

A Financial Resource but a Disloyal Group: Inquiring Sri Lankans' Perceptions towards 'Sri Lankan Migrants'

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Abstract

Sri Lankan emigrants are a heterogeneous community comprised by nearly three million different types of temporary and permanent migrants from refugees, domestic workers, irregular boar migrants, skilled migrants to students. However, Sri Lankans who are living in Sri Lanka do not know much about their emigrants' lives, their migratory experiences or their diversity. The objective of this study is to explore the Sri Lankan society's imagining of the *Sri Lankan migrant* and the factors that affect such imaginations. The data is collected through a range of methods such as observations, interviews with migrants and natives, and discourse analyses of debates, discussions and policy documents. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data. The study reveals that Sri Lankan society has a contradictory dual approach in viewing their migrants: on one hand they view migrants positively - as a financial resource and on the other hand they view them negatively - as a group of disloyals. Non-migrant Sri Lankans have arrived into the latter assumption based on a nation-state premise. They consider a person's physical residence of a territory as the marker of his or her loyalty. Referring to the transnational literature, I show that this is an outdated home country perspective through which migrants' newer realities are not adequately captured. With the developments of migration laws, transportation and telecommunication, the conventional physical distance between migrants' host and home lives has been radically reduced today. Thus, I highlight the need for the Sri Lankan society to view their migrants within a transnational frame, instead of the traditional nation-state frame they still use. Transnational framework would facilitate the Sri Lankan society to see migrants' newer realities

through updated lenses and consequently to establish a more meaningful relationship with them.

Keywords: Sri Lankan migration, migrants, natives, Sinhalese migrants, Tamil migrants, loyalty, transnationalism

Introduction

Sri Lankan out-migration is a complex phenomenon with multifaceted elements. The Sri Lankan migrant community contains various types of migrants, ranging from refugees, domestic workers, irregular boat migrants to highly skilled migrants and students. These migrants' decisions to leave Sri Lanka have been affected by several socio, economic and political push factors from Sri Lanka as well as pull factors from home countries. Even though Sri Lankan migration has been a phenomenon that kept unfolding throughout the recent history in greater numbers and has made significant changes and impact to the Sri Lankan society, the knowledge and awareness about Sri Lankan migrants is noticeably limited in the Sri Lankan public consciousness. In this paper, I attempt to explore the reasons for this lack of consciousness of migrants in the existing dominant narratives while also suggesting some alternative ways to think about them.

The paper begins by providing an overview of how migrants are imagined by both home and host countries, followed by the research methods employed for this study. Findings are then presented in two separate sections, based on non-migrant Sri Lankans' two key approaches towards migrants as identified in the data. I call these two approaches as a contradictory dual approach. As the first approach, I explain non-migrant Sri Lankans' positive perceptions about Sri Lankan migrants as a potential financial resource. In the second section, I explain their negative perceptions about migrants as a group of disloyals. These finding sections are then followed by a brief analysis, highlighting the dangers in continuing such a contradictory approach. I conclude the paper by suggesting a transnational framework to replace the outdated nation-state preposition for Sri Lankan society to view their migrants.

Home and host imaginations of *migrants*

The term *migrant* is used to identify the people who move across state or local boundaries¹. The scope, complexity and the impact of the processes of international migration are increasingly mounting (International Organization for Migration, 2019). Migrants decide to leave their home country for various push factors, such as low income, corrupted political institutions, weak social rights or insecurity. On the other hand, different pull factors in host countries, such as family reunion policies, better social welfare systems or better employment opportunities, also affect migrants' decisions. In relation to international migration, migrants are noticeably understood through two key viewpoints - host country viewpoint and home country viewpoint.

The most dominant versions of host country stand points towards migration are strongly shaped by discourses of Western democratic host countries, even though there are many other non-Western host countries. Western host societies, specifically the ones that are identified as migrant countries, such as Canada, New Zealand, Australia and USA, show a greater interest to study their immigrant groups. These are the countries who made conscious choices to introduce a series of multicultural migration policies since 1960s to attract diverse immigrants from other countries with the aim to make their societies more diverse (Galligan & Roberts, 2003; Koleth, 2010; Kymlicka, 2003; Zubrzycki, 1995). Apart from making their societies more inclusive, there was also a burning economic desire which lied behind those policies. According to Simon-Kumar (2015) some of those multicultural policies were directed at fulfilling host countries' economic interests, so to allow necessary skilled migrants, specially from Global South, to enter their countries. This means, host countries perceive migrants to bring dual benefits, i.e., as an economic resource as well as a tool that brings cultural diversity to their societies. The imaginations and expectations of immigrants have to be understood with these host country desires towards them.

¹In this paper, under the term 'migrant', I specifically mean Sri Lankan emigrants who cross international boundaries, not local boundaries.

When actual migration from Global South to Global North increased through all these relaxed entry laws, host countries often had to study their new immigrant populations and to measure and assess their impact. Until to date, host countries conduct several studies and research to collect data about the migrant communities in their societies. However, in collecting data, host countries are popularly based on the assumption that migrant communities are homogenous and thus have similar and generalizable experiences (Habermas, 1994) which is an over-simplified myth. Several migration researchers are doubtful about the accuracy of these types of data collection methods and its ability to gather complex and diverse realities of migrant communities. As argued elsewhere, one of the key challenges for migration researchers to study different dimensions of migrant communities is that they have to be over depended on findings and knowledge about migration that have been produced by host countries with dangerous biases (Jayawardena, 2020b). While such findings remain to be high problematic, many of the contemporary migration rhetoric – such as anti-immigrant sentiments – are entirely based on these host country studies. Those anti-immigrant sentiments are also presumptuous that immigrants merely have selfish motives to arrive in those host countries, but immigrants lack sense of belonging to the host. It is also believed that such motives present a serious threat to the integrity of the host society (Czaika & Di Lillo, 2018). The Spring 2016 Eurobarometer reports that immigration is the most concerned issue that is ahead of terrorism and the economy, for 48 percent of Europeans (European Commission, 2016).

Marshall and Shapiro (2018) found that one of the factors that reinforces the anti-immigrant sentiments in host societies is the extreme behavior of some media. In studying how USA media portray migrants, they found that they use certain metaphors to frame migrants that have the power to activate thoughts of disgust among native citizens towards immigrants. Being influenced by such anti-immigrant portrayals, Pupavac (2008) identifies that a considerable number of native citizens have associated various extreme connotations for migrants, i.e., describing refugees often as a powerless, traumatized, hopeful and the needy community.

On the other hand, home countries' view points towards their own emigrant communities have gone through many changes during the past few decades. Traditionally, home countries did not seem to be worried about their emigrant communities as they only considered the populations who remain in their territories as their true citizens (Faist, 2007a; Spiro, 2017). This approach was based on their belief that the only loyal citizens of the state are the persons who remain to live in the state. Residency was considered as an important parameter to measure one's loyalty to a state. In other words, home countries believed that a loyal citizen can have relations with only one state and divided loyalties among two states (in this case, among home and host) is not possible. As a result, until recent, sending countries did not show much interest to offer many rights to their emigrants, to outreach them or to study them.

The phenomenon of migration, naturally complicates this linear assumption that one person can only be loyal to one state. With migration, migrants have increasingly begun to keep relations with their home country even after they left state territorial borders and decide to settle in another host country. The traditional home country belief about migrants, that they cannot have multiple political loyalties (Faist, 2007b), hence, appears to be practically incompatible. Interestingly, it can be observed that many home countries are increasingly revising their traditional approach towards the emigrant populations. In fact, many home countries have formally accepted their emigrants' willingness to continue the relations with home country as a genuine and a valid interest. They have also realised that accommodating their emigrant communities is more profitable than restricting them. Howard (2005) sees this home countries' new welcoming approach for emigrants as a consequence of globalisation. For Howard (2005), globalisation has led migrants to hold multiple attachments and identities with many countries. Home countries' decisions to relax their traditional restrictive approach towards their emigrants are also reflected in their new dual citizenship policies. After 1990, a sudden boost in home countries emerged in offering dual citizenship for their emigrants (Bauböck, 2005; Escobar, 2006; Koenig-Archibugi, 2012; Mügge, 2012; Ronkainen, 2011; Sejersen, 2008; Yanasmayan, 2015). Statistics show us that the

number of migrants with dual citizenship identities are sky rocketing (Howard, 2005; Kivisto & Faist, 2010).

However, as I have argued elsewhere, Sri Lankan case shows a reversing trend in their migration outreach policies than many other sending countries (Jayawardena, 2020a). It is estimated that the total number of Sri Lankan migrant community living in host countries in a permanent basis to be one million (Jayawardena, 2020b; Reeves, 2013). This population is scattered across North American countries (estimated population to be 500,000), European countries (around 400,000 migrants) and the rest in the Australasian continent (Reeves, 2013). However, this estimation is contested as some sources calculate the number of the permanently settled Sri Lankan migrants to be as high as two million (International Crisis Group, 2010) or as 1.25 million (United Nations as cited in Hugo & Dissanayake, 2017). Borrowing Reeve's calculation, it shows that there is a remarkable diaspora to population ratio, i.e., approximately one in every twenty Sri Lankans is permanently settled outside Sri Lanka. Thus, the increasing migration numbers as well as this ratio makes Sri Lanka as a significant emigration nation in the contemporary times (Hugo & Dissanayake, 2017). With these increasing numbers, the potential level of impact Sri Lankan emigrant community can do towards the Sri Lankan society is increasing.

Contrary to many other sending countries who are increasingly relaxing their strict laws towards their emigrant populations, Sri Lankan policies show a reversing trend by restricting the dual citizenship policy day by day (Jayawardena, 2020a). Even though Sri Lanka offers dual citizenship, it is considered only as a privilege emigrants receive, but not as a right. While policy implications show a clear restrictive approach towards emigrants, this paper explores the Sri Lankan public sentiments towards their migrants. Inquiring public perceptions will display the assumptions behind Sri Lankan societies' imaginations of their migrants, allowing us to assess the validity of those assumptions. It would also facilitate us to explore interplays between societal and governmental approaches towards migrants.

In the course of this paper, I use two highly contested terms - *migrants* and *natives* - with precise meanings. The term Sri Lankan migrant refers to the Sri Lankan born

migrants of any ethnic group who have decided to leave Sri Lanka and settle in a Western democratic host country on a permanent basis. They might have left Sri Lanka as skilled migrants, refugees or students with a motivation to either permanently settle there or to return to Sri Lanka. However, at some point of their migratory journey they have decided to permanently naturalize in the host country and as a result they have decided to become a host country citizen. For the purpose of preciseness, I do not look at the dynamics play within Sri Lankan labour migrants who are in another host country on a temporary basis, waiting to return to Sri Lanka, but only on the migrants who are permanently settled outside.

The other contested term *natives* is used precisely to refer to Sri Lankan populations. Interchangeably, I also use the term non-migrant Sri Lankans for natives. These are the Sri Lankan citizens from various ethnic groups who continue to live in the soil of Sri Lanka. The employment of these two terms, despite their contested and multiple political meanings and historical prejudices, is to make the distinction between them clearer. In other words, the two terms are used to explicitly showcase the distinction between those who left Sri Lanka (migrants) and those who continue to live in Sri Lanka physically (native). Making this distinction overtly is the key to this paper, because the paper looks at the relations between two subcategories (Sri Lankan *migrants* and *natives*) within one single bigger community (*Sri Lankans*).

Research methods

Studying *perceptions* which are naturally very ambiguous has no easy formula. Adhering to the belief that *perceptions* are inherently subjective, contextual and relative, I employ a qualitative approach to this study. Qualitative studies attempt to understand and unpick the complex realities of the social world (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Paradigmatically, in this study, I locate myself in a constructivist preposition. Constructivist approach says that data is not merely out there, waiting to be found, instead it is constructed (Silverman, 2011). It also suggest that the researcher should locate him or herself within the inquiry, rather than positioning as an outsider (Chamaz, 2014). In this study, I am interested in unpacking the social and historical constructions that underpin natives' perceptions towards migrants, in order to understand them better. In doing so, I locate myself within the inquiry rather than in outside.

To gather data, research methods such as discourse analyses, observations and semi-structured interviews were employed. Newspaper articles, dual citizenship policy documents and parliamentary debates were studied. Discussions in social media platforms were also observed to understand the key directives of existing public discourses about Sri Lankan migrants. Based on those discussions, I recruited participants based on purposive sampling technique. I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty participants, both *natives* who are living in Sri Lanka and *migrants* who are permanently settled outside the country. In recruiting the sample, apart from participants' responses in social media platforms regarding the matter, I also considered their prepositions such as ethnicity, gender, age, class, education background and religion. Interview data was analyzed thematically. In the next section, I present findings of the study according to the two key themes identified in the study.

Natives' lack of awareness about migrants

The data show that Sri Lankan natives have a contradictory dual understanding about the Sri Lankan migrant population. On one hand, natives viewed migrants who are permanently settled in Western democratic countries to be wealthy and hence, fortunate. They viewed a lot of financial potential in migrants. On the other

hand, natives showed to be cynical about migrants' genuine loyalty to their home country. This suspicious feeling leads them to constantly doubt migrants' engagements (legally, financially, socially or emotively) with Sri Lanka. This doubtful feeling is clearly reflected in natives' popular views against Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and dual citizens' interest to get into Sri Lankan politics or higher administrative positions.

The data also show that Sri Lankan natives lack an in-depth knowledge about Sri Lankan migrants. For example, even though they talked about Sri Lankan migrant communities in Melbourne or Toronto, they did not know many facts about the diversities of the community or about their migrant lives. The data show that the little knowledge and the assumptions they have, are affected by the overly generalized narratives about Sri Lankan migrants, such as, all Sri Lankan migrants in Western countries are super rich or all the members of Tamil diaspora are pro-separatists.

It is undeniable that there is an increasing demand in Sri Lanka, especially among the middle-class families, to leave Sri Lanka to settle in a Western democratic country. Those who wish to leave the home country attempt to use different visa categories, such as, skilled labor, student, tourist and refugee, to enter a shore of a so-called better host country. There is a perception among middle class families that sponsoring their children to emigrate from Sri Lanka is an investment. According to Pingama (2016), these perceptions are influenced by their frustration about the weak domestic social, political and economic conditions of Sri Lanka. Due to this belief, families who are not financially resourceful, test many other financial alternatives including obtaining loans or engaging in other financial fraud to send their children abroad.

According to Jayasuriya and McAuliffe (2017), the number of Sri Lankan student migrants to countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand is noticeably increasing. Consequently, the number of education agencies are rising and they profoundly promote potential places for overseas study through different media (Jayasuriya & McAuliffe, 2017). In fact, obtaining a student visa and entering into a

Western country is interpreted as the first step to settle in that country to have a comfortable life that is better than in Sri Lanka.

On the other hand, the demand for skilled migration also remains high. Professionals and skilled laborers in Sri Lanka are interested in seeking permanent residency status or work permits in countries like USA, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand to enter those countries. Professional or skilled migrants' interest to leave Sri Lanka is also influenced by their negative attitudes and frustration about the domestic situations in Sri Lanka. It is widely believed that Sri Lanka as a country is deteriorating politically, economically and socially. There is a massive public rejection of traditional politicians and political practices of Sri Lanka. Such trends have affected dissatisfaction about continuing to live in Sri Lanka. Following the ethnic issues and the safety concerns in the country, some are interested in applying for refugee status from other host countries. However, Hugo and Dissanayake (2017) found that one of the key reasons for irregular boat migration to Australia, is also associated with economic dissatisfaction towards Sri Lanka, not only the ethnic issues or safety issues.

This shows that Sri Lankan migrant community is a highly diverse one, with different types of migrants whose migratory experience is influenced by a variety of different push factors from the home country and pull factors from host countries. Natives' understandings about migrants, however, do not represent much of these complexities. The most dominant distinction natives saw in the migrant community is through an ethnic line. They believed that there are Sinhalese migrants and Tamil migrants, and that these two migrant communities are different from each other. For example, if the respective migrant is Tamil, natives perceive him/her to be a migrant who left Sri Lanka as a refugee due to the ethnic clashes. There is no understanding in the public discourses that there are many Tamil migrants who migrated as skilled migrants or students. Natives also tend to think that all the Tamil migrants are responsible for charging Sri Lanka for war crimes allegations.

As explained in the next two sections separately, these kinds of blanket and monolithic perceptions are based on two over-simplified assumptions, as this study finds. Firstly, it is the assumption that any migrant who is living permanently in a

Western country is wealthy. Secondly, natives believe Tamil migrants are disloyal to Sri Lanka and hence, there is a risk of them defaming Sri Lanka in the international platform. This sense of suspicion towards migrants is not only limited to Tamil migrants but also towards Sinhalese migrants.

Sri Lankan migrants as a financial resource

The findings of the study show that natives over-estimate migrants' economic status in host countries. Many natives believe when a person from any economic class enter into a wealthy Western host country, that person can suddenly become a wealthy and a resourceful person. According to this thought, when a Sri Lankan migrant reaches shores of any wealthy country, that host country welcomes the migrant irrespectively and offer all the rights and benefits that would turn the migrant into a wealthy person all of a sudden. Nimal (45), a Sri Lankan banker who lives in Colombo said:

When you are in a country like USA or Canada, you can easily become very rich. You start earning very well. But then you are lonely there. This is why I did not migrate, even though I could have applied. I do not want to be a rich man in a lonely setting. When you are that rich, then you want to show the way you spend those to your friends and family in Sri Lanka. Just to pretend that you are not lonely and you are having a great time there. It is an illusion.

Nimal's statement summarizes many other participants' similar idea about migrants' economic status in host countries. Participants repeatedly mentioned this idea that financial capacities of the migrants who live abroad are very high. They thought this because host countries are developed high income countries and have enough resources available for immigrants. This positive perceptions about the causal relationship between migrating to a Western host country and being wealthy, is also the belief that reproduces a high interest among middle class families to emigrate from Sri Lanka. This idea finds confirmation in literature. As Pathirage and Collyer (2011) observed how natives in a Catholic village in Wennappuwa view attempts to migrate to Italy, it is mainly with the assumption that anyone who goes to Italy can earn quite well, and become wealthy very quickly.

However, not all the migrants go through a similar lucky process in terms of becoming wealthy so comfortably. Many migrants perceive their migratory journeys as challenging struggles. Anusha (45), a dual citizen of Sri Lanka and New Zealand, reviewing her migratory experience as a skilled migrant mentioned that it was a struggle. She said “Since we moved [to New Zealand], we know, how hard it is to begin [the life from the scratch] in another country. But some people [in Sri Lanka] think [their lives in Sri Lanka] as struggles but what we go through as a bed of roses. But what they are having [in Sri Lanka] are not real struggles. [Instead] we are the ones who see and experience real struggles.”

Anusha’s statement contradicts with the popular narrative about migrants’ wealth and fortunate life experiences in developed countries. Even though she herself was a skilled migrant, she found it very challenging to find suitable employment in the host and to adapt into the host society’s standards. She believes that natives in general do not know these hardships migrants go through. Anusha’s statement is also confirmed by Kamal (39), an Australian citizen who wishes to obtain the Sri Lankan dual citizenship. Kamal revealed that what prevents him of obtaining the Sri Lankan dual citizenship at the moment is his economic hardship. He said, “You would not believe, but I actually have no money to obtain Sri Lankan dual citizenship right now, for my entire family. It’s a struggle here. I am paying for my mortgage here. Until it finishes, we have a tight budget. I really want to obtain Sri Lankan dual citizenship, but I have no money. Yet people in Sri Lanka think, we are so rich.” Both Anusha’s and Kamal’s narratives remind us that natives’ blanket assumptions about migrants’ wealth and their luxuries are not entirely true and that the realities of migrants are more complex than that.

The data also show that having migrants who are their own family members, relatives or friends bring pride to natives, because they are perceived to be wealthy and financially stable. Natives who have some close contacts living abroad in developed countries find it to be an extra source of strength for their day today lives in Sri Lanka and for their future. Surangi (35), a Sri Lankan native from Kelaniya, is an example. She has some distant relatives living in New Zealand. Subha thinks when her kid is grown up (he is still 8 years old), she might seek assistance, both

financial and informational, from her relatives in New Zealand to accompany him to New Zealand.

This trend of viewing one's own migrants as a network as well as a capital resource is also same within the Sri Lankan Tamil migrant community. As Sriskandarajah (2002) points out, this became very evident in the aftermath of 1983 riots. Tamil citizens who were in Sri Lanka did seek assistance from Tamil migrants to get necessary information, network and capital to seek refuge in host countries or to somehow migrate from Sri Lanka. In migration research, specifically in the studies that look at migration from Global South to Global North, researchers have found that natives in Global South perceives their fellow migrant communities in Global North as a potential community to assist them whenever necessary. For example, Yang (1994) states that sending country populations perceive their emigrant population as a financial and a network resource who have the potential to uplift the lives of home country populations as well as to sponsor their friends' or relatives' migration desires.

Another key theme that was shown in the data is natives' perceptions about migrants as a booming market. This perception again overlaps with the previous assumption about their wealth, but with a different dimension. Unlike in the notion of wealth, in this line of thinking, migrants are not only considered for their financial ability, nonetheless, that financial ability is placed within a realm of their interest to continue relations with Sri Lanka. This, I argue, is a subtle acceptance by natives towards migrants' sense of belonging to their home country, even though such acceptance cannot be observed explicitly in any other ways in which natives view migrants.

As the numbers of Sri Lankan migrants concentrating in certain cities or neighborhoods in the host countries are increasing, their demands for Sri Lankan goods and services increase gradually, forming Sri Lankan sub-markets. Consequently, the trends of increasing import and export businesses between Sri Lanka and those host countries can be seen in cities such as Melbourne in Australia, Toronto in Canada and Auckland in New Zealand. In Melbourne, the city outside Sri Lanka with the highest concentration of Sinhalese migrants, there are a number

of centers that offer different goods and services for Sri Lankan migrants. These include grocery shops - selling Sri Lankan goods, restaurants - selling Sri Lankan food, bands and dancing groups - offering Sri Lankan entertainment and media channels - sharing Sri Lankan information. In a traditional economic sense, all these ventures engage in the demand and supply chain, a straight forward economic activity. However, when it operates in a migratory space, it also has a powerful non-economic dimension. That is, the demand and supply chain also acts as a reflection of migrants' strong interest of continuing their home country practices and memories. In other words, the economic activities directing at Sri Lankan migrant markets take place within a transnational social field in which migrants perceive both their home and host relations to be functioned in one singular space.

An overly simplified exercise to understand the complexity of this phenomenon would be reviewing the names of some of these goods and services. For example, in Melbourne, there are Sri Lankan grocery stores titled as Taprobane Sri Lankan Grocery, Elephant House, Pelessa Sri Lankan Takeaway, Colombo Impex and Ceylon Food City Sri Lankan Grocery. These titles allow their consumers to recall their Sri Lankan memories and provide them with an appealing opportunity to re-live in the *home world* for a short period. As Pathirage (2018) notes, this is an ephemeral experience for migrants where they live in two confronting life-worlds, the world left behind (the home country) and the new world (host country), simultaneously. As many other transnational theorists have also denote, migrants' pre-migratory experiences and memories become critical elements in the ways in which they inhabit their new life in the host country (Cassim, 2017; Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004; Yang, 1994). In this case, Sri Lankan migrants' interest for Sri Lankan goods and products should not be understood merely as economic activities, but also as emotive representations.

While Sri Lankan markets are expanding in host countries, Sri Lankan based goods and services providers also show keen interest to engage with those overseas markets. Businesses whose target audience is precisely migrants are booming. These services include exporting various goods such as – grocery, cloths, gifts, fish, and exporting services – telecommunication, mass media, delivery of goods, event organizing or marriage proposal services etc. We also see a significant trend of Sri

Lankan media institutions expanding their networks with Sri Lankan migrants who are based overseas. Sri Lankan mass media engagements with migrants in overseas range from responding to song requests from migrants in local channels to visit those host countries to report how migrants celebrate home country practices or rituals in host (Jayawardena & Siriwardhana, 2018). As for now, Sri Lankan media is visibly involving only with Sinhalese migrants and they employ a patriotic lens in reporting migrants' stories. However, many of these actions are sponsored by migrants and hence, there is a strong financial motivation behind such engagements. Another reason for natives to have positive thoughts about migrants is their donations to Sri Lanka in times of need. Sri Lankan migrant organizations send different types of donations to natives. For example, a lot of Sri Lankan migrant organizations sent financial donations and other resources during the times like Tsunami or War. Migrants are involved in such donations because they feel they are responsible to assist their fellow Sri Lankans in those kinds of difficult times. For example, Anusha (45), a dual citizen of Sri Lanka and New Zealand, stated that: "...we raise funds for Sri Lanka for many occasions, [such as] during the war time... [or] tsunami time... it was an emotional need and I feel obliged to assist Sri Lanka. [We also do] things like establishing temples in New Zealand and other community works..." Not only Sinhalese migrants but also Tamil migrants donate Sri Lanka in multiple ways. An explicit example is their active involvements in the development tasks of the Northern and the Eastern provinces during the post-war period (Erdal, 2006).

Migrants' such timely interventions are generally appreciated by natives. However, many natives view such interventions to take place merely because migrants are wealthy and they look for places to spend. Nonetheless, natives do not acknowledge that migrants donate also because they have a sense of belonging and a feeling of obligation towards Sri Lanka. This similarly goes with migrants' willingness to purchase Sri Lankan goods and services. Therefore, I argue that natives' thoughts about migrants are based on over-estimations of migrants' wealth and that they completely ignore the fact that migrants do have emotive attachments with their home. Instead, in this study, I suggest to employ a transnational framework to

understand migrants, in which natives will acknowledge migrants' sense of belonging. The next section explains this line of argumentation further.

Sri Lankan migrants as a group of disloyal persona

In contrary to the natives' positive perceptions on migrants' financial capabilities discussed above, the data also show that natives have a doubtful view about migrants' loyalty towards Sri Lanka. This doubt about loyalty emerged with the belief that since migrants do not physically live in Sri Lanka, that they are attached to another country. In other words, natives consider that migrants' extra-territoriality as the marker of their loyalty towards Sri Lanka. Based on this view, an inconspicuous resistance against Sri Lankan migrants can also be observed. In this section, I explain two key themes displayed in natives' perceptions: 1. Skepticism towards Tamil migrants, and 2. skepticism towards dual citizens. While explaining these two themes separately, I also argue that those ideas represent outdated, conventional home country view towards their emigrants.

Skepticism towards Tamil migrants

The data show that natives are skeptic about migrants but the intensity varies across migrants' ethnic lines. While their skepticism against Sinhalese migrants lies in an invisible and a structural level, it is publicly evident towards Tamil migrants. In this case, looking at natives' suspicious views about Tamil migrants can be an extreme example to understand natives' views about migrants, but it is a phenomenon that we cannot ignore in the context of Sri Lankan migration.

Following the civil war and deep-rooted ethnic issues between Sinhalese and Tamils, natives' understandings of migrant communities are highly ethnicised. Answering to a question about whether she thinks migrants are loyal towards Sri Lanka, Gayatri (32), a female participant based in Sri Lanka, stated that she thinks "Tamil migrants are disloyal while Sinhalese migrants are less loyal." Gayatri's statement summarizes many other similar views shared by other participants. While natives are suspicious about both Sinhalese and Tamil migrants' loyalty, they hold extreme views towards Tamils. As the reason for her answer, Gayatri stated that she believes the war crimes allegation towards Sri Lanka is completely sponsored by

Tamil migrants, because they want to defame Sri Lanka in the international sphere whatsoever.

Gayatri's and other participants' thoughts about Tamil migrants again show that natives' views about migrants are overly generalized. While it is true that there are groups among Tamil migrants who hold extreme pro-separatist motives, many others do not. An example is Thiru (68), a Sri Lankan Tamil Australian citizen. Thiru has left Sri Lanka in late 1980s for the safety purposes because the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) approached to him asking him to either grant his elder son to the separatist movement or to give funding to their movement. Even after arriving to Australia, Thiru said he did not involve in any of the pro-separatist propagandas and that he believes Sri Lanka should be a unitary country. Thiru's example shows that Tamil migrant community, similarly to Sinhalese one, is a very diverse community, with different types of migrants with different experiences and thoughts. The data of this study show that natives do not know such complications within the Tamil community and that they have not heard much about different narratives of Tamil migrants.

Despite the Sri Lankan society's lack of awareness of the complexities of Tamil migrants, the particular phenomenon has attracted huge scholarly attention from several scholars. For example, Tamil Diaspora's transnational identity has been studied by Burgio (2016), Sankaran (2019), Cheran (2003) and Wayland (2004). Erdal (2006) investigated Tamil Diaspora's engagements with the developmental projects in Sri Lanka. Orjuela (2008) studied the role of Tamil Diaspora in the context of Sri Lankan civil war. There are also a few studies that examine how Tamil migrants' sense of belonging to Sri Lanka affect their actions and reactions in the host country. Studying how street gangs work within the Sri Lankan Tamil community in London, Toronto and Paris, Orjuela (2011) explored the parallel links of the Tamil migrants' dimensions of civil war between the levels of global, home and host country. Lindley and Hear (2007) examined how the naturalisation of Sri Lankan refugees affected host countries, specifically the UK. Meanwhile Brun and Van Hear (2012) discussed how the relationship between the LTTE and the Tamil Diaspora informed Tamil politics. O'Neill (2015) explored how seeing the civil war unfold in Sri Lanka affected the activism of the Tamil Diaspora in the host country

and argued that witnessing the events of the last days of the civil war critically affected second-generation Tamil migrants' transnational patterns and political activism. Perera (2020) too studied the intergenerational perspectives of belonging amongst Tamil immigrants in Australia.

This shows that even though natives are not aware of the heterogeneity of Tamil migrants, a fair amount of academic knowledge has already been produced about them. It is clear that natives have not heard about these academic studies that detail the complexities of Tamil migrants. This lack of awareness has led natives to be obsessed with an extreme ethnic explanation to make sense of Tamil migrants. That is, Tamil migrants left Sri Lanka due to the civil war and then, all of them contributed to the separatist ideology of LTTE. Tamil migrants' unwillingness or inability to return to Sri Lanka is also framed as a consequence of their disloyalty to the country. However, as found in this study, these are overly simplified assumptions about Tamil migrants.

The case of dual citizens

As discussed above, natives' views towards Tamil migrants can be considered as extreme views, influenced by different ethnic and historical forces and prejudices. However, the study shows that natives also have doubtful perceptions about Sinhalese migrants' loyalty to Sri Lanka. This doubtfulness towards Sinhalese migrants however is less intensive than towards Tamil migrants and therefore it is less visible. Nonetheless, the heated discussions took place during the last few years around the rights and privileges associated to Sri Lankan dual citizenship; provide us an entry point to understand natives' skeptic thoughts about Sinhalese migrants' loyalty.

Dual citizenship discussion is mainly based on two key developments. One was the debates about whether Sri Lankan dual citizens can run for the Sri Lankan parliament. One of the popular incidents was the supreme Court's verdict unseating Geetha Kumarasinghe, an elected member of the parliament, because she holds dual citizenship (Tennakoon, 2017). The second one was in relation to the bond scam incident in the Central Bank. The third accused person for the case is Mr. Arjun

Mahendran who is evading courts as he is reported to be hiding in Singapore where he is a citizen (Dilshan, 2021).

In both cases, the central attention was based on the question about dual citizens' loyalty. It asked questions such as: when a Sri Lankan citizen has a citizenship from another country, how can natives trust his/her honest loyalty to Sri Lanka? Are divided loyalties possible? How can natives ensure that dual citizens would not misuse the rights they receive from Sri Lanka for their selfish motives? How can natives guarantee that dual citizens would work for the collective betterment of Sri Lanka? As I have argued elsewhere, governmental policies clearly show a reluctance to accept dual citizens' divided loyalties (Jayawardena, 2020a). Even though the country offers dual citizenship, Sri Lanka is picking up a reversing trend in the policy by imposing restrictions day by day.

This study reveals a complementary finding to the above argument that it is not only government policies but also the society that is reluctant to acknowledge migrants' divided loyalties. For example, one of my participants, Kasun (40), a Sri Lankan based male, stated, "...migrants cannot be considered as full citizens of Sri Lanka even they get dual citizenship. They do not live here with us, so they do not contribute to [the wellbeing of] the country. They do not spend, nor do they pay taxes. Many of them studied through free education and left the country, causing a brain-drain. They would not do it if they were loyal citizens. [After leaving the country,] they show a lot of interest to involve in Sri Lankan matters, but [I think] it is a fake thing." For Kasun, divided loyalties are not possible. One has to be either loyal to a country or not loyal at all. Kasun's perception mirrored many other native participants' thoughts about migrants' loyalty towards their home. In the section below, I highlight the limitations of this common perception.

Suggesting a transnational framework to understand migrants

As discussed in the previous sections, the study reveals that natives perceive migrants through what I call a contradictory dual approach: on one hand - positively, as a financial resource, and on the other hand - negatively, as a group of disloyal citizens. In migration literature, these perceptions (mainly the latter) are

considered as home countries' conventional ways of understanding migrants. In these conventional views, permanent residence in a respective state territory becomes the maker of persons' loyalty towards that state. This belief is constructed on a nation-state premise that in a given point of time, one person can belong and be loyal to one state only. The phenomenon of migration anyway complicates this linear 'one citizen-one state' arrangement. With the rapid increase of human mobility across borders, many academics, researchers and policy makers around the world have highlighted the limitations of this conventional understanding to comprehend contemporary migration realities.

Instead, transnationalism provides an alternative framework to understand contemporary migrants more accurately. Transnationalism discourages to continue a dichotomous way of thinking of migrants, i.e., they are *either* loyal to host *or* home. As an alternative, it encourages to look at migrants as a group of people who are operating in a transnational social field, in which territorial boundaries between home and host are blurred. For example, Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-szanton (1992) identify transnationalism as a process in which migrants see both home and host countries as linked with each other in numerous ways. This way of perceiving home and host both in a singular social field has increasingly been a trend among migrants' practices, specifically during the latter part of the twentieth century and after that. As Schiller *et al.* (1992) note, there is a significant difference between the contemporary migrants with late nineteenth and early twentieth migrants. In early migration, migrants had to fully break their ties with home, as there was no improved transportation or communication infrastructure as it is today for them to continue their relations with home.

Portes and Rumbaut (2006, p.130) specifically point out two key factors behind this difference between early migrants and contemporary migrants: 1) the technological innovations in transportation and communications; and 2) sending states' new attitudes towards their respective immigrant Diasporas. They identify that the significant improvements in the transportation and telecommunication in the world today have provided a platform for migrants to keep constant and unbreakable ties with their home country. Even though migrants are settled physically in another distant territory, they are very close to the home country virtually and are updated

about the daily developments of home, as a result of the advancements of telecommunication. In other words, time and space dimensions of migration have been significantly changed during the last couple of decades, blurring the physical distance between home and host territories.

In observing Sri Lankan society's imaginations on 'Sri Lankan migrant', it is clear that we still do not seriously consider how these later developments in transportation and telecommunication have affected migrants' lives, their thoughts, divided loyalties and their relations with home. Following the traditional view, natives still see migrants as a community who 'breaks ties' with Sri Lanka, just because they live in a distant territory. I argue that the existing suspicion about migrants' loyalty is a cause of this conventional thinking and the lack of knowledge about migrants' current practices. This has also led natives to overlook the existing newer realities of migrants and to understand their heterogeneity.

Continuation of such a suspicion based on outdated assumptions has the risk of creating a greater disparity between natives and migrants. Keeping on viewing migrants as a group of disloyals establishes a stiffness in identifying migrants as a separate and distinct Sri Lankan population. It creates a division between natives as *we* and migrants as *them*. I argue that this is an unnecessary division and it is important we find ways to minimise the distance between the two groups. Continuing such divisions become more dangerous as it would then function within a contradictory dual approach towards migrants, as identified in this paper. For example, if natives do not consider migrants as a part of 'we' but 'them', while at the same time viewing migrants positively for their donations; there is a risk of looking at migrant donations as a source of disloyalty. In this case, natives would not be worried about offering the due acknowledgement or acceptance for migrants for the true reasons (such as sense of belonging or empathy). . This would generate a severe miscommunication between natives and migrants and will eventually lead natives to hold a discriminatory approach towards migrants.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper highlights the need to revisit natives' contradictory dual approach towards Sri Lankan migrants and the importance of considering the diversity of Sri Lankan migrants in judging them. Continuing this contradictory dual approach which is based on outdated traditional assumptions would create an unnecessary polarisation between natives as *we* and migrants as *them*. Such a polarisation would prevent Sri Lanka from treating their migrants with due respect. In a country where one of every 21 is living abroad in a permanent basis, such a division would also prevent involving migrants with domestic matters in any meaningful way. Considering the worthy inputs transnational approach can offer here, I suggest employing a transnational framework to understand migrants, instead of the conventional nation-state thinking.

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