora: class and, implicitly, caste. In the Sri Lankan context, caste is an important, albeit ‘unspoken of’, determinant. Class and caste influence political orientation, as does education. These dimensions are difficult to separate because they mutually influence each other. Nevertheless, Rajasingham is very clear in his analysis, which could be transcribed as ‘class matters and it makes them different from me’. As an ‘ordinary person’ he wants

to work for 'ordinary people'. The disassociated and abstract engagement in conferences, advocacy and awareness-raising activities does not link sufficiently to the 'common people', does not impact directly on those who matter to him. He cannot relate it to his life and 'his people'. Even though Rajesh, for example, is fighting a class struggle through his communist–socialist orientation, he is of a different caste and has an understanding of how politics at international level interlinks with the national level and, eventually, filters down to community level. So class may not be exactly the right terminology here, but caste and education definitely are.

All these voices heard above are associated with an ethnic or political identity but they are all located outside the mainstream politics of Sri Lanka. While they do position themselves in relation to the nation states – both the Sri Lankan nation state and the de facto nation state created by the LTTE – it is in a dissenting manner. They reject the nationalism and human rights violations exercised by both sides to the conflict and seek alternative ways of engagement, or, alternatively, they disengage totally. The national question, however, is prevalent for all and they all – first and second generation alike – define themselves in relation to the national question, be it for or against.

*“They [the LTTE] are the only ones protecting us. We always ask ourselves ‘who is our guardian?’ because we were all suppressed by the Sri Lankan government. If we have problems, we all support them. They are like our people, not different: they come also to the Tamil families and they help everybody... I do not want war for my people. I want that our people can live quietly. Only that is important; it makes me support them here also.”* (Tiru, Tamil, male, first generation)

Tiru is a supporter of the LTTE and he was actively involved with them in Sri Lanka. He only arrived in Germany in 1994, about ten years later than many of the other Tamils quoted in this chapter. Much of his account above relates to Sri Lanka and, indeed, his support for the LTTE in Germany is based on his experiences and perception of the LTTE in Sri Lanka. He identifies with the LTTE, carries a collective identity of 'my' and 'our' people, and his concern is

the protection of his co-ethnics in Sri Lanka. Nayan had expressed a similar concern and identification with 'my people' but it translated into a different sort of action. Nayan contributed financially and Tiru politically through participation in different events. Furthermore, as in Rajkumar's case, Tiru's experiences of exclusion determined his identity, and yet, the suppression he refers to is one experienced in the home country carried out by the Sri Lankan government and not within the host society. The source of suppression and marginalization is different for Rajkumar and Tiru (host society versus Sri Lankan government), but the experience (suppression and marginalization) is the same. Tiru's main emotional attachment is towards the home country and he does not mention German society in his narrative at all. One would not be able to locate him geographically – he could be based in Canada, France, Norway or Switzerland just as much as in Germany. Only Sri Lanka remains the reference point; that is where he belongs.

Whereas Tiru as a first generation Tamil is entirely oriented towards the home country, second generation Tamils seem to be focused much more on Germany, though they can equally be supporters of the LTTE:

*"You cannot say we are LTTE; we are sympathisers of the LTTE. I am a member of the Tamil Coordination Committee here in Germany. With the EU ban, the name has changed but activities have continued. For example, the demonstrations here: you have the biggest number of people attending them, so this is also a sign that they identify with this political line... This does change something. As a diaspora, we will play an even more important role because more and more work will be done with governments."* (Ganesh, Tamil, male, second generation)

The changing political context in the European Union impacts on how Ganesh identifies himself: he is one of the representatives of the LTTE in Germany and yet he calls himself 'only' a 'sympathiser'. So he has to present a different identity – due to the political repercussions this may otherwise have on his

personal life<sup>44</sup> – than he may actually have in terms of his emotional attachment. This is indeed an important facet in diaspora politics of identity because it applies to all Sri Lankan citizens. The extent to which real, perceived, or imagined repercussions threatens one's life nevertheless may differ according to the political groups one supports or belongs to and the level of engagement. However, this applies to both Sinhalese and Tamils as the political attachment here is the determinant factor rather than ethnicity.

A second important aspect in Ganesh's account is that he is a second generation Tamil and, in many ways, he is more, or at least equally, engaged, politicized and nationalist than many first generation Tamils. This may be surprising at first sight: however, it does link to the creation of an 'imagined' home and homeland. First generation Tamils have experienced atrocities, injustice, discrimination and violence themselves. They went through the war and, therefore, their relationship to the homeland is also grounded on these life experiences. Distance, though, also creates a 'nostalgia' mode so that much of the original experiences get distorted, and they enter into the realm of imagination – just as with the second generation. The difference, however, is that nationalism, emotional attachment and identity construction among second generation Tamils is based on the experiences of 'others'. Ganesh is a German citizen; he speaks German fluently and is well integrated professionally. However, he is a visible minority member, which makes him not feel fully 'German'. So, confronted with a relatively hostile environment and having been raised as a 'Tamil', he has to find new ways of defining himself. Germany is 'home' but only partially; it does not cover the multiple facets of his identity. Sri Lanka is part of his identity but it is not a 'real' home either, as he only visited the country from time to time and never lived there over a long period. Yet, given his experiences in Germany, Sri Lanka does offer a 'refuge', a safe space where an alternative feeling of being 'at home' can be constructed. It is an 'imagined' home, which is reinforced by the nationalist discourse of the LTTE. The LTTE itself relies on the construction of an 'imagined' homeland – though

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<sup>44</sup> Note, that in Switzerland, for example, following the EU's 'ban' on the LTTE, a number of arrests and raids took place of persons who were previously known LTTE supporters and representatives. This had an effect on how the LTTE could function and organize itself abroad.

clearly linked to the de facto nation state – in Sri Lanka, in order to mobilize support for its nationalist project. Ganesh is much more open to these ‘imaginings’ and to the associated nationalism than his parents are because it helps him to define himself. Even though the first generation also supports the nationalist project of the LTTE, they still put this in relation to their real life experiences. In this way, the second generation becomes a fertile ground for nationalist projects and it is often much more radicalized than the first generation.

Ganesh is a second generation Tamil who embraces the discourse of a nationalist project and gains his feeling of belonging from this affiliation. Ganesh is not an exceptional case because the same dynamics of being a visible minority, imagining home in Sri Lanka, and being absorbed in a nationalist project, can be observed with second generation Sinhalese too. The determinant factor is here that they are linked to a nationalist discourse, in the case of the Sinhalese, to the discourse of the Buddhist nationalist parties. It is important to note, at this stage, that a national or ethnic identity *per se* can have a positive impact on the lives of Tamils and Sinhalese in the diaspora as it can provide a positive sense of belonging and can foster diversity. Yet, once one enters the realm of nationalism with a negative perception towards the ‘other’, this identity construction can become problematic as it can lead to violence and fragmentation.

As a result of this described dynamism, Ganesh is publicly and actively engaged politically and he is, in fact, one of the organizers of LTTE-supportive political events in Germany on Sri Lanka. Demonstrations and rallies are a common way to express a political opinion, to articulate solidarity and to raise awareness and reach out to a wider public. The LTTE has used demonstrations and rallies as a strategic communication tool to gain visibility, but also to create identity. Anbarasani shares her understanding on these events:

*“There is a ‘National Day’: it is a kind of memorial for Tamils who lost their lives in the war. It is held on the anniversary day of the leader [LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran] and there are special guests who come for this,*

*also from Sri Lanka. They make speeches and you really get also dragged into it, if there are 10,000 German Tamils coming together. I also thought then: 'Yes, I am here, I am part of it.'*" (Anbarasani, Tamil, female, second generation)

Anbarasani expresses her pride in being part of this movement. So, in fact, the messaging of the speeches itself is far less important in her account than the feeling of being together. Having like-minded people brought together reinforces one's identity and creates a sense of belonging. And indeed, belonging matters in the diaspora, given members' alienation and their sense of 'difference' from the host society. At the same, precisely because belonging matters, the LTTE can even more effectively mobilize around their nationalist project and instrumentalize the event for their political purposes. Participants of such events often are less politicized or nationalist than they may appear to be, given their participation in the event. Anbarasani exemplifies this as she writes in a note to the author:

*"I am brought up in a multicultural or multi-ethnic society. To put it in other words, I am neither 100% German nor Tamil. I am rather a German citizen with Tamil origins grown up in a metropolitan area."* (Anbarasani, written note, 27.01.2007)

So her participation in the LTTE demonstration could lead to the assumption of a strong national or nationalist identity but, instead, her affiliation is on the basis of her Tamil identity and the emotional attachment it creates. Her participation is also a reflection of her Tamil socialization and, yet, she not only has a Tamil identity but also a German identity. The German identity, however, is not entirely based on her citizenship status but on her metropolitan identity. Anbarasani unifies multiple identities: all exist for her but not all come to the fore or have the same importance at the same time. At the LTTE demonstration, the Tamil identity is dominant, but when interacting with her friends of diverse background her German identity, or rather her 'multi-ethnic' identity, comes to the fore. Identities adjust; they are fluid and changing. This complexity, however, makes her understanding of belonging difficult. She does truly belong

to Tamil society and, yet, she also is embedded and belongs to German society. Belonging is multiple and multi-faceted.

Among the diaspora communities in Germany, the LTTE is the most organized group when it comes to engagement in political projects. However, a Sinhalese nationalist counter-discourse does exist. At the time of the research, it originated mainly from the embassy of Sri Lanka as Sinhalese nationalist political parties were not active physically but were organized virtually.

Kumarage mentioned in his interview that:

*“[t]he embassy has not done anything. That was a mistake. Now they are changing and they are really trying to counter-attack through propaganda.”* (Kumarage, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Kumarage’s assessment was quite true as, for a long time, the embassy had not been engaged in nationalist politics but did so once the atrocities during the ceasefire period increased as of 2005–2006. A group called ‘Sri Lankans against the Terror of the LTTE – Germany’ (SLALTG – Group) has also become politically active and their demonstrations were announced on the embassy’s website. A press release issued by the Sri Lankan embassy in Berlin states:

*“Demonstrations of this sort against the Liberation Tigers were not thinkable a few years ago, but today the Sri Lankan Diaspora in Europe is well determined to reveal the atrocities of terrorists in the world through demonstrations across European capitals. On 26 July [2009], the ‘Sri Lankans Against the Terror of the LTTE – Germany’ have successfully organized a demonstration against the Sri Lankan terrorist group, LTTE, also known as Tamil Tigers. The demonstration against the LTTE took place on the streets of Berlin. According to the information from the Group more than 1,200 people – Sri Lankans and Germans – from all over the Federal Republic participated in the event last Saturday.”* (News release dated 31.07.2009 from author’s archive)

This extract shows that the nationalist project of the LTTE did not differ much from the nationalist project of the Sri Lankan state. The difference is, however, that the Sinhalese interviewees defined and positioned themselves solely vis-à-vis the LTTE and the Tamil interviewees positioned themselves first and foremost vis-à-vis the suffering of the Tamil – ‘my’ – people. The identification process and the level of identification are, therefore, quite distinct and result in a different political engagement.

Finally, elections are a form of political participation that are often used and encouraged to express one’s belonging. In the case of Sri Lankan–German relations, the participation in elections is without signification. Sinhalese with Sri Lankan citizenship cannot vote in Sri Lanka at the elections because “*there is no system allowing us to vote*” (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation). Indeed, the Sri Lankan government did not provide the possibility for its citizens to vote from abroad. Therefore, unless they travelled to Sri Lanka to cast their vote on an election date, their voices would not be heard in their home country. Tamils, as Sri Lankan citizens, similarly could not vote in Sri Lanka. However, in 2010, after the war officially ended, the Transnational Government of Tamil Eelam was formed and referendums and elections concerning a ‘Government of Thamil Eelam’ were held around the world, among other events, also in Germany. Tamils – regardless of their formal citizenship – could participate in these events. As this goes beyond the research period no further elaborations on it will be recorded here. Tamils and Sinhalese, once they obtain a permanent residence title, can participate in communal elections and, if they become German citizens, they can also participate in elections at all levels in Germany. Hardly any of the interview partners of the first generation mentioned this form of political participation and only few of the second generation referred to it. This provides an indication on how they define themselves, where ‘home’ is actually located, and the extent to which they feel they belong to German society.

### **Does gender matter?**

Political activities are gendered. Most of the male interviewees expressed and positioned themselves politically, whereas women were more reluctant to do so.

Even though women actively participated in the war in Sri Lanka<sup>45</sup>, their engagement in the political activities listed above was very limited. Some participated in demonstrations and rallies but, even then, this was not highlighted as a political activity *per se*. If they mentioned such engagement – and only very few did in the interviews – it was as part of a family activity. So the whole family would go to the demonstrations as a collectivity, under the leadership of the male head of household. This participation would be based, therefore, on their role as social and cultural dependents, which will be also further elaborated below, rather than on their active political identity. Women expressed in the interviews a distinct ethnic identity, but this did not translate into or was not linked to a political identity. So they were participants, but women followed the nationalist discourses, reproduced by the dominant (de facto) state structures, without shaping them. This dynamic was then mirrored in their political identification and feeling of belonging. Sinhalese and Tamil interview partners shared a similar discourse here, although the LTTE always reached out and integrated women into their military struggles in Sri Lanka more actively and systematically than the state structures did. Ethnicity was not a determinant for their political engagement; the difference was rather in being first or second generation. First generation Tamil and Sinhalese women – with some few exceptions, especially related to those who came for studies – came to Sri Lanka as wives of husbands who had either fled to the country or migrated for economic reasons. The husbands were the family heads and remained so also in Germany, and, hence, they took the political decisions. This explains the reason for men’s political identity and women’s ethnic identity. Second generation Tamil and Sinhalese women have grown up in a different context and could frame their gendered identity and their role in the society also in relation to the host society. Therefore, they also had a space to define their political identity leading to political action. The determinant factor is, therefore, whether there is a space for action and the framing of an identity outside the traditional Tamil and Sinhalese societal structures. If such space is there, political engagement can result initiated by women as active agents with a political identity, and not only by being absorbed in the male-headed household

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<sup>45</sup> See Told (1997) for a detailed analysis of women’s role as participants in the military structures, both government and LTTE, in Sri Lanka.

or (de facto) state structures. Indeed, if this space is found, even women of the first generation would engage actively on their own account.

### ***Social activities***

Social activities relate to contacts with friends and family in the home and host country, to membership in social organizations or clubs, to contributions in newspapers or the media more generally, but can also relate to schooling and education (Al-Ali et al., 2001b). It is sometimes hard to draw the line between social and cultural activities as these boundaries between the two are blurred and mutually influential. Social activities do not necessarily link to politics. However, as the focus of this research is on political activities, they will be analysed in view of their political impact – if any.

One obvious transnational social activity is having regular contact with friends and family members in the home country and host country. All the interview partners had kept contact with Sri Lanka, even though some may have interrupted their contacts for some time and resumed them after having settled in Germany. The focus of interaction also shifted for some from Sri Lanka to elsewhere, be it to Germany or other places, such as Canada, France or Switzerland, where their family members or friends had migrated to. But social contacts were important for both Sinhalese and Tamils, though the level, number and intensity of these contacts have varied. Clearly, the social contacts with the home country aligned with identity: those with a political identity kept contact with political contacts back home, while others who defined themselves ethnically kept contact mainly with their community or family members. Very few indeed crossed the boundaries of their ethnicity. Contacts in the host society, however, were more varied:

*“I have a few best friends but with them I do not talk about politics. They are very nice but only a few are really close because it is better not to say exactly what you think politically. They do not trust you otherwise. For example [Tiru] was a Tiger, then we always had tensions; but then*

*they realized that I am not so anti-Tamil, maybe just a little bit critical sometimes, so then when they realized that, it was OK.”* (Rajasingham, Tamil, male, first generation)

*“I have won new friends in the international diaspora. They are very trustworthy people, also internationally. Sometimes you lose some Sri Lankan friends but then you win new ones also and these are friends who are open, engaged people.”* (Jayalath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

*“My friends are only Turks, no Germans. My best friends in primary school were a Turkish girl, a Polish girl and a Yugoslav girl. I was the only Sri Lankan. I had contacts in the Tamil community too but this was a different class because we were always very political and followed the anti-LTTE groups. The LTTE is a closed circle, so we did not have so much to do with them.”* (Letchumi, Tamil, female, second generation)

*“I have Sinhalese friends, yes, but I do not have a close relationship to them. I say hello and talk to them but when I go home I don’t share my feelings with them. I do not have trust.”* (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation)

The variety of these quotes has to be analysed in view of their social locations, which are selected here across ethnicity, gender and generation. For Rajasingham and Letchumi, both Tamil, their social relations within the Tamil community exist but are shaped by the dominance of the LTTE as an organized group in Germany. So a critical voice against the LTTE is difficult to sustain and, therefore, friendships are also influenced by this. Or alternatively, if one is an LTTE supporter, social contacts would remain within this political group. Jayalath and Chahila, both Sinhalese, also have contacts within their ethnic community but they have no close friends within their own ethnic group because they do not trust them. Trust, it seems, is a value that either explicitly or implicitly plays an important role in defining the social engagement. All of them, Sinhalese and Tamils, women and men, first and second generation, referred to

trust as a determinant factor through which friendships are defined. The value system here influences social contacts, which also shape a person's feeling of belonging.

Jayalath, a first generation Sinhalese, and Letchumi, a second generation Tamil, both also stressed their contacts and friendships with others beyond their own ethnic group, including non-Germans. Being in Germany does not imply having close German contacts. Jayalath and Letchumi said that they felt much closer to non-Germans than Germans, as they found their friends on the grounds of being a minority in Germany, independent of citizenship status. Here a 'minority' identity – versus the majoritarian German population – came to the fore, which influenced the feeling of being 'at home'. Some other interviewees, Sinhalese and Tamils, did highlight their good contacts to a very few Germans, which mainly developed in relation to their arrival to Germany, when Germans were very helpful and supportive in their settling in Germany. These German contacts then remained over the years. Obviously, the relationship to the host country and its people shapes social engagement and interactions. If the relationship is marked by marginalization, exclusion or discrimination then little contact exists; if positive contacts were encountered, friendship with the local population were built up. This was experienced regardless of ethnicity, gender or generation, but what could be commonly observed as the determinant factor was either the hostility or the friendliness of members of the host society and the political orientation of the migrant.

Alongside the contacts with friends and family members, social gatherings also occurred on regular basis, both with the Tamil and Sinhalese diasporas:

*"I organize informal meetings once a month for people to come together. We show [visually] the killings of the Sri Lankan government and we tell them that it is important to see this. I talk to the participants, I show my feelings also. We usually have 100 to 150 people each time."* (Tavarajah, Tamil, male, first generation)

Clearly, the social activity described here is also a political activity, linked to the nationalist project and grounded in the identification with the Tamil cause. Tavarajah is also the contact person for the 'Eelam's Tamil Welfare Association e.V.', a registered NGO in Berlin. Sinhalese organize similar gatherings, but they link these instead to the social and cultural aspects of the get-together. Yet, some turn into more politically oriented meetings:

*"We have organized meetings every first and third Friday, but they are not so political. We meet to discuss and gather socially, eat Sri Lankan food together. But lately, for some time actually, we have also started to work more with the diaspora and to have political discussions."* (Sarath, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Sarath's account highlights the social dimension of identity formation. Food, for example, is an important marker and links the community together. In this regard, the Tamil food shops play an important role as meeting points. But Sarath's remarks also show that social gatherings can evolve from the non-political to the political realm. Such a development reflects change in the political situation in the home country. Diaspora communities react very quickly to contextual changes in the home country, which expresses itself not only in political activities but also reinforces their ethnic or national identity. It can also bring a political identity to the fore or shift it to a different orientation. Such a shift indeed could be observed among a number of interviewees, such as Sivalingam:

*"I was a member of PLOTE originally but then withdrew from politics. I also had to work and had a family here. But in recent years, as I have seen how the government treats my people, I have felt like doing something. I am still not pro-LTTE but I am pro-Tamil. There is nobody strong enough to take on the Tamil voice, only the LTTE."* (Sivalingam, Tamil, male, first generation)

Sivalingam then got engaged politically again, participated in the social gatherings where Sarath had been active, became a member of INSD, and

finally, later on, started to upload strong pro-Tamil messages through social media. So he obviously went through different stages of engagement, which gradually developed in parallel to the changing political situation. His identity always remained Tamil, but within that shifted from moderate to radical. Indeed, not only are identities diverse within a community but they are also fluid in a person, over time and situationally.

Social engagement can find its expression in different ways. Keller (2001) lists a number of Tamil membership organizations, including a Tamil student organization, and informal Tamil sports clubs. They are all based in Germany and do give a sense of belonging abroad. Sivalingam has also directed his engagement towards the host society, but others link it instead to Sri Lanka, for example, through the support of development projects in Sri Lanka, as outlined earlier. Kajani and Muthu, both Tamil, engage in social projects through their money transfers, while Sinhalese also participate in similar ways:

*“After the tsunami, the Sri Lanka Association helped 18 children every month. They sent money for scholarships.”* (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation)

The Sri Lanka Association Berlin e.V. (SLA)<sup>46</sup> is a registered association, established in 1978 in Berlin, which unites – according to its website – all ethnic groups to undertake a wide range of social and cultural activities, such as the one mentioned by Chahila. Even though theoretically multi-ethnic, in practical terms only Sinhalese join its meetings and activities. The association’s social gatherings also shifted from being moderate and non-political, to reproduce a more radical, politicized and nationalist discourse. This is not surprising, given that the Sri Lanka Association is closely linked to the Sri Lankan Embassy in Berlin and, therefore, influenced by its increasingly nationalist discourse. In a news item on the Sri Lankan embassy’s website in Berlin on 31 July 2009, a report was posted about a promotional event in which “Sri Lankans Against the Terror of the LTTE – Germany participated”, and that the event “at the

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.srilankans-berlin.de/>

Embassy was organized with the assistance of the Sri Lanka Association – Berlin”. This establishes a clear linkage between these three entities (i.e., the Sri Lankan embassy in Berlin, Sri Lankans Against the Terror of the LTTE – Germany and the Sri Lanka Association Berlin).

One of the most important social activities of Sri Lankan diasporas are contributions to the media, although these could also be considered straightforward political contributions as will be seen below. The diaspora communities can, of course, contribute from Germany to the media in Sri Lanka, especially to the radio and print media. One interviewee who was active in journalism in Sri Lanka continued to publish in Sri Lanka itself. In 2009, he, together with other journalists across Europe, started Journalists for Democracy in Sri Lanka<sup>47</sup>, a media platform providing news, analysis, features and videos on Sri Lanka. This platform, although international in its outlet, is run from Germany. In addition, the International Association of Tamil Journalists (IATJ), established in London in 2006 (TamilNet, 2006), also has a membership in Germany.

In addition, a number of newspapers are published in Germany and others are imported from Sri Lanka, London or Paris in the Tamil language and are sold through Tamil food shops. Similarly, Sinhalese newspapers are available through Tamil food shops but have a much lower circulation. Radio and TV in Sinhala and Tamil can also be received in Germany. A large number of internet radio and TV stations exist, each with a different political orientation. Tamil-language radio and TV stations also operate out of Germany; for example, the European Tamil Radio<sup>48</sup> is transmitted worldwide and is based in Hamm, Germany. Sinhala radio stations are mostly headquartered in Italy as it hosts the largest – and most nationalist – Sinhalese community (Henayaka-Lochbihler et al., 2004). A diversity and variety of media outlets exist and, to some extent, their numbers and political orientation are not so important; more important is the fact that they exist, that the diaspora is using them and that they connect through these media to the home country and keep their identity alive.

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<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.jdslanka.org/>

<sup>48</sup> See <http://etr.fm/default.html>

*“I like to listen to the news. Daily, I listen to it. I like to know the situation in Sri Lanka.”* (Nayan, Tamil, male, first generation)

Nayan is just one voice but a very common voice. The range of media provides political, economic, social and cultural news from Sri Lanka. The second generation, although it also listens to the news, perceives them very differently:

*“There are so many Tamil media, radio, newspaper and TV channels. They have all got a political colour. But I do listen to the Tamil news; everybody listens to it. Every young Tamil listens to it, even if we do not understand a word. They talk so fast and you cannot catch what it is all about: JVP, PA, UNP, TNA, JHU, SLMC, names of journalists who have been killed, whatever; so many things they tell. It is so difficult to follow because we don’t know the context; we miss the big picture. But of course, this is also business. Then you need to go to them [to Tamil school or the LTTE] and they explain it to you.”* (Anbarasani, Tamil, female, second generation)

Anbarasani’s perception is quite unique as she confirms, on the one hand, that the Tamil news channels are frequently listened to but, on the other hand, also that she does not really understand the political context. This is true of the second generation, which is alienated from Sri Lanka’s history and, yet, wants to understand and learn. Her perception of the situation needs to be contextualized in so far as she defines herself as having grown up in a political, anti-LTTE family and, therefore, she interprets her interest as ‘business’ rather than a simple matter of lack of language fluency or historical knowledge. The example nevertheless shows that the news channels are important to both the first and second generation, and they are indeed used.

In recent years, the internet has also played an important role in covering this need. A long list of English, Tamil, Sinhala and German websites exist that service this need. Later in this chapter, the virtual space will be further explored.

### **Does gender matter?**

Women are often those who are perceived to be linked to social activities in many contexts but in the diaspora, social gatherings are just as important for men. Women and men are 'foreign' to their host country and they together need to define a space of their own. Often this happens through social gatherings. Women are those who prepare the food for these events or are primarily responsible for the social and cultural reproduction of the Tamil or Sinhalese value system, but, as soon as politics enters, their participation is less obvious; even if Tamil women seem more active than Sinhalese, owing to their general politicization and their participation in the LTTE struggle as fighters. Nevertheless, women have not taken on leadership and decision-making positions in the LTTE. Instead, women have been instrumentalized for the nationalist project. Their identities have always been constructed within the realm of the family and this can also be observed in the interviews:

*“The first thing is to be a good mother and show that this is our Sri Lankan culture. I can tell stories, make the family stick together and respect each other. The world has changed, so I want my children to be independent but I don't want them to be 100% German.”* (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation)

Women are perceived as biological reproducers (Anthias et al., 1989) and as mothers who have a role in the reproduction of their group's value system. This narrow perception of women as mothers places them in a subordinate position. Indeed, many interviewees - male and female – have mentioned that women in Sri Lankan society are suppressed and do not have equal rights. Many have also recognized that by living in Germany some adaptation had to take place. Nevertheless, women remain responsible for family relations and are the children's socializers:

*“I had no idea how to socialize my children but I am a Tamil. So I want to transfer to them Tamil values. I have to give my children an identity. Take the example of the 'Tamil Women's Circle' here: They hardly play a role here but family-wise the circle is important – to transfer and create*

*identity and values ... German society is a closed society. Men have their rights and women are just ordinary housewives. Not so many women work here, they raise children. For us, as Tamils, it is important that children learn. They have to learn, learn, and learn. We have to teach them their culture. Men are not doing this. This is the role of women, of us mothers.”* (Praveena, Tamil, female, second generation)

Praveena’s point of view does not differ much from Chahila’s. They both define themselves as mothers who have to look after social and family relations, as well as the socialization of children. Diaspora women reproduce the traditional family structures from the home country but also adapt it within acceptable limits to the German context. These ‘limits’ are set by their understanding of their identity: they reproduce and maintain ethnic boundaries (Anthias et al., 1989). These boundaries have to be set not just vis-à-vis other ethnic groups but also, and more importantly, vis-à-vis the host society. Flexibility is allowed as long as a child’s identity can be maintained and ensured, which is the essential role of women. This ascription of the role is the same for Tamil and Sinhala women. However, there is one difference: For Tamils, education and learning is an inherent value which has to be transferred to their children and children are expected to study well in school, as Praveena illustrated. Tamil interview partners insisted on this aspect on several occasions, Sinhalese only mentioned it as part of the socialization process but not as a distinct value.

The role of women in social activities is closely linked to their role as reproducers of culture, or as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) have put it, as ‘ideological reproducers’.

## **Cultural activities**

Cultural activities in the diaspora concern cultural and educational events, religious and other cultural practices, language classes, but also drama, film, and music (Al-Ali et al., 2002). Women have a particular role in the reproduction of culture and ideology but also, *inter alia*, in signifying difference (Anthias et al., 1989). Werbner highlights three dimensions of culture: as “a field of transaction and relatedness ...; as performance...; and as an “imaginary of selfhood, identity, subjectivity and moral virtue” (2005:746). In translocating culture, members of the diaspora confer agency and perform cultural and religious practices according to the host country’s context. This also means that culture cannot be essentialized but should be adapted to the host country’s context. The way in which culture is embodied influences the way identity is constructed and belonging defined. Hence, performance of culture becomes an important instrument to mark difference, especially in nationalist projects. As Hall has pointed out: “Cultural identity is ... a matter of becoming as well as being” (1990: 222). This implies that ‘culture’ is about the past, the present and the future. One interviewee underlined precisely this when he explained:

*“There are events organized by the LTTE: dances performed, songs sung, Tamil values taught. They [the LTTE] demand that we keep our culture, they want to increase our awareness. They focus on the second generation. I know that because I also give tutoring classes. They [the LTTE] explain what culture means and what is happening in Sri Lanka. Indirectly, they mention politics always. ... They do so as if it is culture. But in reality, it is politics, hard-core politics, and you have to recognize that. Many know that from Sri Lanka but they do not want to admit this.”*  
(Anadan, Tamil, male, second generation)

Anadan not only lists cultural activities that are carried out by the LTTE<sup>49</sup> but he also highlights the importance of culture for the nationalist project of the LTTE.

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<sup>49</sup> Note, that most schools were run at the time by the World Tamil Movement (WTM), among others, the ‘educative’ branch of the LTTE. Interviewees, however, did not differentiate between the WTM and LTTE, hence, the text only refers to the LTTE.

Culture is instrumentalized to shape the future generation within the ideological framework of the nationalist project. In Berlin, two Tamil schools exist - one was run by the LTTE at the time of this research and one in close ideological proximity to the LTTE<sup>50</sup>. As the second generation is socialized in the German context, the LTTE has to ensure that they will not 'drift away' culturally from the nationalist path. Hence, a strong emphasis is given to the cultural education of the young Tamils. The first generation is also included in this cultural-nationalist project, but because they had experienced the Sri Lankan history themselves, they are mobilized as parents to help educate the youth. Indeed, Anadan continued to explain:

*“The main difference is that next to the German school, we also have the Tamil school. I started with the Tamil school when I was seven. So first you attend the German school, then you come home and attend the Tamil school. You get influenced by both. There is no chance for you to be critical. Parents also contribute to this. With the first generation I understand this, but with the second generation I don't.”* (Anadan, Tamil, male, second generation)

Anadan is quite sharp in his analysis as he also mentions that there was no chance for children to be critical. Indeed, it would not serve the nationalist project to educate critical youth – even if – despite all efforts – critical youth still do emerge. All the second generation interviewees, except one, did attend the Tamil school. Many of the first generation Tamil women and some of the second generation were involved as educators in these schools. Education is perceived as a women's realm, in order to transfer Tamil culture to the next generation. The second generation, being particularly radicalized as outlined earlier in this chapter, and women especially, can be instrumentalized doubly: As women, being the 'natural' care-givers and cultural carriers, and as second generation, not questioning or critically challenging the methods applied by the LTTE in these educative activities – all serving the purpose of reinforcing loyalty to the imagined homeland and creating a strong Tamil identity.

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<sup>50</sup> A third Tamil school was mentioned by one interviewee but not by others.

Once again, the LTTE is the dominant structure which has subsumed other groupings, in particular towards the end of the ceasefire period and the end of the war. Nevertheless, the same mechanisms used by the LTTE are also used by nationalist Sinhalese to reproduce their culture:

*“I really love to give a bit of my culture. They [the children] cannot get it from here [Germany], so I need to teach them. If I don’t do this, they will not learn it. If they can perform them [i.e. dance performance], then I have done my duty for Sri Lanka. It is my responsibility to do this. That’s why I enjoy it.”* (Chahila, Sinhalese, female, second generation)

Chahila, a young, second generation Sinhalese woman, introduces cultural activities to the younger generation as does the LTTE. She works through the ‘Sri Lanka Association Berlin e.V.’ (SLA) which provides the platform for these activities and which - as mentioned earlier - is an extended branch of the Sinhalese state. She is proud to perform her duty for her country and to ensure that members of this country do not forget their cultural roots abroad. This constructed nationalism, transferred to the second generation, brings her to carry out these activities. There is, indeed, in essence not much difference between the nationalist Sinhalese state and the LTTE structures, except that the LTTE’s rationale has to be geared towards both the home country and the host country: They have to ensure that Tamil culture is defended in German society and they have to mark their difference to the Sinhalese state in order to mobilize for an independent Tamil Eelam. Yet, the Tamil schools, as proxy of the LTTE, and the SLA, as proxy of the Sri Lankan government, both reproduce a cultural identity, ensure that the home- and Motherland is alive abroad and use women as their primary reproducers.

Cultural activities not only concern classical and popular arts, such as dance, drama, and music but importantly also language. The Tamil schools and the SLA both offer language classes for their respective languages, in which religious values are also taught.

*“I work with the Sri Lanka Association here. We meet to discuss the situation, we offer Sinhala language classes and we organize cultural events, like the summer market or the Christmas market where we perform a cultural programme.”* (Priya, Sinhalese, female, first generation)

Whereas the Tamil schools are explicitly Tamil and therefore offer only Tamil language classes, the SLA, despite its official mandate to bring together all ethnic groups from Sri Lanka, only offers Sinhala language classes. To some extent, one could argue that the Tamil schools cover the Tamil language need sufficiently, yet, as shown, they are politically oriented and therefore, they do not quite cover the need for non-partisan language classes. Accordingly, one could argue that the SLA covers a non-partisan need and yet, they do not do so. Therefore, it appears that the SLA is a reproducer of Sinhala culture only, which is consistent with both its relationship to the Embassy of Sri Lanka in Germany and to the ‘Sri Lankans Against Terror of the LTTE - Germany’.

Next to language, religion is another important marker of culture. For Sinhalese, a Buddhist association exists in Berlin and three Buddhist temples are run in the tradition of the Sri Lankan Theravada Buddhism<sup>51</sup>. Tamils are more diverse in their religious fabric. According to Schalk (2007), roughly 17–20% of all Tamils in Germany are Catholics and 3-5% are Protestants, the remaining 75-80% are Hindu. In 1989, only four Hindu temples existed in Germany, differing considerably in size and activities (Baumann, 2001). Ten years later the number climbed to more than 20 (Baumann, 2000). The increasing number of temples reflects the increasing number of Tamil migrants and reveals the growing confidence of the Tamil population to practice their religion and associated rituals in Germany. At the same time, it enabled them to express their belonging to a minority religion. In Berlin, at least three temples were mentioned by the interviewees, all organised in private houses. In September 2013, the Sri Mayurapathy Murugan temple was opened as first public Hindu temple in Berlin

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<sup>51</sup> See [http://www.buddhanet.info/wbd/province.php?province\\_id=127](http://www.buddhanet.info/wbd/province.php?province_id=127)

(Schurmann, 2013)<sup>52</sup>. Tamil and Sinhalese Christians could practice their religion by visiting the existing churches in Germany and thereby, integrating into their neighbourhood.

Some interviewees mentioned that they practice Buddhism and that religion is an important feature of their Sinhala identity, but they did not associate their belief with the Buddhist nationalist parties<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, Tamil interviewees mentioned that they are practising either Christianity or Hinduism.

*“There is a small Tamil Catholic community. Since I came here, I am there regularly. We are very engaged there. We have a Tamil priest and we meet for prayers. We also collect money and send it to Sri Lanka. There are also other associations but we do not go there.”* (Muthu, Tamil, female, second generation)

*“I am a Tamil and I am a Hindu. I pray every day. There is a Hindu temple here but I was there only three times in six years. But still I pray every day.”* (Nayan, Tamil, male, first generation)

Religion does play an important role in the daily lives of Sinhalese and Tamils in Berlin. Since identities are shifting, the complex interplay between religious and ethnic identity has to be further examined to understand the extent to which the Sri Lankan diaspora communities base their political activism on religion.

Levitt (2003) points out that transnational religious practices are shaped by global culture and institutions, Werbner (2005) draws attention to the potential of regional culture, among others religion, to create cross-cutting ties and to transcend coalitions mitigating conflicts back home, and Paerregaard (2008) argues that members of diaspora communities use their religious engagement to pursue goals oriented towards the host country, for example, to create a

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<sup>52</sup> The temple in Hamm, Westphalia is the biggest Sri Lankan Tamil Hindu temple in Germany, with up to 15,000 devotees from all over Germany and neighbouring countries, such as France, Switzerland and Denmark, visiting to worship the Hindu gods. (Baumann, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Note that Sinhala Buddhist nationalists emerged in Berlin in particular after the end of the war. The large majority of Sinhala Buddhist nationalists live in Italy.

public space for themselves or to differentiate themselves from other minorities. Underlining all these views are that religious engagement can serve political ends: the strengthening of a global institution, mitigating conflicts in the home country or creating space in the host country.

In regards to Sri Lanka and its diaspora communities in Germany, religion has also been used for political gains, and yet, the war in Sri Lanka is not based on religion (Schalk, 2007) but on territory, ethnicity and discriminatory politics. As stated in chapter 3, Buddhism is constitutionally defined as state religion, ignoring the importance of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam in the country. This provides the space for the Sinhalese state to mobilise the majoritarian Sinhalese population on religious grounds, as seen through the emergence of the Buddhist nationalist political party JHU and other religious, non-political formations.

In contrast, the de facto LTTE state under the leadership of V. Prabhakaran never mobilised its Tamil constituency in the country on the basis of religion *per se*. The Tamil speaking population in the North and East is religiously too diverse for this to happen and many of the LTTE leadership were Christians and even Muslims in the earlier days of LTTE.<sup>54</sup> From the beginning of the ethnic conflict until today, the Catholic Church in the North and East has been a firm supporter of the rights for the Tamil people. According to Schalk (2007), Hinduism, Christianity and Islam are considered by the LTTE as parallel religious expressions of Tamil culture. These convictions were also exported into the diaspora but politics penetrated religious life in a different way:

The LTTE had to finance its war for an independent Tamil Eelam and, therefore, they asserted control over Tamil schools, Hindu temples, cultural and sports organisations (Brun et al., 2012). Donations to these institutions, especially temples, are considerable, and therefore, the control by the LTTE became quite important (Keller, 2001). The interlinkage of religion and politics is documented

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<sup>54</sup> For example, V. Prabhakaran (Christian), S.P. Tamilselvam (Christian), Balraj (Christian), Pottu Amman (Christian), Anton Balasingham (Christian), Soosai (Christian), Basheer Kaka (Muslim).

in the case of the Sri Muthumar Amman Temple in London. This temple was founded by a Jaffna Tamil who was sent to London by the LTTE. He worked as a trained accountant and as financial controller of the LTTE in Western Europe, responsible for collecting funds from Tamils in the European diaspora and for procuring weaponry (David, 2008). This case illustrates the direct link between gaining control of the temple and accessing funding.

At the same time, the control of the religious space allowed the LTTE to access the Hindu Tamil community to mobilize for their nationalist project. For this purpose, cultural activities linked to religion were appropriated and redefined. Bharatanatyam is a form of traditional, classical Tamil dance embedded in the ancient Hindu tradition and performed in Hindu temples (David, 2009a). O'Shea has illustrated that Bharatanatyam in Toronto was used by two Tamil dance teachers to create new choreographies that supported the nationalist project of the LTTE. Anadan quoted earlier in this chapter alluded to the political nature of the dance performances in the Tamil schools in Berlin, too, but he omitted to explain its originally religious background. So, the dance ritual was consciously instrumentalized for political means and thus, its religious meaning was lost.

In the context of Sri Lanka, religion is instrumentalized by two actors: the Sinhalese-dominated state used Buddhism to mobilize and motivate their populace for the war; and the LTTE used religion to obtain funds and to transfer their nationalist ideology. In both cases, the instrumentalization was directed towards the own ethnic group and did not target the other ethnic group. During the period of the war, the LTTE attacked in three major instances Buddhist places of worship, monks and devotees<sup>55</sup>. These attacks were politically motivated and targeted in fact the Sri Lankan state.<sup>56</sup> This specification is of significant importance to understand the role religion plays in Sri Lanka. Religion is used as a means for the (de facto) state structures, government and

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<sup>55</sup> The three incidents are known as: the Sri Maha-Bodhi Anuradhapuraya attack on Buddhist pilgrims in May 1985; the Aranthalawa attack of Buddhist monks in June 1987; and the Temple of Tooth attack in January 1998.

<sup>56</sup> Note that only during the last phase of the war and after the war, Hindu temples and mosques were specifically and explicitly targeted on religious grounds, partly as integral part of the government's strategy to deprive Tamils and Muslims their minority rights.

LTTE, to achieve their own political objectives and to foster the war on ethnic-nationalist grounds, not on religious grounds.

Sivapalan, a first-generation Tamil, who runs the 'Adults Moral Education Service', is directly linked to one of the Hindu temples in Berlin. He focuses on teaching the *Thirukkural*, a classic Tamil book of couplets on human living, and on transferring the related value system: Occasionally, he also advises the teachers at the Tamil school on moral issues. In the interview, he clearly linked his moral teaching to the ethnic and national question:

*"I am teaching morality and moral living. As a teacher, I am interested in correcting people. You have to show identity for this, you have to know how to conduct yourself. ... We want a separate land because the government did not give us any rights. It is a moral issue to get the land back. We want it. The government is deceiving the whole world. They perform so much violence. So we have to educate people about what they [the government] do, we have to support the movement [the LTTE]. ... I am not so much tied to Sri Lanka, but to Tamil Eelam, even if it is far away. I am a Tamil German, for me home would be Tamil Eelam."*

(Sivapalan, Tamil, male, first generation)

As a teacher of religion, he is well aware of religion as a marker of identity and uses this explicitly in his teaching. He links the transfer of the Hindu value system to the construction of identity and the creation of a sense of belonging. His moral view is linked to the land question, which was at the core of the Tamil struggle for independence. In his understanding, the government has a moral obligation to give this land back to the Tamils. He is resisting the government's action, not for religious reasons but for political ones, and this compelled him to support the LTTE. Sivapalan continues to believe in Tamil Eelam as the only legitimate home. That is where he belongs to. Owing to his German passport, he considers himself as Tamil German, but in no part of the interview was there a sense that his identity was linked to Germany. It was entirely oriented towards the 'homeland' as propagated in the LTTE discourse. And strikingly, even though he teaches Hindu morality in his interview he did not express a Hindu or

religious identity. This identity must exist for him as a person running a Hindu temple, yet it is overridden by the importance of the Tamil identity.

Sivapalan illustrates this complex and 'negotiated' relationship between ethnic and religious identity: both exist simultaneously but one is more prevalent than the other at different moments of time. The politicized context of Sri Lanka, characterised by the two ethnic-nationalist projects, defines the sense of belonging, despite the frequent performance of religious practices.

Finally, literature, film, and music are important expressions of performing culture. Classical arts have been always a way to express resistance to or support for a nationalist project. The expression of feelings, but also of belonging, can be found, for example, in many of the diaspora writings. V.I.S. Jayapalan (2013), a known Tamil nationalist poet, wrote the following verses in a poem called "The Song of the Defeated"<sup>57</sup>:

*"Primordial Mother! Do not cry.  
Our history is not a sand-castle  
In Mullivaikkal that it can be  
washed away.  
It is built from the living desire of the North-East peoples.  
It is their unfinished dream.*

*From Melbourne to Toronto  
Across the seven seas  
Tamils awaken to your call.  
Even the last Tamil in the world  
Dreams only of your liberty, Mother!"*

Jayapalan not only expresses the longing of the Tamils in the diaspora for their own land but he also refers to this land as the 'Mother'. In nationalist writings, the 'mother' is frequently used as a metaphor for the nation. The nation then

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<sup>57</sup> See <http://www.jdslanka.org/index.php/2012-01-30-09-31-17/poetry-a-prose/318-the-song-of-the-defeated>

becomes female and a site of struggle. Women are at the core of the identity of the nation. In their role as cultural, ideological and biological reproducers, women are essential to defend the nation and to set its boundaries. Therefore, women also become a site of struggle and in the nationalist project, they are symbolically possessed and have to be liberated, both as women and as a nation.

Diaspora writing not only refers to the nationalist project. It can as well express resistance. Tamil literary meetings were set up in the mid-1980s to find a channel to express dissent and protest against the militant armed groups. Some of the interviewees were active participants at these meetings.

*“I am in the literary circle and we have a women’s group there. I go regularly to these meetings. They are in different cities in Europe, sometimes in Germany but also in Norway, in London, in other places. I am otherwise not politically active, but I like these meetings and we all know each other.”* (Praveena, Tamil, female, second generation)

In these literary meetings, Praveena finds a political home and a safe haven where she can express herself. Literature provides the space for an identity of resistance to come to the fore. The women’s group has existed within the literary circle and through it women were able to give their political engagement a public voice that is expressed in bilingual publications.

Literary resistance to dominant structures was not only exercised by members of the Tamil community. Many political Sinhalese in the diaspora also expressed themselves through literature. Often this was done through poems or prose articulating a nostalgic memory of Sri Lanka, published in Sinhala in Sri Lanka. As they became more settled in the host society, some also started to express themselves in the language of the host country, be it English, French or German.

One of the interviewees has for many years engaged in Sinhala political writing but published his first novel in German only in 2010 entitled *“Mit dem Wind*

*fliehen: Ein tamilisches Flüchtlingsschicksal* ('Escaping with the wind: The fate of a Tamil refugee') (Henayaka, 2010). The book tells the story of a Tamil refugee coming to Germany and his experiences in the hostile, even racist environment of the 1980s and 1990s. It is a fictional political story based on true incidents. But more so, the author told me that it was a way for him to express himself, to give witness to German politics and to come to terms with a racist society that has become 'his' society over the years.

Cultural activities can find, yet again, a different expression such as in the example of Kumarage:

*"I am managing the Sinhalese library here. I am the one who opened the library two years ago. Last time I went to Sri Lanka, I bought some books and sent them in the container of the new ambassador. So now the library is open, every Friday."* (Kumarage, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Literature preserves language which is a cultural marker. This is particularly important for the Sinhalese because their language is only spoken in Sri Lanka and its diaspora communities. In such a context, setting up a library contributes to preserving not only language but also identity. It actually can become even a nationalist project. An indication for this may be the transportation of books through the Sri Lankan Embassy in Berlin and the location of the library in the Sri Lanka Association.

### **Does gender matter?**

In cultural activities, women not only matter, they are essential. Cultural activities, as shown above, rely on a gendered construction in order to form identity. The role of women in maintaining ethnic boundaries, signifying difference and reproducing ideology is located within the cultural realm. Identity depends on cultural continuity to survive, hence, diaspora communities, both Sinhalese and Tamil, have to ensure its continuity. Women are active to this end. Traditional decision-making and family structures that exist in Sri Lanka

have to be reproduced in Germany. Many women interviewees found it very difficult to cross their traditional boundaries, given the social pressures they face within the community. Within nationalist projects, the construction of an ethnic identity, the construction of an identity towards the 'other' and the construction of a national identity are more important than women's empowerment, and yet, they are also essential for women's empowerment. Sometimes this implies a dual reproductive role for women – within the family and among co-ethnics, and vis-à-vis the host society. Second generation women interviewees expressed their dilemma in this regard even more often. They are the future 'nurturers' and 'carers' of the nation and hence, nationalist projects have to target them as well, even in and especially in the diaspora. A sense of belonging is created through the identity and values women, mothers, and teachers transfer to their children. This applies to nationalist projects in the home country just as much as it does in the diaspora.

### ***Virtual activities***

In recent years, the internet has gained in importance and cyber-space has become important for diaspora interaction. The internet has enabled faster and more in-depth access to information: it has also resulted in better information flows and networking. Information now crosses boundaries without any obstacles and can be shared in real time. This section will only touch upon these activities to introduce this topic but by no means will it be able to cover all aspects of this 'online revolution'.

A vast range of Sinhala, Tamil, and English language sites exist which provide news about Sri Lanka from different political angles.

### **Tamil websites in English**

<http://sangam.org/>

<http://www.tamilguardian.com/>

<http://www.asiantribune.com/>

<http://dbsjeyaraj.com/>

[www.globaltamilnews.net/](http://www.globaltamilnews.net/) (tri-lingual Tamil/English/Sinhalese)

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### **Tamil Nationalist, pro-separatist websites**

<http://www.tamilnet.com/> (in English)

<http://pathivu.com/> (in Tamil)

<http://www.athirvu.com/> (in Tamil)

<http://www.sangathi.com/> (in Tamil)

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Sinhalala news websites with dissenting opinions

<http://www.lankanewsweb.com/> (bilingual English/Sinhalese)

<http://www.lankaenews.com/Sinhala/> (bilingual English/ Sinhalese)

<http://www.vivaraenews.com/> (in Sinhalese)

<http://www.lankaguardian.com/> (bilingual English/Sinhalese)

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In Sinhalala extremist nationalist websites and Facebook sites are run mainly from Sri Lanka because they are provided the space to do so. All others have to re-allocate their websites abroad. Also interesting to note is that Sinhalese nationalists mainly engage through Facebook sites.

<https://www.facebook.com/TheSword.lk>

<http://lankacnews.com/sinhala/>

One Sinhalese nationalist anti-LTTE website exists also in Germany:

<http://lttewatch.wordpress.com/> LTTE Watch Deutschland (in German)

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Social media have become a powerful tool for engaging politically. Facebook and Twitter have gained in recent years in importance, though at the time of the research both were not yet as popular as they are today. Age also matters in this regard. “Older” diaspora persons check websites but do not use social media; the younger members of the diaspora – both women and men – take advantage of the wide range of offers available on the internet and also use it specifically as a platform to express political opinions:

*“I am not supporting the LTTE as such but you have to be against the Sri Lankan government. They suppress the Tamils. I write on Facebook and I share information. So that people know. I am a Facebook journalist.”*  
(Sivalingam, Tamil, male, first generation)

Sivalingam does identify himself as anti-government and Tamil, and in order to share this identity, he uses Facebook as a tool where he regularly uploads information exposing the human rights violations of the government and the plight of the Tamil people. The outreach of his Facebook site goes far beyond Germany. Networking and campaigning through Facebook are now daily features of political life.

There are also dedicated sites, such as the Facebook group ‘Tamil Community Germany’ which bring like-minded persons together. However, these sites are all transnational: most of the time they cannot be traced to one country and the originator may not be known either. It is a form of impersonal engagement which, on the one hand, provides a safe space and, on the other hand, also allows for radicalization more than ever. This is especially the case for blogs where commentaries can be provided. Owing to its transnational and impersonal nature, ethical standards have fallen dramatically and personal attacks on dissenting voices can be observed more frequently.

The impact of the internet and the social media has been dramatic for both the Sinhalese and Tamil community, both at home and in the diaspora. It has brought about many changes:

*“I am coordinating a political news website here. But it has changed since when I came here. I am compelled now to collect more data to prove the situation. It changed the original kind of positioning we had and it now gives me an opportunity to relate to international issues and to the broader map of the whole of Indian Ocean. This is also what I study, mayn other Tamils studying this as well. I can speak to them now and this has strengthened my argument.”* (Priyadarshana, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Priyadarshana's positioning has changed in the diaspora: both his way of work and his way to collect data have changed. This may not be just because of the internet but he has much better access to information now. In Sri Lanka, many sites are, for example, blocked, or can be accessed only through proxy servers. In addition, the audience in the diaspora has changed dramatically, being much more demanding and networked. The internet and the social media links the home and the diaspora, it allows one to escape realities and to create new realities.

### **Does gender matter?**

The internet is used by both women and men in the diaspora. As shown earlier, the internet can create a protected space for women to interact politically, for example, through blogs. However, only few of the women interviewees confirmed their use of blogs in the interviews. Blogs are used much more frequently by men, and they use it mainly to express their political opinions. Women, in contrast, engage more on private and family matters .

Facebook is as popular and appealing to young women as it is to men. The huge difference is, though, that women interviewees use this virtual space to engage socially, rather than politically. They reproduce expected 'social' and emotional messaging and reinforce in this way their social role as 'carers', rather than expanding and newly defining their prescribed gender role.

Twitter is also a frequently used communication tool. It is considered a more substantive tool for short messaging, limited to 140 signs per message. One interviewee and frequent twitter user mentioned:

*"The content of tweets is very different from Facebook. Twitter is a very political tool. Within a year I have got 600+ followers and among them less than ten are women. Very few people are actually from Sri Lanka, they are mainly from the diaspora and if there is a good tweet, immediately it is re-tweeted."* (Madura, Sinhalese, male, first generation)

Madura's experience is quite telling: Out of a twitter community of 600+, a little bit more than 1% are women. This enormous imbalance shows once again that politics is gendered and male-dominated.

The internet provides a space to belong to a virtual community which is social, cultural, and political. Sri Lankan dissenting voices in the political arena are mostly expressed in web media and provide platforms to make virtual connections to the country. Sinhalese and Tamil extreme nationalists in the diaspora also engage in these platforms. This makes the connectivity to the homeland or the motherland a transformative political process. Internet-based communication brings home close, for example keeping the Skype on over a longer period of time creates a feeling of home. VOIP networks offer economic telephone rates to Sri Lanka. These internet-based communication technologies allow family and extended family members to meet in a virtual 'home' through live video calls. The internet and social media not only cross borders, but also create a virtual community and connectivity and, thus, a new form of belonging.

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS

This research was based on my desire to learn more about the dynamic relationships of both Sinhalese and Tamils living in Germany with their home and host country, and to understand better the complexities of their political involvement. As a starting point, the research has described the history of the ethnic conflict in the post-independence period and has analysed it in order to highlight migration flows out of Sri Lanka (chapter 3). It has also outlined Germany's relationship to economic and political migrants and the accompanying policies that impact on Sri Lankan diaspora communities' residence there (chapter 4). These two chapters addressed my ***first research question*** on the historical circumstances resulting in out-migration from Sri Lanka and the different forms of settlement in Berlin:

I showed that migration from Sri Lanka in the early 20th century and in the post-independence period, until the onset of the armed conflict, was mainly linked to upward mobility of the middle classes, both Tamils and Sinhalese. Large-scale migration of Sri Lankan Tamils started in the late 70s and continued over a period of almost three decades: The Sinhala-Only policy, Buddhist Sinhalese nationalism, anti-Tamil riots, violent attacks and continuous discrimination, restrictive minority policies and no autonomous status are just a few of the accumulated reasons for leaving the country.

Although Sinhalese society also went through two armed insurrections and state suppression, no forced migration of Sinhalese youth occurred. However, Sinhalese migrated for economic reasons and still do so today. In recent years, dozens of Sinhalese journalists and an even larger number of Tamil journalists, as the one outstanding professional group, have left the country and sought asylum in different countries across Europe.

The Muslim community and the Plantation Tamils of Indian origin also faced ethnic backlashes and discrimination; still, they tended to remain in the country

as their political leaders were able to partner with the state political powers. So, for example, the 100,000 Muslims who were expelled from the North by the LTTE found a friendly environment to live outside these areas through state patronage (Sørbø et al., 2011).

It is within this context, that Sri Lankan Tamils have forcefully migrated outside Sri Lanka, and nearly one million Sri Lankan Tamils (Potters, 2013) have now settled outside Sri Lanka in Western countries. This out-migration by Sri Lankan Tamils has greatly reduced their numerical strength in the country. For example, if the natural increase is taken into the account, the Tamil population in Jaffna has reduced by half (Sivathamby, 2004). This also had major political consequences: The Jaffna electoral district which had 11 parliamentary seats in 1981 were reduced to 6 seats by 2010 (Department of Election, 2013).

Germany during the same period faced a very different history. Germany relied after the war, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, on guest workers from Turkey, Italy, Portugal and other countries to rebuild its economy. This was also the period when in-migration started on a large scale and all policies were geared towards the temporary stay of these guest workers. In doing so, Germany applied very flexible rules in order to respond to the needs of the economy. However, the guest workers brought their wives and families to Germany on the basis of family unification, and actually prepared for long-term settlement.

In the early 1980s the politics towards guest workers started to change. However, borders remained open for asylum seekers and refugees. 24% of all asylum applicants in 1984/85 were from Sri Lanka (Bosswick, 1993), which indeed only mirrored the political events in Sri Lanka and were directly linked to the anti-Tamil riots in 1983. At that time, most asylum seekers, Sri Lankans included, came through the GDR which applied liberal asylum policies. Once arrived in East Berlin, they crossed the border at Friedrichstrasse and then claimed asylum in West Berlin. Sri Lankan asylum seekers were nearly all Tamils and they mostly received a *Duldung* (exceptional leave to remain in the country).

The situation dramatically changed again with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989: the entry through East Berlin was closed off and laws concerning asylum seekers and refugees tightened. Instead, Germany now faced an influx of East Germans and even encouraged ethnic Germans from other countries to settle in Germany. They enjoyed a number of privileges, among others, immediate citizenship. During this period, xenophobic and racist sentiments in the country rose against migrants of all sorts.

Germany's politics only started to change for the better when the new red-green coalition government came to power in 1998. Finally, the government officially announced that indeed Germany was an 'immigration country' and its population had a diverse make-up resulting in a number of important legal reforms. This went also hand-in-hand with EU policies which pushed for more harmonization in this area. Sri Lankans now had for the first time a chance to change their residence status from one of relative instability to German citizenship – and many did so. Germany moved from having a relatively homogeneous ethnic society to one with approximately 15 million foreigners in 2008 (Werewolf, 2008). The young generation is used to this diversity, for example in schools, despite the fact that discrimination remained a negative feature of German society.

As summarized above, my **chapters 3 and 4** not only responded to the first research question but they also linked in new ways the processes of out-migration from Sri Lanka and in-migration to Germany together. The chapters described historical facts but they even more so told the history of Sri Lanka and Germany from the migration angle as it applied to Sinhalese and Tamils. Literature on Sri Lankan migration mainly focuses on forced migration of Tamils (among others Fuglerud, 1999; Cheran, 2001; Shanmugaratnam, 2001; McDowell, 1996) or on economic migration of Sinhalese to the Middle East (among others Brochmann, 1993; Korale, 1984; Adams, 2003). So it largely omits Sinhalese migration to the West and, indeed, I have not yet come across literature linking Tamil and Sinhalese migration together. In the context of Germany, again, much has been written about immigration, integration or more generally on migration policies (among others Klusmeyer, 2001; Pagenstecher,

1994; Deniz Göktürk, 2007; Heerwart et al., 2007; Green, 2004; Schönwälder, 2010; Muenz et al., 2003), yet, Sri Lanka has not been part of any particular investigation. So the combination as we find it here – Sinhalese and Tamil migration out-migrating from Sri Lanka to Germany can be considered a continuation to the current literature.

My **second research question** posed the question on the kind of belonging and collective identities that have emerged among the Sri Lankan diaspora and transnational communities in Berlin. This question was dealt with in chapter 5 on “Belonging, Citizenship and Identity”. In order to investigate this question and to find responses to this research question, belonging was framed within the analytical framework outlined by Yuval-Davis (2011) considering social locations, emotional attachments and identifications and political and ethical value systems. However, this framework was embedded in the existing literature and applied specifically to the diaspora and the narratives of my Sinhalese and Tamil interviewees. Some of the findings of this chapter include the following:

Belonging is shaped by the multiple relationships between the home and host country and it is closely linked to the construction of ‘home’. The Tamil and Sinhalese diaspora communities in Berlin construct belonging not only in relation to a ‘real’ (geographic) territory/land – depending on their social locations – either in relation to Sri Lanka or in relation to Germany, but more importantly they expand the notion of ‘home’ to the virtual and the imagined realms. In fact, they may enter into ‘phantasmic’ and virtual belonging, which allows them to create a new ‘space’: a space that is now finally theirs and which cannot be occupied by others. This new appropriation of space can be observed among the Sinhalese and Tamil communities and among the first and second generation. They differ, however, in their ‘appropriation’ strategy, i.e. the ways they interact in that newly created space, the frequency, the contents, etc. This ‘virtual’ space may be found in the internet but, indeed, it can also be found in ‘imagination’. This appropriation strategy is influenced also by diasporic identity and material realities. It seems likely that the stronger a political identity

is, the more the appropriation of the new space is needed – real if possible, or else virtual and imagined.

The political context matters, both the political context in Sri Lanka and the political context in Germany. The political contexts influence the sense of belonging and the construction of (collective) identities in many ways: The political context in Sri Lanka determines, for example, whether return is possible. The real possibility of return, however, will differ according to the personal history and the identities of the individual. In general, a Sinhalese may have the possibility of return. However, if engaged in politics against the home country, this return may not be possible at all and remains a dream. Just as for the Tamil population whose return is influenced by both the politics of the LTTE<sup>58</sup> and the government of Sri Lanka. At the same time, the political context of Germany, being a xenophobic environment, influences the desire to return, for both Sinhalese and Tamils. So the German context influences the desire to return but the Sri Lankan context determines the real possibility of return.

The political context in Germany also shapes at least to some extent aspects of citizenship. Decisions to take up new citizenship in Germany were clearly related to the change in the legal framework in Germany and in Europe, and they were also influenced by the desire to return home. Their decision regarding German citizenship created for Tamils and politically engaged Sinhalese the possibility of return. Yet, this citizenship status did not necessarily influence their sense of belonging or emotional attachment, but the emotional attachment, i.e. the identity, shaped their decision in regards to citizenship. A Tamil, strongly identifying himself as Tamil, tended not to take up German citizenship even if he had the possibility, and even if German citizenship could have allowed him returning to Sri Lanka. His political identity would be the determinant factor. Important to note is also that the decision-making power in regards to citizenship did not exist before the change of laws because the German state simply dictated the policy. So the political context of Germany influenced

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<sup>58</sup> Note the research period concerns the period 2006 – 2008, so a time period during which the LTTE still formally existed.

citizenship – even if it meant that migrants were not perceived as agents but objects.

Similarly, the political context in Sri Lanka also shapes the relationship to the nation and this relationship then influences the sense of belonging. Biased and discriminatory government policies and Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism have influenced Tamil identity throughout history and indeed, Tamil nationalism. The creation of an imagined nation but also the creation of a real de facto nation state – which indeed did exist until 2009 – is thus crucial. This in itself resulted in a new Sri Lankan political context, which influenced both the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Sri Lanka and Germany alike, though in different ways. Collective ethnic identities emerged and reinforced, identities of resistance were created.

Belonging remains a multi-layered, multi-territorial concept and it is influenced by the many identities a person may have. Identities shift and adapt to the contexts they are linked to. Even though multiple identities exist in parallel, only one identity can be filtered as dominant and therefore as determinant factor. Which identity this is depends on, for example, the situation, personal history, political contexts, the 'other' in the host country but also the 'other' in the home country. In comparing the narratives of the Sinhalese and Tamil, their political identity is the determinant factor shaping their sense of belonging but also of action.

**Chapter five**, even though grounded in the literature, brings to the fore the dynamics of belonging and identities among the Sinhalese and Tamil communities in Berlin. In this way it analyses 'belonging' in a diaspora context across two ethnicities and two generations. This provides a complexity that the literature usually does not address. For example, studies of the second generation, even third generation, exist (among others Andall, 2002; Christou et al., 2010) but at the same time they restrict themselves to a particular ethnic group only. Of course, this has much validity and allows in-depth insights into a specific community, yet, it may lack a holistic viewpoint. A community is always embedded within a 'bigger' picture and my attempt here was to show this bigger

picture. In doing so, I hope not only to have added a new context of study (Sri Lanka/Germany) but also a new dimension of study (two ethnicities/two generations) to the existing literature. This new dimension also is meant to perceive the dynamics between the two communities as relational but also – and in particular – as relative. Relative, for example, in relation to their political identity: Sinhalese in the diaspora – contrary to the claim often made – face and are shaped quite similarly to Tamils if they have a political identity as the dominant identity. This would not apply, though, if their ethnic identity is the dominant identity.

The **third research question** relates to the gendered character of collective identities and political processes. To some extent this question is absorbed in both chapters 5 and 6. I shall elaborate and comment on this in more detail when I discuss chapter 6. However, in relation to chapter 5, one could summarize my conclusions in the context of my research that belonging is gendered, but not necessarily always. This may be a provocative statement, and yet, it reflects to some extent the complex interface of belonging, influenced by social locations, emotional attachment and identification and value system within the context of the Tamil and Sinhalese diaspora communities. Gender matters and is even instrumentalized, but it does not always play a dominant role. So as my investigation filtered determinant factors, belonging is gendered but at times when the political identity determines the migrant's belonging, at that moment, a gendered identity becomes secondary to the political identity. So gender still matters but does not have the same strong influence. At other times, gender actually is the determinant factor and can be then also instrumentalized through different reproductive roles (see Yuval-Davis, 1997a)

Finally, the **fourth research question** relates to the ways the members of the Sri Lankan diaspora communities engage politically. This question has been addressed in chapter 6 of my thesis. I have structured this chapter along the five most common transnational activities, namely economic, political, social, cultural, and virtual activities. These activities have been related to the concepts as elaborated in chapter 6, and have been elaborated only in so far as they were relevant to the political engagement of the diaspora communities studied.

In addition, a gender lens was applied. The findings in this chapter are based on the collected narratives only, and I have not related them to the existing literature.

Economic activities *per se* are carried out by both Sinhalese and Tamils, however, their motivations and the grounds of this involvement differ. Women and men also invest differently and reproduce traditional gender perceptions: women 'invest' in social care projects, men in political or technical projects. Sinhalese 'invest' in their own future, so that they can go back home one day to live. Tamils of course also send remittances to their families but they otherwise 'invest' in projects benefiting their co-ethnics. This divergent motivation is linked, on the one hand, to the possibility of return and, on the other hand, to ethnic identity which, of course, in the case of Tamils is nurtured abroad.

Engagement in political activities is diverse. It changes with the different social locations, the political context and the individual's perception of his or her ability to have an impact through action. The engagement may be directed towards the host country or solely towards the home country. Whether, how and where such engagement will happen depends on the political identity of the person involved. Faced with discrimination in Germany, both Sinhalese and Tamils engaged politically in the host country and in this way defended their 'otherness'. The extent to which state and de facto state structures, or other political groups from the home country, are able to mobilize and function in the host country will also influence the political engagement of the individual. In the context of nationalist projects, the second generation then becomes an important target. Depending on the space women can create, they can engage as active agents or be absorbed and instrumentalized by the home structures.

Interview partners across ethnicity, gender and generation referred to trust as a factor which determined whether they would engage in social gatherings in the host country or not. Knowing people was crucial. However, contacts with friends and family back home were mostly kept alive independently. In addition, the context of Germany and the political orientation of the individual influenced their level and ways of engagement: Social gatherings, sports activities, attendance

at conferences, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and writing in Facebook were all activities that were determined similarly. They could be carried out to different degrees and involvement may change over time – from moderate to more radicalized, nationalist or politicized – depending on the dominant identity of the actor. Women’s role is crucial in this respect and, indeed, the state (or de facto state) structures rely on their function as ‘carers’ and ‘nurturers’ to influence belonging.

Cultural activities are very much in the women’s realm. It is the space where women are instrumentalized to contribute to identity politics as biological reproducers, ideological reproducers, signifiers of cultures, and reproducers of symbols. Women are the ones who transfer the group’s culture through dance, music, drama, language classes, family traditions, and food, but they are not those determining what the culture is. It is a ‘soft’ entry point into political engagement and to contributing to a nationalist discourse. Belonging to a community and to the ‘homeland’ is constructed through a culture based on an ethnic identity. Literature plays a particular important role as a marker of difference from the host society. Language and religion give identity to both Tamils and Sinhalese in the diaspora alike. It can reinforce their ethnic identity, their political identity, their identity of resistance, and their cultural identity.

Finally, virtual activities have gained more importance in recent years, especially among diaspora communities. They link the home and the host country; they ensure a communication flow with ‘home’, even if passive; and they allow people to escape realities or create new realities. They create community and a feeling of belonging. The medium used, however, differs between Tamils and Sinhalese, and the first and second generations: Tamils run websites from outside the home and those are consulted by the first generation primarily. Nationalist Sinhalese have set up mainly Facebook sites from within Sri Lanka that are shared worldwide. The second generation not only uses the internet but also social media. Identity construction in the virtual world is now a reality and is a powerful tool for creating a sense of belonging. Women, however, engage fundamentally differently than men. Women often

remain anonymous and men go public. Indeed, this is very much a reproduction of traditional gender roles.

**Chapter six** of my research has provided an analysis of narratives relating to different kinds of activities in which members of the Sinhala and Tamil diaspora are engaged. It shows that these activities – independent of what kind of activity – link to politics, especially in the context of nationalist projects fostered in the home country and within a hostile environment of Germany. Belonging manifests itself in transnational practices and in identity construction consciously fostered through these activities, when aimed at a political project. This part of the research contributes not only one more country case study to the many existing (among others Al-Ali et al., 2001b; Wight, 2000; Hajo et al., 2004; Ehrkamp, 2005; Korac, 2009b), but it also frames it within the concept of belonging and the complex interface of gender, Sinhalese/Tamils and first/second generation.

Overall, I would hope that through my research new insights and knowledge can be gained not only on the complex and multiple constructions of belonging and identity but also on the interplay of gender, ethnicity and generation. My research shows that economic, political, social, cultural and virtual activities in the diaspora often entail political activism that either reflects the agency of the migrant or his or her instrumentalization by the (de facto) state structures. The degree of this political activism of a migrant then depends on his and her social locations in the home and host country, his and her emotional attachments and his and her value systems. Therefore, political activism shapes the sense of belonging and allows the migrant to assert an agency in the host society that connects and impacts on both the home and host country.

My findings should then find interest among academics wanting to understand the dynamics of the Sri Lanka diaspora communities as well as among policy makers. In looking at this 'holistic' bigger picture and in bringing all these dimensions together, a differentiated understanding with implications for home country politics and host country politics is acquired: Reconciliation efforts in Sri Lanka would indeed benefit from a differentiated analysis of the Sinhalese and

Tamil diaspora communities. At the same time, in Germany, understanding the dynamics within diaspora communities allows policy makers to possibly formulate migration and integration policies closer to the expectations and needs of its population – be they citizens or denizens. In this way, they could also be more responsive to the visible minorities and indeed, foster diversity. More generally, I would hope that my findings also contribute to, shed light upon and inspire the analysis of other complex intersectional contexts, and as such contribute to building a wider knowledge base of diaspora communities.

This research, however, remains only a starting point to better understand Sinhalese and Tamil diaspora communities. Many questions remain unanswered and would merit further research. In the following and as a concluding note, I want to suggest a few research questions that could build on my research and take the agenda further:

1. How do perceptions of belonging change in a post-war scenario, such as Sri Lanka, where the armed movement for a separate homeland has been crushed militarily and structurally, and where new parliamentary politics have replaced the Tamil nationalist militant movement? Such research could be taken up in the framework of reconciliation efforts after a separatist, violent war.
2. How far does the age of the internet influence the sense of belonging among the migration populations? Today, the internet and social media have changed the communication patterns with the home country and made it more accessible. The virtual space strengthens family bonds and keeps them alive, while at the same time this may hinder integration into the host society. In which ways would this really hinder integration and affect multiculturalism? How far do internet-based web media contribute to the home country and to transnational communities?
3. How does the Sinhalese diaspora define belonging and citizenship in the context of the intensified polarization that has taken place in the last phase of the war and in the post-war period? No academic research has been undertaken to better understand the Sinhalese diaspora. Such understanding

could provide new insights for policy-makers and civil society towards reconciliation and peace-building.

4. What is the impact of literary works in vernacular languages, i.e. Tamil and Sinhalese, on diaspora communities? How does it transfer the feelings of 'home' and belonging to the next generations? In the course of my research, I came across some Sri Lankan English and German literary works but much more exist in Tamil or Sinhalese. Vernacular languages are a powerful tool used by the Sri Lankan diaspora to convey diaspora experiences and, hence, it merits further research.

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