



Return reimagined: Diaspora interactions with protracted internal displacement

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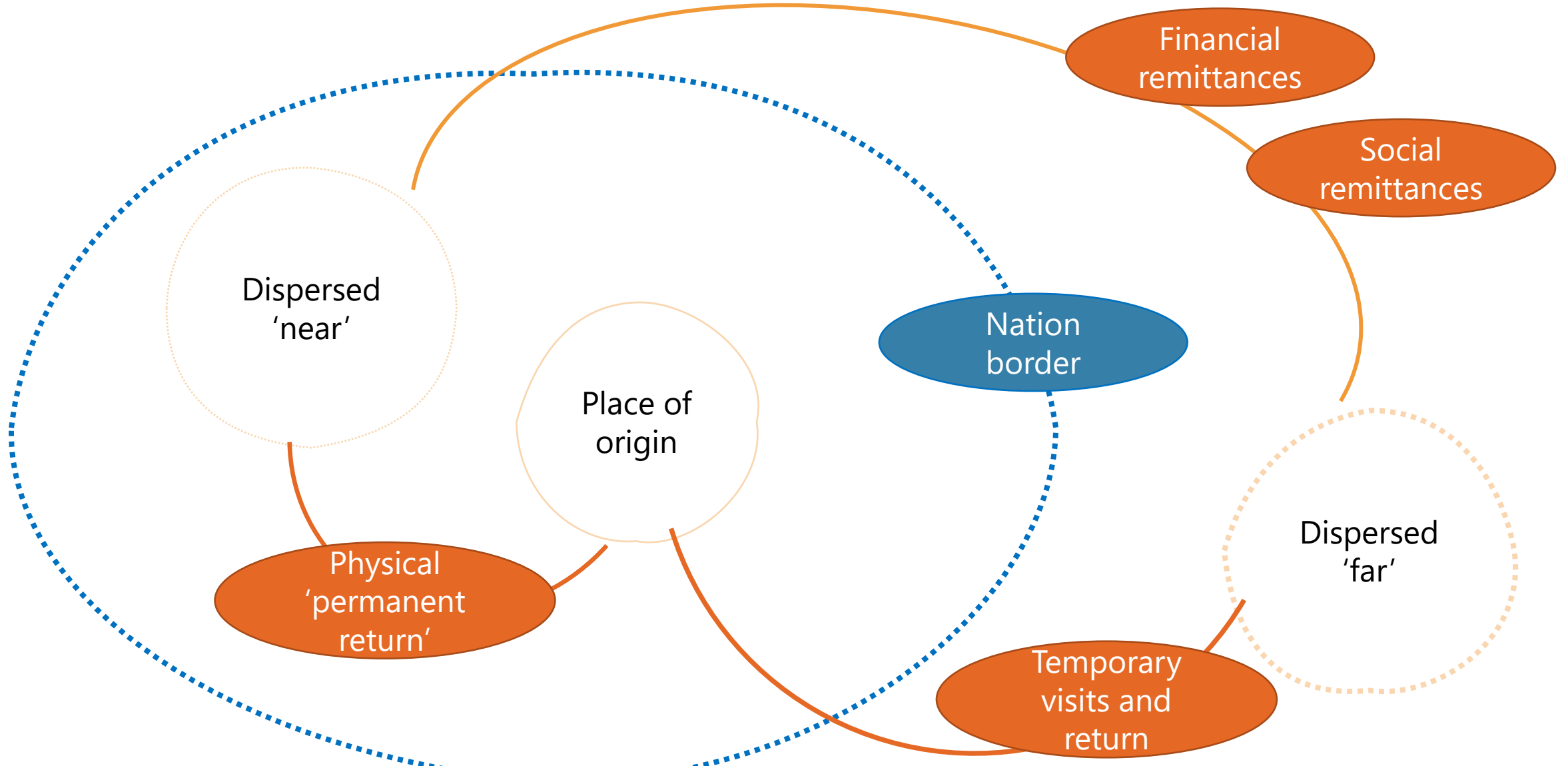
Displacement experience

By the time we left the village, the whole village was burning...they (Sinhalese mobs and military) had burnt everything and they went...nothing was there...later we went to Kokkuthuduwai... when we came back, there was nothing, everything was taken or broken...even cooking utensils, plates were broken...When people resettled, the government didn't help us, we had no way of eating food also...

(Community leader, Panaimarathadi)



Complex forms of return



Wanting to 'return'

I'm at the tail end of my professional career. I learnt so many things over many years going from the least developed country to one of the most developed countries and worked there. Thank God, it's been successful. **But after a while, money is not everything, designation is not everything.** After a while you go to field and think what the hell have I been trying to do, more money, more money and it's a never ending story. This job (his current role working with a diaspora organisation operating in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka) brings the best in me from a professional output point of view. It's not structured. **We set the agenda, we go after it, we think afresh, it is very interesting. Very satisfying.**

(Diaspora organisation representative, Kilinochchi, 21/09/2017)



Research questions

- How do diasporas conceive and reimagine return and recovery in post-war context?
- How does transnational diasporic engagement influence return and recovery of people with protracted internal displacement in post-war Sri Lanka?
- How do diverse stakeholders conceive and act on temporal and spatial dimensions of return in a post war context?



Theoretical framing

- **Diaspora research: Aspiration to return (Safran 1991, Sheffer 2003)**
- **Protracted displacement; linked to waiting and hope, and protracted uncertainty (Brun 2015)**
- **Near and far diaspora (Van Hear 2004)**
- **'Permanent temporariness' nature of people in displacement affect their ideas about return to their places of origin (Hyndman 2011).**

Methods and data sources

Part of a multi-sited qualitative study on diaspora engagement

- Two Villages, Panaimarathadi from Trincomalee district and Semman Kiramam in Mullaitivu district
- Following the initial visit, an in-depth study was carried out to assess the role of diaspora organisations in assisting the recovery of war affected people.
- Spent extended period of time in the village to carry out discussions with villagers, and key actors in the area
- A semi-structured interview format was used to conduct these discussions.
- Discussion with representatives of diaspora organisations from United Kingdom and Australia



Findings

Return through return of others? Diaspora supporting return of locally dispersed

I was in Jaffna during 80's to 90's. 1980 to 1990. And from 70 to 80 I was in Colombo and different places. I know what the status of industry and agriculture in the North during the 60s, 70s and 80s. Right? Which many people don't know today. So I put my knowledge, my experience to be passed so I was working with different groups and I got more attracted to... My children don't like me travelling and they asked me why. Why are you going? Why should you go? (Diaspora organisation representative)



Multiple actors, roles and competing agendas in facilitating return

- **Key state-led interventions facilitating return**
 - Indian housing scheme for returnees
 - Elephant fence
 - Construction of access road to the village and public transport
- **Non-government support: Development agencies**
- **Diaspora support**
 - Livelihood support
 - Health
 - Education
 - Temple renovation
 - Access to land-clearing, ownership



Multiple actors, roles and competing agendas in facilitating return contd.

Diaspora claiming the development space- sometimes in tension

The government is not cooperating well in this project. They (government) have issues with the implementation. They (Government) are prejudiced about diasporas and diaspora activities. One of the officials said to us that “**you are a foreigner and bring your own money**”. They also said that you have come for a business here hence you should be bringing your own money. Then I said I did not come here for my business and for my own sake. I came to help the people pro-bono. **These are all my people and I am here to help.** I spend my own money to work here. I have been working here for a while now. **We are doing a voluntary work,** We have to leave our children and family behind to help these people... **They are not interested** in learning what we are doing, but they want to know why we are working in these areas.

(Diaspora organization representative)



Concluding remarks

- **Diasporas re-imagine 'return and restoration of homeland' and fulfil return aspirations by facilitating the physical return of those displaced near**
- **Role of diasporas as development actor**
 - Bridging finances to complement the state programmes and services
 - Channelling remittances, social remittances
- **Contextual knowledge; Shaped by past and present interactions with places of origin**
 - Coordination mechanisms in these complex contexts-the need to reconcile the competing agendas
- **Diaspora interactions with fragile post-war contexts may not always result in desirable outcomes**





Thank you!