We were so happy to see each other after a very long time but somehow we felt scared of them. They were very Westernized. The way they spoke was strange for us. And they were wearing nice and new dresses. We felt odd compared to them, like street people.

This is the comment of a Tamil woman in Sri Lanka’s Northern peninsula of Jaffna who met her relatives living in Europe after a Ceasefire Agreement had temporarily ended the Sri Lankan civil war in 2002\(^1\). The statement highlights the ambivalence of the reunion after more than ten years, because it reveals her subjective feelings of alienation and that of other locals during the war vis-à-vis her emigrated relatives who had temporarily returned for a visit. Despite all the joy and happiness which marked the moment of reunion, this quote hints at the material and emotional distance which had emerged within a family and, more generally among the Sri Lankan Tamils, quite often constructed as a unified and homogeneous, yet spatially dispersed community under the conditions of war-related immobility and distance.

Taking this observation as a starting point, the article addresses the new opportunities for mobility after a long period of immobility. My aim is to explore, how social relationships change when migrants travel back ‘home’ after having been absent for many years. I will

\(^1\) The Ceasefire Agreement which was negotiated between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in 2002 was the most promising initiative for consolidating a sustainable solution to the decade-old conflict. But despite initial enthusiasm among Sri Lankans, political stakeholders and donors the peace process gradually broke down. In January 2008 the Sri Lankan government officially annulled the Ceasefire Agreement. Military offensives with an unrivaled intensity took place, which have claimed several thousand lives. Despite an international outcry incriminating the ruthless proceeding of the Sri Lankan Army, none of the institutions which could act as a peace-maker have been able to undertake any effective measures to prevent further escalation. The Sri Lankan government justified its harsh moves with their attempt to destroy the LTTE completely. In May 2009, the troops finally managed to capture the last LTTE stronghold. Almost the entire leadership and thousands of civilians died. In February 2010 large numbers of civilians are still been kept in internment-camps.
show that these changes concern not only family relations, but also ethnic relations in the particular context of transnational solidarity. This results in reconstructions of ethnic belonging, in a process of re-positioning and re-adjusting belonging which is embedded into the dynamics of (im)mobility. I argue that a growing awareness of difference in experiencing cultural practices, expressions and perspectives in everyday-life has emerged as a result of renewed mobility. At a more general level, the dynamics of boundary-drawing are interrelated with general patterns of globalization and the restructuration of society under globalized, yet mobile conditions. This restructuration is characterized, as Meyer and Geschiere have called it by ‘dialectics of flow and closure’ (Meyer and Geschiere 1999) in which re-constructions of identity are pertinent in translocal space. The new frictions and cleavages between spatially dispersed groups result from opportunities provided by mobility and refer to life-worldly experiences embedded into social relationships within ‘actual reach’ (Schütz and Luckmann 1979). Social relationships within actual reach are tied to the condition of co-presence, because they presuppose face-to-face contact. Seen against the background that contemporary society is constituted by mobile communication and virtual co-presence, it is necessary to explore the elements which turn face-to-face proximity into a unique social experience entailing a particular quality. In the context of (im-)mobility, I attempt to investigate the re-structuring of social relations in what has been commonly conceptualized as ‘transnational community’. I will show how mobility, structured by time and space, reinforces the emergence of multiple forms of belonging. Especially in the context of migration and diasporization, but also at a more general level through the anticipation of the world as ‘attainable reach’ (Schütz and Luckmann 1979, see also Engelbrekt in this book), the question of ‘where and when to belong’ becomes particularly relevant. Exploring the notion of belonging in relation to (im)mobility reveals the enduring significance of localized co-presence in times shaped by mobile options and globalization.

**Mobility, Immobility and Globalization**
Mobility is a constituting phenomenon of contemporary society. Moving has become a normal part of everyday-life for large parts of the world’s population. People move on foot, by bike, on wheels, on ships or by plane, individually or collectively, for short or long periods of time. The motives and motivations vary greatly, as does the scale of movement. People travel for business, as tourists, to meet with family members or friends, to work or to save their lives from environmental hazards, war and other disasters. The practices of mobility, overriding geographical space and travel, are related to imagination and anticipation of distant places and locales. If we did not know about the existence of distant places, and if we did not have personal relationships to people there, most of us would remain in the localities where we spend our everyday-life.

Mobility, as an analytical concept, is related to attempts to understand modern society shaped by and shaping globalization. A large body of literature has discussed the diverse phenomena characterizing the process of globalization as well as attempts to understand the state of the ‘global situation’ (Tsing 2002) under conditions of modernity. A guiding principle in understanding the conditions of the globalized society is what Harvey (1989) and others describe as time-space-compression. The observation that new transport and communication has subdued space and compressed time forms the starting point of most globalization research. Especially the significance of geographical space has been intensely discussed. The often neglected aspect of time has been highlighted by Bauman (2000) who describes the consequences of everything moving faster and shows how this affects spatial reordering in ‘Liquid Modernity’, a term which highlights deterritorialization or detachment. The changes accompanying global mobility have led some scholars to proclaim that territoriality like localities will be increasingly insignificant. However, this has instigated manifold attempts to prove the enduring significance of the local. Robertson (1995) who argued that homogenizing and heterogenizing effects lead to ‘glocalization’ was among those who ensured that localization as a crucial process structuring globalized society is taken for granted in today’s
Mobilities are central to the re-ordering of space and time instigated by globalization, because they transcend both. Theoretical approaches which relate space-time-compression to globalized society, reveal that, first, various forms of mobility cause places to move closer together, and that every form of movement speeds up. Secondly, global flows affect the reordering of social realities and expressions of cultural difference in localities and places. At the same time, people keep on moving, represent, and reproduce global flows. This has spurred scholars to elaborate on the significance of globalizing processes for culture and identity. Some have argued that global flows and cultural contact produce hybridizations (Nederveen Pieterse 1995) or creolization (Hannerz 1987), describing the commingling of different cultural contents. Bringing together identity and belonging with space and mobility, Appadurai has introduced the concept of ethnoscapes to describe the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world … This is not to say that there are no relatively stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work, and leisure, as well as of birth, residence, and other filial forms. But it is to say that the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move (1996: 33-34).

Mobile people constituting ethnoscapes establish translocal (Lachenmann 2008) or transnational spaces (Pries 1999, Faist 2003) or fields (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). This reveals a ‘complex interrelation between travel and dwelling, home and not-home’ (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 10). Migrants move to other places and at the same time, they maintain contact with their place of origin. Translocal spaces² emerge, which

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² I use the term ‘translocal space’ to highlight the relational and multi-dimensional character of transcending space. In contrast to the notion of ‘transnational space’, which relates mainly to the crossing of national boundaries, translocal space highlights not only geographical mobility but relates to symbolic and imagined boundaries in space and time.
Mobility is about transcending geographical space, and more than that. Concepts of mobility are quite extensive and comprise different forms of physical movement of people, collectively and individually, over long and short distances, virtual mobility and social mobility (see Urry 2007). Limiting ourselves to geographical mobility, Urry’s way of distinguishing between different forms of travel provides a useful framework for analysing the modes of mobility which are relevant in the empirical case. ‘Corporeal travel’ describes human movement and migration. Likewise, the ‘travel of objects’ constitutes a meaningful practice of mobility. The use of communication technologies can be understood as either ‘imaginative travel’ when images move across print and visual media, as ‘virtual travel’ in the sense of transcending distance in real time, or as ‘communicative travel’ through person-to-person messages (Urry, 2007: 47). Transnational or translocal spaces are made up by social relationships spanning geographical distances, which do not necessarily need to rely on physical mobility any longer. Communication technologies such as the telephone and the internet are constitutive of what Castells called the ‘Network Society’ (2000) and subdue space and time. One might argue that advanced communication technologies might compensate for a lack of ‘physical mobility’ to a certain extent. The case investigated in this article will show whether this assumption is supported by empirical evidence.

When we speak about mobility, we also have to consider immobility. Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006) argue that mobility can only be understood in the function of its oppositional constituency that is immobility. Borrowing Harvey’s notion of the ‘spatial fix’, they state that ‘infrastructural and institutional moorings’ (2006: 3) necessarily configure and enable mobilities. This means that mobility always entails a relational dimension: Without immobility, there is no mobility. Some scholars working on mobility conceptualize immobility mainly in the sense of moorings resembling the immobile knots of a mobile network, so-called platforms such as transmitters, roads, garages, stations, airports etc. (Urry...
Immobility, however, can also relate to the symbolic construction of locality in translocal space. People constantly localize themselves, even when they are on the move. Exiles, diasporas and labour migrants try to make a home wherever they reside. Conceptualizing locality as a construct of phenomenological quality (Appadurai 1996, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2005), the local appears as a space where everyday-life takes place and is made up of face-to-face contact which entails a special kind of sensual experience (Hannerz 1996: 26-27). The case of Northern Sri Lanka to which I am referring to in this article draws attention to this kind of immobility as dwelling in locality. Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006: 3) have argued that mobilities are structured by power hierarchies and that the rights to travel, for example, are highly uneven and structured by gender, class, status, and ethnicity. In my empirical example immobility emerges as enforced immobility, which is imposed by the state in the course of civil war. This enforced immobility is related to different forms of mobility (imaginative, virtual, communicative, and corporeal) which is structured by temporality: while mobility was restricted during civil war, the peace process ushered in a period of manifold mobilities which produced new configurations of belonging.

Jaffna Tamils between Mobility and Immobility

Shortly before my first trip to Sri Lanka in 2002³, a Ceasefire Agreement ending two decades of the civil war, which had begun in the early 1980s, was signed between the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Although this ceasefire lasted only until 2007, it was a historical event for many and set loose a whole array of changes especially in the north-eastern territories, where the majority of the ethnic Tamil minority

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³This article is based on the findings of my ethnographic field work which I conducted in Sri Lanka between 2002 and 2004. I twice spent six months in different parts of Sri Lanka, but mainly in the northern peninsula of Jaffna. The methodological tools employed are comprised of participant semi-structured and open unstructured interviews with various stakeholders, observations in various fields, analysis of documents and other material. (see Gerharz 2007)
lives. It is also the north-eastern parts of Sri Lanka where the LTTE, which attempted to represent Tamil claims for independence, had its stronghold. The many years of intense fighting had turned the north-east into a war zone. Until the Ceasefire, the war had caused large-scale destructions and more than 67,000 deaths, and huge numbers of Internally Displaced People (IDP), refugee movements to neighbouring India and other countries. Especially the Tamil-inhabited peninsula of Jaffna located in the north, which is regarded as the centre of Tamil culture as well as resistance, has been terribly destroyed by the fighting erupting again and again. Before 1995, Jaffna was under the control of the LTTE. A military offensive brought the peninsula under the government control which has prevailed until today. But only the Ceasefire led to a re-opening of this area, which remained cut-off from the mainland throughout the war. This was accompanied by large-scale reconstruction and development efforts and intensified circulation of goods and people.

It was also in Jaffna that re-migrating and circulating migrants were most visible. Rough estimations by local authorities reveal that the population has been halved since the outbreak of war. Concerning the population living in the diaspora, it is estimated that 90 per cent of Sri Lankan Tamils living abroad are from Jaffna (Gunaratna 1998). Although the war caused massive movements of people, migration from Jaffna has a long history dating back to (post-)colonial times. Compared to Tamils from other parts of Sri Lanka the Jaffna Tamils were comparably well-off and aspirations for education had produced (temporary) migratory movements to Western countries. In addition, the shortage of appropriate jobs forced Jaffna Tamils to migrate to southern Sri Lanka and other British colonies (Cheran 2001). The rise of anti-Tamil sentiments and discrimination also reinforced migration after independence. When the war broke out in 1983 many Tamil had already found a new home in Canada, the USA, Australia, Europe and other countries. Others who were planning to return after completion of their education decided to stay abroad. As the war escalated, huge numbers of refugees fled to India, whereas movement to Western countries continued. The chance to migrate depended on
people’s individual resources and was structured by caste, gender and other determinants.

Group formation has taken place among the diaspora in many ways. This includes social and welfare associations assisting diaspora members, cultural organizations, media, business and trade, and political organizations (Cheran 2001, 2007a, McDowell 1996, Fuglerud 2001). These social organizations have two major functions. On the one hand, they serve the needs and group formation aspirations of the diaspora itself. There are, for example organizations offering courses in Tamil language, dance, or music for second generation migrants or those assisting elderly Tamil migrants. On the other hand, there are organizations whose work is mainly directed towards the homeland and consists of lobbying, public demonstrations and information exchange. The structures mobilizing for diasporic identity formation and political lobbying not only include informal and formal forms (Wayland 2004: 415), but are also closely interlinked. Many organizations fulfil both functions and relate cultural work in the diaspora to activism for the homeland. Cultural shows, for example, are often organized with the aim of raising funds for relief and development, but also for war-funding. Political and non-political organizational forms often overlap and their objectives are fuzzy. The same relates to businesses in the diaspora, of which many are allegedly run by the LTTE, which oversees a strong transnational network. Group formation in the diaspora thus constitutes an important prerequisite for the construction of transnational space. The mechanisms to preserve Tamil identity are related to a strong homeland orientation. This constitutive aspect of ‘diaspora’ (Brubaker 2005) contributes to the formation of transnational

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4 I use the notion of ‘diaspora’ in the context of Sri Lankan migrants, for two reasons. First, I pragmatically adopt the term many Tamils living abroad use themselves, and which has also become mainstream in the relevant literature. Secondly, I argue for the usage of the diaspora concept by referring to Brubaker’s (2005) recent account which gives a useful and encompassing overview of this vast debate. He claims that dispersion, boundary maintenance vis-à-vis the host society and a homeland orientation make a diaspora. The latter includes a collective memory, an eventual will to return, commitment to its maintenance or restoration and a sense of belongingness and identification with the homeland (Brubaker 2005: 5).
social spaces consisting of migrants’ practices in maintaining, building and reinforcing links with the places of origin as well as with other places where diaspora members are located. Diaspora Tamils have developed different strategies to establish these spaces ranging from media and performative representations to the establishment of co-presence through travel.

Different forms of mobility can be distinguished as relevant. Following Urry (2007: 47) the first form of mobility can be described as ‘corporeal travel’, describing human movement across space in the form of migration and travel. Tamils migrated in large numbers yet under harsh conditions to seek refuge abroad, in neighbouring India or on other parts of the island. But in contrast to other contexts in which homeland visits have been a powerful instrument for maintaining transnational social spaces for a long time (Scheyvens 2007, Bruner 1996), Tamils from Northern Sri Lanka have had limited possibilities to return. Many parts of the northern war zones remained inaccessible by land for military reasons. Travel to and out of Jaffna was only possible by air or sea, and was limited by harsh restrictions and insecurity. In Jaffna, people relied on dangerous travel routes to the south and many lost their lives (Suryakumaran 2002). The second form of mobility is ‘imaginative travel’ affected through the images of places and people, which appear in print and visual media. Among Jaffna’s locals and migrants, these possibilities were severely limited in both directions. A road block and unreliable postal services prevented the transportation of print media to and from Jaffna. Getting images from Jaffna to the outside world was difficult because of the absence of electronic media and because journalists were not allowed to report from the war zones. Electricity and telephone services were suspended most of the time. This may also be among the reasons why the maintenance of a sense of a collective stronghold related to the homeland and group-cohesion was so important: in order to get information about those who

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5 Imaginative travel resembles to a certain extent what Appadurai called mediascapes (Appadurai 1996: 33). But while Appadurai refers to the global scope of imaginative flows, Urry’s concept allows us to focus more on connections and flows between certain locales.
stayed behind, it was essential to establish and remain in contact with newly arrived migrants. This leads to a third form of travel which appears as highly relevant in this context: ‘communicative travel’. Because mail service and contact by telephone were unreliable, Tamils became creative in developing strategies to spread information. One of my interviewees said that before the internet, people used to call a number in London, where an answering machine reported about the newest developments in the homeland. Discussing the different forms of travel highlights the importance of immobility as the counterpart of mobility. Modes of mobility were severely restricted and limited before 2002. Restrictions were imposed on corporeal travel and circulation of migrants and foreigners, including journalists, correspondents and aid workers. Information flows from Jaffna through imaginative or communicative travel were scarce and depended on face-to-face communication. In contrast to moorings as connecting points of mobilities (Urry 2007: 54; Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006, Adey 2006), immobility appears as an empirical phenomenon materialized in terms of the restricted movement of people, goods, images, information and knowledge imposed by the state.

When the Ceasefire was signed and the road to Jaffna was reopened in April 2002, the relationship between mobility and immobility changed considerably. This ‘opening to the world’ (Gerharz 2008) was accompanied by a massive movement of people and goods. One university professor in Jaffna whom I interviewed in 2003 described the consequences of this process illustratively: ‘Before the ceasefire, Jaffna was a closed prison. Now it has become an open marketplace’. This indicates that local everyday-life was disrupted by the new forms of mobility and their intensity impinged on the local in different ways. Jaffna was integrated into global and national economic exchange networks again. Consumer goods, which had never been available in Jaffna before, produced changes in the economic sector by opening new markets and niches and remarkably transformed consumption patterns. All of a sudden, exotic goods such as Swiss chocolate and American chewing gums were available in newly
constructed supermarkets, to which people first had to get used. Jaffna also regained connection to global mediascapes (Appadurai 1996: 33). The availability of satellite TV changed local media consumption. Especially Tamil channels, broadcasting from neighbouring Tamil Nadu in India, attracted much local attention and were watched extensively. The market for Indian and Western DVDs boomed. Newspapers issued in Colombo were available in the local market the same day and even internet cafes mushroomed. Free movement produced ‘tourists’ from southern Sri Lanka, India, and Western countries who wanted to see the peninsula. They, along with international staff employed by the various development organizations, visibly represented cultural difference. All these changes and new images Jaffna became exposed to contributed to a translocalization of people’s life-worlds. The atmosphere I experienced among Jaffna residents was determined by enthusiasm about free movement and openness, but, at the same time, by ambivalent reactions to new images and impressions. The new forms of knowledge, which became available after the Ceasefire, changed perspectives on the world, but also on the local space itself and the ‘we-group’ (Elwert 2002) living therein and beyond.

Enthusiasm and Alienation: Encounters under Conditions of Mobility

Jaffna’s exposure to global mediascapes changed local perspectives in different ways. Thanks to communication facilities allowing imaginative and virtual travel (satellite television, up-to-date newspapers, radio, and internet) people in Jaffna were more aware of what was going on in other parts of the world and reinterpreted global events with regard to their own situation and their effects on the local context. The imaginative and virtual travel via television alerted many to the fallacies of a Westernized life-style, which influenced their interpretations of foreigners’ actions and behaviour in Jaffna itself. Such immoralities, however, impinged on the local in the sense that it invited imitation. In the newly created internet-cafes I witnessed many young men looking at dingy websites called tamilsex.com, hindisex.com and so forth. For those locals recognising these new popular leisure pursuits of their youngsters, this was
quite often related to the impact of the alien and ‘spoiled’ practices which had found their way into Jaffna after the re-opening.

Local perspectives changed also as a consequence of the physical travel of development experts, tourists, diaspora members and Jaffna Tamils. Cultural contact resulting from this kind of mobility led to the emergence of a translocal interface, where all kinds of differences were negotiated. Based on the ethnographic research perspective applied, I discovered the changes emerging from the re-established contact between locals and circulating diaspora Tamils. Many visiting Tamils reported very ambivalent experiences. I was sometimes approached by migrant Tamils on Jaffna’s street who wanted to exchange information about how I was experiencing post-war Jaffna and many were eager to express their emotional involvement as well as alienation. Some of them differed a lot from the locals and a few looked much more the ‘tourist’ than I myself felt. Having lunch in one of diaspora Tamils’ favourite hang outs, the Palm Beach Restaurant, I was stunned when a family entered, all of them well fed and dressed in shorts. The father was wearing a baseball cap and had a camera dangling around his neck. Like some diaspora Tamils, these Australian Tamils expressed alienation from what they had self-evidently considered their homeland. The daughter who worked as a nurse and who had never been to Jaffna before complained forcefully about the local hygiene: ‘This place is so filthy! I can’t use the toilets here, it’s so terrible.’ Other diaspora Tamils I spoke to explained that they could not imagine migrating back to Jaffna in the near future. They referred to inadequate medical care and the deficient school system when explaining that it was impossible to live there with small children. Other diaspora Tamils reported about having had alienating experiences although they tried to adopt to local circumstances. One young Tamil who had spent most of his life in Great Britain and who volunteered in a local NGO for one year claimed:

I feel localized in everyday life and during work. But people see me as a foreigner. I speak Tamil, but they can differentiate between my accent and the local one. I try to speak like them, but
nevertheless, they recognise it. Moreover, they don’t know who I am, who my parents are and where I live. Then there are the many little things. For example, I am used to carrying a backpack, because it is more practical. But the fact that I am carrying a backpack, makes me a foreigner.

Full of ambivalent impressions, this quote hints at the construction of difference, which is embedded into a set of hierarchy and power relations. This also includes economic differences, which were highlighted by the woman quoted in the beginning of this article. Like the young Tamil from Great Britain, she referred to the way her relatives spoke to her and her family and the language they used, though they spoke Tamil, and the way they were dressed. The way she highlighted the differences in appearance pointed to a hierarchical relationship between Jaffna and the West. For her, the dress symbolized existing economic differences between the developed West and Jaffna. This caused feelings of being inferior and made her recognize economic difference as a dividing factor between her family and the relatives from Europe. Others took such observations with a sense of humour and laughed about a man who had returned from Malaysia and had become fat there.

Constructions of differences between Jaffna and the outside world, particularly the West, were linked to cultural identity as well. In local images, the ‘culture’ of Jaffna people was constructed as morally superior to others. The fear that the local culture is being spoiled by Western influences represented by visiting diaspora Tamils was prevalent in many discussions. Such difficulties arose mainly between generations and put a strain on family ties. In one case I was told about a Tamil grandmother throwing her visiting granddaughters out of the house and calling them prostitutes. According to my informant, the girls had not done anything wrong except not observe the local dress code. For the grandmother, wearing Western clothes symbolized the girls’ immorality. Similarly, some people assumed that ‘something must go wrong’ when Tamil girls spent their leisure time at the local beach in swimsuits. It is often assumed that girls and women are particularly threatened by foreign culture and that they might become morally spoiled or loose, especially in migration contexts.
As much as in other parts in South Asia, dressing is central in Jaffna because wearing immodest clothes is related to sexual promiscuity. But also images of how to behave in the public arena are gendered in a different way and produced conflict between local and diaspora Tamils. A Catholic priest told me about a grandmother who complained about her granddaughter: ‘How can this girl go in a car alone? She must be someone else’s grandchild!’ The construction of a causal relationship between Western clothing and immodest behaviour in public also caused prejudices and exaggerated images of sexual behaviour. One hotly debated issue, relevant also in the developmental context, was HIV. This disease was unknown in Jaffna before the Ceasefire. Only after the re-opening approximately thirty cases became known, probably because testing methods were introduced by Western development organizations shortly after the Ceasefire. When I discussed the occurrence of HIV cases with some local Tamils, I was told that it was caused by the reopening. Who exactly was to be held responsible remained unclear. While some people argued that international staff of development organizations brought HIV, others argued that it was spread by a returned diaspora woman.

The empirical encounters presented show that diaspora and local Tamils stressed certain differences between the local and the foreign in the course of re-established contact. Diaspora Tamils who travelled to northern Sri Lanka after many years of absence were at times alienated by the ways they experienced the local Tamils and their way of life. This related not only to constructions of economic and social disadvantages, but to social relations in a broader sense. Some diaspora Tamils complained about tight social control within families and neighbourhoods, about the local narrow-mindedness and other characteristics of Jaffna society which can also be traced back to the fact that it is shaped by the rural context to a large extent. Similarly, for some of the local Tamils diaspora Tamils represented otherness in a critical way. Some even rejected the strange representations. These processes of reciprocal boundary-drawing and exclusion are based on images and constructions of the West in
opposition to the local, the foreign versus the well known. Diasporization thus, has contributed to the emergence of de-localized, translocal spaces in their own way, reconfiguring notions of identity and belonging. However, although oscillating between processes of localization and de-localisation (Spiegel 2005: 159), there is a sense of consciousness about shared experiences among diasporas and locals as many studies on 'transnational communities' have revealed. In the case of the Tamil diaspora, it is the experience of diasporization and the identification with the imagined homeland which constituted the space for transnational community building. But over time, and in situations of re-established co-presence as described in this paper, the Ceasefire Agreement marked an important turning point which led to a re-ordering of transnational social relations. That diasporization in the sense of being away from the homeland changes identity formations has been revealed by Cheran who argues:

recent technological changes and diasporic existence have had an immense impact on perceptions of mono dimensional identities. Diaspora produces multiple identities and hybridities such as Tamil-German, Tamil-Canadian, Tamil-Norwegian and Tamil-Dutch. There is a generation of 'Tamils who may not want to be identified solely as Tamils (Cheran 2004: 272).

But can we assume that these hybrid identities per se relate to local identities of those remaining in the place of origin? Or aren’t the patterns of identification and constructions of belonging embedded into much more complex, multi-layered processes? My empirical material challenges precisely this assumption. Dynamics of boundary-drawing between local and diaspora Tamils reveal that perceptions and constructions of commonality have changed as well. There are issues with which diaspora Tamils and local Tamils highlight their

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6 Here, again, it is important to be aware of the dangers of essentialization. Similar to identity, communities are social formations which are constructed, and also instrumentalized for representation. Adamson notes in this context that interlocking networks characterize a transnational community as constituting transnational social space which is partially embedded in and interacts with other networks, institutions and social spaces. At the same time, its quality as partially autonomous space defined by a common homeland experience is retained (2002: 159).
commonalities and there is a strong agreement on sharing one Tamil identity. This is expressed, for example, through solidarity and united representations in the context of the struggle for an independent homeland, a point on which many (not all) diaspora and local Tamils agree. Although Tamilness entails a globalized dimension related to some universal aspects of Tamilness (language, literature, performing arts) which are constructed across boundaries, the discrepancies highlighted above hint at more controversial dimensions and revealed difference at the level of everyday-life which set limitations to the concept of identity. In the following section I seek to critically explore the usefulness of ‘belonging’ as a notion, which allows us to grasp the ambivalence and complexity of diaspora-local-relationships in this particular context of (im-)mobility.

**Multiple Forms of Belonging**

To comprehend these different layers of collective identification and demarcation I propose to investigate the usefulness of the concept of belonging to grasp the complex nature of social positioning in translocal space. Taking the re-established direct contact and co-presence as a critical turning point, the notion of belonging diverts our attention to how collective attachments and mutual commitments change and how commonality is constructed. Pfaff-Czarnecka (2008) has argued that these three dimensions of belonging (commonality, mutuality and collectivity) determine the ways in which social relations in transnational space are constituted. Moreover, she criticises how in many studies, commonality of interest, mutually accepted division of labour, common aspirations and expectations are taken for granted without considering inequalities and power differentials. She reveals that:

> Transmigrants and those remaining at home tend to be depicted as sharing the same goals, interests and political attitudes … But transnational space is forged by networks of diverse political allegiance. ‘Local societies’ do not necessarily share political ideologies. On the contrary, factionalism, i.e. political group formation cutting across socio-economic lines is often stabilised through patron-client-relationships, is a wide-spread phenomenon in local societies around the globe (2008: 317).
Translating the discrepancies described by Pfaff-Czarnecka for political activism in transnational space into more mundane concerns brings the concept of belonging to the centre of attention. This is important if we attempt to understand and conceptualise the highly ambivalent dynamics of meeting again as it has been described for the case of Jaffna Tamils. These co-present encounters were highly emotional and determined by ambivalent feelings of sameness and difference. According to Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran and Vieten (2006: 1), the emotional dimension is central to notions of belonging. Moreover, belonging encompasses and relates both, citizenship and identity. They furthermore argue that the politics of belonging can be viewed as situated in three different, yet complementary ways (ibid. 2006: 7). These are central if we want to understand the dynamics of constructing sameness and difference at multiple junctions, as well as the fragmented and situated nature of belonging.

The first way of situating belonging relates to temporality. Issues of belonging are embedded into historical, technological, economic and political developments. The second dimension is that belonging is spatially situated which refers to local and regional difference, for example concerning responses to globalization. Thirdly, belonging depends on intersectionality, highlighting that different intersecting and intermeshing dimensions of belonging (class, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, stage of life cycle and so on) are related to each other in different ways and intensity. These three dimensions provide a constructive basis for analyzing the effects of the various forms of mobility which decisively changed every-day life in Jaffna. With the concept of belonging defined thus, I seek to move beyond the analytical limitations inherent in the concept of identity, especially the ‘residual elements of essentialization retained even within the idea of fragmented and multiple identities’ (Anthias 2002: 491). Comprehending belonging as intersecting social positionings expressed in terms of commonality, mutuality and collectivity, as Pfaff-Czarnecka suggests, the three parameters

Yuval-Davis, Kannabiran and Vieten refer basically to the politics of belonging and less to the core concept itself. Nevertheless, their categories point at crucial dimensions which are highly relevant for the concept of belonging.
of intersectionality, temporality, and spatiality as proposed by Yuval-Davis and her colleagues provide a fruitful and constructive tool for analyzing the multiple and ambivalent forms of belonging which I observed in re-opened, post-war Jaffna.

**Intersectionality**

In the Sri Lankan Tamil context, intersectionality as one dimension of the dynamics of belonging is particularly relevant with regard to gender and age. I have shown above that gender constructions are crucial in the process of situating diaspora Tamils vis-à-vis local culture. For Sri Lanka especially, gender has been repeatedly employed as a constitutive element for the construction of nationalism and identity (Maunaguru 1995; Rajasingham-Senanayake 2004; Tambiah 2005). Although LTTE’s policies and practices on gender and women have challenged older constructions in multiple ways, women are still constructed as the bearers of tradition and culture. Considering the centrality of these constructions for determining the level of cultural purity it can be argued that the meaning of womanhood is to a large extent equated with Tamil culture. Therefore, ‘spoiling culture’ in Jaffna has quite often to do with gender relations. Westernization in this context is regarded by some defenders of local tradition as dissolving the separation of ‘traditional’ separate spaces and questions women’s sexual promiscuity. As a consequence, unmarried Tamil women who do not meet the local norms of gendered behaviour are considered as ‘loose’. This ‘looseness’ or ‘being morally spoiled’ is ascribed to women who do not meet the local norms for dressing or behaviour in the public arena for example when drinking alcohol, driving cars, or spending their leisure time at the beach in swimsuits. Wearing jeans instead of a Sari or other locally accepted South Asian clothing can represent the potential dangers for local culture which needs to be protected against foreign, mainly Western influences. These accusations put considerable pressure particularly on younger diaspora women belonging to the second generation who travelled to Jaffna sometimes for the first time in their lives. They are constructed as an embodied danger for local culture which needs to be preserved. Re-
positioning and re-constituting belonging thus became an important project for these women vis-à-vis local Tamils. Gendered identity intersecting with diaspora Tamilness provides an interesting example of the significance of different positions and belongings, which are embedded into time and space as well.

**Temporality**

Many Jaffna Tamils who travelled back to see the peninsula after having been absent for many years had particular constructions in mind, which were filled with images from the past. These nostalgic images were intensively celebrated on several occasions. As an observer I participated at one school located in Jaffna where several elderly diaspora and local Tamils belonging to the schools’ alumni organization had gathered together with their old teacher. The meeting was centred on chatting about the old times when they were living as students in Jaffna. Apart from their memories, they exchanged proverbs and poems about ‘Old is Gold’. At the end of their meeting, they sang a song together praising the ‘Good Old Days’. Such rituals related to Jaffna’s glorious past reinforced a sense of commonality between elderly men, regardless whether they had migrated or not. This shows how generational, gendered and Jaffna Tamil identities intersect and are embedded in the temporal order of social reality. The orientation towards the locality’s ‘status quo ante’ antagonised members of the younger generation of Jaffna Tamils, whose life-experience is shaped by war, rather than the peaceful good old days. Members of the same age cohort have been raised abroad, exposed to completely different circumstances of living, whereas gendered images and positions differ as well.

Apart from these complex frictions leading to different patterns and dynamics of belonging, temporality determines more general processes of positioning among diaspora and local Tamils. Schiffauer (2006: 175) describes the relationship between migrants and those who stayed behind as particularly tense in the context of civil wars. The question ‘what would have happened if I had stayed back like others’ is among the most depressing misgivings
among migrants. Likewise, Schiffauer argues, refugees are sometimes labelled as traitors who did not contribute to defending the homeland. During fieldwork, I was confronted with subjective and collective feelings of guilt among migrant Tamils, but I hardly ever heard that they were accused of having escaped. Nevertheless, different life-worldly experiences in the diaspora and at home result in a complex frame of reference for both, which are embedded into a peculiar relationship between sameness and difference. At this point, mobility becomes a crucial determinant because during the period of physical, imaginative and communicative immobility, migrants tended to imagine the homeland based on the experiences from the past, e.g. their subjective life-worldly perspectives on the locality and the Tamils living therein. These constructions of Jaffna remained important, because they structure the entire sequence of images which travelled communicatively and imaginatively from northern Sri Lanka to diaspora members thereafter. The relevant information was spread through official reporting on the war by foreign and local journalists, through the propaganda promoted by the LTTE, through the narratives of newly arriving diaspora members, through the information transmitted by those locals who managed to travel to the capital of Colombo and who had access to communication there, and through the few letters which could be exchanged infrequently. The sequential character of war history experienced from the viewpoint of the diaspora was thus shaped by the life-worldly images of co-presence in Jaffna during childhood. The images constructed from afar led to the emergence of so-called imagined spaces (Schiffauer 2006) in which memories and imaginations of the locality were conserved, transformed, and created anew. Although people followed the tide of the war and realized that changes had occurred, this kind of knowledge was not related to experiencing, or facing the locality and the people living therein. The new spaces filled with images from the past created by diaspora Tamils over time were detached from the proximate experience of the locality. The significance of the emerging time lag characterizing the Tamil diaspora’s position towards the locality of origin for structuring social reality shows that temporality is an
ordering principle of mobility, because it shapes the subjective and collectively shared images of human encounters, places, situations and moments which can be transmitted either through physical travel or communicative and virtual mobility. These forms of experience embedded in proximate and distant relationships thus are situated differently in time, but also in space.

**Spatiality**

Spatiality structuring the constellations of belonging and positioning of local Tamils vis-à-vis diaspora Tamils and vice versa is central, because spatiality is a central determinant for the construction of transnational space. Migration and travel are specific forms of mobility (other than social mobility) which are always related to transcending geographical space. The migratory context of diaspora Tamils therefore entails spatial distance from the place of origin. In this regard, the case reveals how the significance of geographical space shapes belonging. Whereas Yuval-Davis Kanabiran and Vieten (2006: 7) focus on the argument that states and societies are affected by globalization in different ways with regard to belonging, I highlight the significance of geographical space and distance for belonging under conditions of mobility.

Travelling to Jaffna I was confronted with the desire to experience the territorial space, e.g. the place, in different ways. The Sri Lankan Army had declared some parts of Jaffna as so-called High Security Zones (HSZ) which were not accessible to civilians. The inhabitants of the villages located in these HSZs were displaced to camps, to relatives’ houses, or they migrated. Even though the Ceasefire Agreement promised the relative stability of the peace process, the Sri Lankan Army refused to repatriate people within the army-occupied HSZs. Concerning this controversial issue one interviewee who originated from a village located in a High Security Zone described his claims towards the government: ‘Before I die, can you please allow me to see my village?’ This utterance makes it clear how important the emotional attachment to a place can be. In a similar vein Cheren (2007b: 151) argues that in the Tamil
tradition, exile or banishment from one’s place/country/ur\(^8\) has always been a form of supreme punishment more severe than the death penalty. Furthermore, he relates this assumption to the diasporic space by claiming this to be a space of ‘social death’. Cheran also argues that these patterns of deadly relationship to the place of origin are changing. He relates diaspora to embracing new possibilities for multiple forms of belonging and subjectivities, also signifying diaspora as spaces. Highlighting the ambivalent relationship between Tamils and their diasporic space, Cheran hints at the diverse ways of belonging as related to space and place.

On a more general level, Pfaff-Czarnecka (2008: 316) argues that distances and boundaries are not sufficiently taken into account in transnationalization research whereas spatial distances and political boundaries continue to affect migrants’ existence in crucial ways. She traces this to the oversimplifying terminology of transnationality which deals with international problems in kinship and friendship relations. This is indeed the point I wish to make here: Diaspora Tamils lived in a different location for many years, spending their everyday-life and bearing the difficulties imposed by the receiving society. The forceful mundane dimension of living became localized in the recipient country. This process of localization in the receiving context changes the relationship to the place of origin, although diaspora politics, emotional bonds to the (imagined) homeland and the place of origin, including the people living therein, prevailed as a salient feature structuring their life-worldly experience and contributed to the formation of transnational space. Nevertheless, limited opportunities for mobility and travel reduced transnational space maintenance to constructions based on communication and imagination. Consequently, the place itself could be constructed only by means of imagination. However, the view from afar channelled through means of virtual co-presence is always selective and abandons worldly experiences embedded in

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\(^8\) The Tamil notion of Ur relates to place in the sense of village.
geographical space within actual reach. In line with Cheran, I therefore argue that space and place are important for people’s belonging and that the emotional attachment to a certain place changes over time. However, whereas he traces the changing modes of belonging to diasporic space, his argument is supported by stating that Tamil diaspora members’ co-present encounters with their place of origin after the Ceasefire of 2002 dramatically changed the images of this place exactly because diaspora Tamils had appropriated diasporic space. This life-worldly appropriation of diasporic space while continuously constructing, imagining, maintaining and mobilizing for the homeland characterizes this particular Tamil transnational social space determined by immobility. Facing the homeland thus overthrew the old, yet salient, constructions of the place of origin and resulted in the necessity to redefine and reposition subjective and collective belonging within space.

**Conclusions: Globalization, (Im)Mobility and Belonging**

In this article I have discussed the relationship between mobility and belonging with regard to situations of proximity after a long period of immobility and absence. Analysing encounters of re-establishing co-presence between local and diaspora Tamils after the war-related isolation of northern Sri Lanka, I observed that despite transnational solidarity and the construction of global Tamil identity, differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ became important. These constructions of difference only occurred due to the new opportunities for mobility after the isolation. The various dynamics of constructing sameness and difference are related to spatial and temporal dimensions and intersectionality and can be captured with the notion of belonging. A choice of identifications and identities situated in time and space are relevant if we want to understand the complex features of contact between the members of a transnational community or ethnoscape, who remained apart for a longer period of time.

Locating these findings and interpretations within the realm of approaches to (im)mobility, the significance of physical co-presence established through corporeal travel, or immobility, becomes particularly pertinent. In contrast to other forms of travel, corporeal
travel enables the mobile person to have encounters which are qualified by the sensual experience of proximity. According to Urry (2002: 262), face-to-face contact, facing the place, and facing the moment is what characterizes proximate encounters. Proximity conceptualized in this way is interlinked with immobility (in the sense of mooring), because proximity presupposes dwelling in a particular place, at a particular moment in time, being involved in a particular face-to-face situation. Setting this observation into the translocal context stretched in time and space, proximity can only be achieved by corporeal travel. In the globalized world shaped by transnational migration and translocality, thus, corporeal travel turns into an experience entailing a particular quality which can not be achieved by virtual or communicative travel. The varying degree characterizing the intensity of experiencing other human beings, places and moments determines how human encounters resulting from mobility are shaped by positionality and belonging.

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